ResearchOnline@JCU

This file is part of the following reference:

Kimani, Mary Muthoni (2013) *What can parents do? parents' aspirations and choices of early childhood education and care in Kenya: a constructivist grounded theory*. **PhD thesis, James Cook University.**

Access to this file is available from:

http://eprints.jcu.edu.au/26902/

JAMES COOK
UNIVERSITY
AUSTRALIA

What can parents do? Parents' aspirations and choices of early childhood education and care in Kenya. A constructivist grounded theory

Thesis submitted by

Mary Muthoni Kimani

BEd. (Moi University) MPhil. (Moi University)

in

March 2013

for

the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the School of Education

James Cook University

DEDICATION

Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honour and glory

forever and ever (1Tim 1:17 KJV).

STATEMENT OF ACCESS TO THE THESIS

I, Mary Muthoni Kimani, author of this work, understand that James Cook University will make this thesis available for use within the University library and via electronic network, for use elsewhere.

I understand that, as an unpublished work, a thesis has protection under the Copyright Act, and I do not wish to place further restriction on access to this work.

<u>19/03/2013</u>

Signature   Date

DECLARATION OF SOURCES

I, Mary Muthoni Kimani, declare that this thesis is my own work and has not been submitted in any form for any other degree or other award at any university or other institution of tertiary education. Information derived from the published or unpublished work of others has been acknowledged in the text and a list of references is provided.

_19/03/2013_____

Signature   Date

CONTRIBUTION OF OTHERS

DECLARATION OF ETHICS

The research presented and reported in this thesis was conducted within the guidelines for research ethics outlined in the *National Statement on Ethics Conduct in Research Involving Human Participants* (1999), the *Joint NHMRC/AVCC Statement and Guideline on Research Practice Guidelines* (2001), and the *James Cook University Statement and Guidelines on Research Practice* (2001). The proposed research methodology received clearance from the James Cook University Experimental Ethics Review Committee (approval number: H3196).

<u>19/03/2013</u>

Signature   Date

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

ABSTRACT

This thesis offers a grounded explanation of how a small group of educated Kenyan parents working as professionals in urban Nairobi define and attempt to choose high quality early childhood education and care (ECEC) services for their children. Being an educator and a mother working in Nairobi, I was amazed at the age at which parents were enrolling their children to preschool. These well-educated parents were sending their children to 'school' well before the mandatory starting age. These parents want the best for their children but the ECEC services they choose are often more like formal schooling than the play-based ECEC widely accepted as optimal for early learning and development. Motivated by a concern that these children are being robbed of their childhoods I wanted to find out what was going on, and understand the process as well as the social contexts in which parents make their choices.

Endorsing parents as primary caregivers and partners in ECEC service development and delivery, the Kenyan National Early Childhood Development Policy Framework follows a global trend. However, despite this policy endorsement, there is a scarcity of research focusing on what parents believe to be important when choosing ECEC services. This scarcity of research, in Kenya and elsewhere, means that what parents want for their children, their choices and their experiences are poorly understood and accounted for in the development and delivery of 'quality' ECEC services.

Constructivist grounded theory, was adapted and adopted to collect and analyse data. Twenty-three professional, educated Kenyan parents with direct experience of enrolling their young children in ECEC services in Nairobi were purposively and theoretically selected and interviewed. The data were collected and analysed simultaneously creating a to and fro movement between data collection and emerging codes and themes. Constant comparison, memoing and using *in-vivo* codes ensured that analysis stayed close to the data. Coding of the data entailed two stage process of initial coding and focused coding. Verbatim interview transcripts were coded using QSR Nvivo software.

The study revealed incongruence between parents' ideals and their choices of ECEC services. Using constructivist grounded theory approach brought to the fore, the social processes that enable or impede parents to choose choices that matched their ideal. The study revealed that although choosing ECEC services may appear straight forward from the face value, it is complex, involving interplay of different systems. Both individual circumstances as well as systemic factors mediate parents' choices. Thus, faced with the prevailing competitive education system, a privatised preschool market, social pressures and the limited choices, these parents are aware that what their children finally get is 'a balancing act between their ideals and the realities'.

Three key issues emerged from data that offer grounded explanation to parents' behaviour in defining and choosing ECEC services. These key issues included:

- Good Understanding versus Pragmatic Reasons: Parents have a good understanding of quality ECEC (including the value of play in learning) which aligns with the literature, yet they make their choices for pragmatic, rather than quality reasons, such as academic stature, affordability, proximity and similar values with home.

- Balancing Ideals and Realities: Parents claim to be acting in the best interests of the child, yet in balancing ideals and realities their children are getting less than the best;

- Effective Partnerships: Parents understand and value partnerships with teachers; indeed they wanted partnerships with the teachers. Yet from their reports, they took a back seat and gave teachers the main responsibility for their children's learning.

The study findings highlight the importance of understanding parents' social contexts and a more proactive role by the government to create an enabling environment for parents to choose services that matched their ideals. Moreover the study champions parents' individual and collective voice in advocating for children's issues honouring early childhood as a political space worthy to be defended.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ASAL	Arid and Semi-Arid Lands
DICECEs	District centres educational for early childhood education
ECD	Early childhood development
ECEC	Early childhood education and care
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
IMF	International Monetary Fund
KCPE	Kenya Certificate of Primary Education
KCSE	Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education
KHA	Kindergarten headmistresses' association
KIE	Kenya Institute of Education
KNBS	Kenya National Bureau of Standard
MOEST	Ministry of Education Science and Technology
NACECE	National centre for early childhood education
NGOs	Non-governmental Organisations
NICHD	National Institute of Child Health and Human Development
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
SID	Society for International Development
UK	United Kingdom
UNCAC	United Nations Convention against Corruption
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
USA	United States of America

Chapter One: Introduction and Background to the Study

Haraka's Story–Haraka Turns Two

Haraka is two years of age. She is fast learning to talk. She spends her days with Naliaka, the house help. Haraka learns all sorts of things from Naliaka. She can fill and empty the buckets, match the socks, pass the pegs, and pick the ripe tomatoes. Naliaka and Haraka both practice speaking English. Sometimes they go for a walk and name the things they see along the way.

On one of her regular walks with Naliaka to the local kiosk, Haraka discovers there is a child living next door and another in the other compound, who are both out walking with their 'Aunties'. It is a fun but short-lived encounter. Haraka's mother has warned Naliaka that she should never be found outside gossiping with the other 'Aunties'. Soon they are back behind the big metal gates.

Haraka's parents are both university graduates and have good jobs like their neighbours. They can afford the rent in this 'good neighbourhood' and choose a 'good school' for Haraka. Haraka's mother's job is flexible. Although at times she leaves home before Haraka wakes up, other times she is home early. Haraka especially enjoys the evening walks and play with her mother. Her father is extremely busy and tries to make time on Sunday to catch up with Haraka.Haraka has her own room with cabinets full of children's books, toys and play materials. Haraka's parents insist that Naliaka has to finish the housework early so she can spend time with Haraka.

Naliaka has passed the National Examination for Secondary Education. She qualified to join the university but her parents could not afford the school fees. Haraka's parents promised to help her pay for a middle college if she serves them faithfully for three years. Naliaka loves

her job. She sees it as an opportunity to better her life. She is determined to please her employers to earn her entry to a college. She and Haraka are great friends. They read stories, sing songs and play all kinds of games – hide and seek, karti, horse rides... all the games you can imagine.

Haraka celebrated her second birthday a month ago. Many of her parent's friends came for the birthday party and there was much talk about finding a school for Haraka. Everyone seemed to think it was time for her to go to school, with everyone offering advice on this topic. Haraka's parents, however, had completed their search for a school for Haraka six months previously. Although the kindergarten they chose is away from home, many parents recommended it because of the school's overall performance in Standard Eight National Examination of Primary Education. Her parents already knew that unless the child was admitted to kindergarten six months before the beginning of the year at formal school, it was almost impossible to gain entry to the school. There is always a long waiting list.

Haraka starts school. She wakes up by 6.30 a.m. The school bus picks her up at about 7.00 a.m. At first she cries all the way to school. She doesn't want to leave her comfortable bed, her toys, her books or Naliaka. At school, Haraka must speak in English. She must not speak in Kiswahili. She must start learning the letters of the alphabet and the numbers she can count. She cannot go to play without permission and can only play the games the teacher shows them. She cannot play with the toys unless the teacher says so and some days the teacher doesn't read even one story. No more walks to the kiosks. No chance to meet with her new friends. School finishes at 4.00 p.m. Haraka watches lots of other children get off the school bus before it drops her home an hour later.

Introduction

When I was working in Kenya as a teacher educator and trying to make concrete decisions regarding what kind of early childhood education and care (ECEC) services would be best for my own children, I was particularly struck by the dissonance between my expectations, government policy and my own, lived experience. I regard decisions about ECEC as being of major importance because the outcomes of such decisions can strongly influence a child's future.

I found the dissonance so disturbing that I felt compelled to try to better understand the situation. On discovery that little research has been conducted into this topic, I decided to use grounded theory to systematically investigate whether it was possible to form a theory to explain the process that is occurring when educated professional parents living in urban Nairobi make decisions regarding their child's ECEC, what they describe as 'preschool'.

This chapter begins with a nugget IS THERE A BETTER WORD? ANECDOTE? based on my experience in choosing a preschool for my children as well as their experiences embodied in the vignette on Haraka as she starts school. As explained below and in chapter three, as a researcher, I am an insider, having been a parent living in Nairobi and having had to choose preschools for my children. The nugget is followed by a broad introduction to Kenya highlighting the geo-historical, social, economic and political contexts that influence ECEC services, especially those in Nairobi, which is the focus of this study. I then briefly describe the Kenyan school education system, with particular emphasis on ECEC services and Ministry of Education policy that promotes parent and community partnership in education. I follow this with an introduction to my own story — as a daughter of peasant farmers, a parent, and as a researcher, which leads on to a description of my research design.

Kenya

This section sets the stage for understanding the geo-historical, social, economic and political contexts influencing ECEC services that are available for parents to choose for their children.

The Democratic Republic of Kenya lies across the equator on the east coast of Africa. It borders Somalia, Ethiopia, and Sudan to the north, Uganda to the west, Tanzania to the south, and the Indian Ocean to the east. The country covers an area of 580,367 km^2 (224,080 miles^2) with a population estimated to be 43 million (International Organization for Standardization, 2012). Almost 80% of the land mass is arid or semi-arid and it is sparsely populated. Most of Kenya's population is concentrated in the cities. Nairobi is the capital city with a population of approximately 3.75 million people. Other major towns include Mombasa, Nakuru, Kisumu, and Eldoret (Figure 1.1 on page 11).

In Kenya there are 42 ethnic groups, each with a unique language. These languages are divided into four major linguistic clusters: Bantu, Cushites, Khoisans, and Nilotics. In Kenya, English is the official medium of instruction with Swahili (Kiswahili), a Bantu language, the national language. Swahili (Kiswahili), a *lingua franca*, is also the national language of Tanzania, the Comoros and the Democratic Republic of the Congo and is spoken by more than 60 million people (Irele & Jeyifo, 2010).

Kenya became a British protectorate in 1885 and a colony in 1901. In 1963, after years of insurrection and freedom fighting, Kenya attained internal self-government, finally becoming a republic in 1964 (Gatheru, 2005). This was a time of great upheaval as the country came to terms with its new way of being. This has inevitably included major ongoing impacts on the educational system (see School Education in Kenya, Chapter 1 below).

Figure 1.1 Map of Kenya, showing administrative boundaries.

Source: http://www.nationsonline.org/oneworld/map/kenya_map.htm

According to the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (KNBS,(2012a), the population of Kenya has been increasing by approximately one million people every year for the past five years. This is the result of high fertility rates coupled with low mortality rates. The result is a predominantly youthful population with 36% aged between 15 and 35 years of age and 54% below 15 years of age. Concomitant with the burgeoning population there has been a rapidly increasing demand for health care, education and other social amenities and employment (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, 2012a). Such impacts are happening against a backdrop of high rates of poverty and inequality. In Kenya about 50% of the population are living in poverty as defined by the (United Nations, 2011). Additionally 10% of the population earns 43% of the income, making Kenya one of the most unequal countries in the world with regards to income distribution and it ranks poorly on the Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI, 2010).

Kenya's economy has been diminishing over the past two decades (Republic of Kenya, 2012). The main contributors to Kenya's economy, namely agriculture, tourism and manufacturing, have been on the decline. Environmental factors such as unreliable rainfall and prolonged droughts, as well as population increase and competition from the international market have all contributed to the poor performance of the agricultural sector. Tourism has been affected by interethnic conflicts, terrorism attacks and negative advisories, while the manufacturing sector has been impacted negatively by a decrease in demand for manufactured goods, poor business infrastructure such as high interest rates and poor governance (KNBS, 2012)**.** Austerity measures to address this situation, such as structural adjustment programmes, have caused rising costs of living and unemployment (Swadener, Kabiru, & Njenga, 1997, 2000; Swadener, Wachira, Kabiru, & Njenga, 2008). The collective effects of these various challenges have made even more difficult an already complex context in which Kenyan parents raise their children (Swadener, et al., 2000).

School Education in Kenya

In this section, I present a brief history of the development of education in Kenya and a synopsis of the current situation in relation to ECEC services. This background is important because it helps with understanding parents' ideals, aspirations and experiences of ECEC.

       Development of education in Kenya. Prior to colonisation, teaching to socialise and nurture children in the various ethnic communities was carried out by parents, uncles, aunties, grandparents and village elders. Most teaching was oral and practical through observation and imitation. Traditional tribal education closely matched the needs of tribal life at that time but 'it demanded conformity, but not individuality, creativity or individual'(Marah, 2006, p. 20). This rigidity was its strength but also its weakness as there was no leeway to encompass the profound changes that colonisation brought.

       When missionaries came in the mid-1800s, they established schools focused on teaching the Bible in indigenous languages. In a complete turnaround, traditional teaching, values and knowledge were no longer valued. Education had become polarised by both strands, tribal and missionary, which were dominated by ritual and rigid hierarchical structures.

       In 1911, the colonial government started taking a pragmatic interest in African education because it saw such education as a means of providing low-level government officials, such as translators and workers, for the white settlers. A Department of Education was established and the education system was formalised. Existing missionary schools were subsidised and new government schools were created. The colonial government saw Africans as a source of cheap labour and so organised education that was vocationally oriented (Bunyi, 1999).

       Many Kenyans at that time were opposed to the use of indigenous languages as the medium of instruction (as in the original missionary schools) because such use was considered

to be a way of limiting African development. Through the jobs that those who could speak the language had acquired, English was seen as a status of economic, social and political power (Bunyi, 1999). Accordingly, as Ngugi wa Thiong'o (1985, p. 435) contends, "English was the official vehicle and magic formula to colonial elitedom" African parents demanded instruction in English for their children, a legacy that remains to date.

The next significant development was in the 1930s, the result of an increasing realisation by Africans that the aim of colonial education was to consign and limit them to inferior roles in a white ruled society. Dissatisfied by the policies of the Department of Education and unable to effect change, Africans revolted (Mwiria, 1990). They formed self-help groups, carried out extensive fundraising and erected independent schools. Each independent school was governed by a local committee, responsible for hiring and paying teachers, setting school fees and other fundraising activities (Mwiria, 1991; Stanfield, 2008). By 1952 during the Mau Mau freedom fighters uprising, there were 400 independent schools catering for 62,000 pupils in different parts of the country (Mwiria, 1991). The colonial authorities deemed them 'anti-European, anti-Christian and anti-Government' (Natsoulas, 1998, p. 303). The substantial demand by Kenyans for independent education with a strong community input has persisted to date.

At independence Kenya faced enormous challenges. It had inherited an education system stratified along racial lines (African, Asian, white) with disparities in resources allocation, with most resources being devoted to the more privileged groups (Somerset, 2007). Over the years the missionaries and later the colonial government had made the Kenyans believe that their ways of life and cultures were primitive. To be civilised meant abandoning their cultures and embracing western culture. Hence, the colonial government had left not only a strong legacy of segregated system of education:

...but the paradox of living between two worlds, the traditional and the modern,

persisted. Kenyans craved a western-style of education and knowledge, as they

believed that this would promote economic development and the acquirement of

riches that the British and white settlers were accustomed to. These aspects of

modernization were embraced as many detested the old traditional learning systems,

and longed for modernity, which they believed indicated power and strength (Coles,

2008, p. 13).

These challenges continue to haunt the country today. The difficulty lies in
developing an education system that fits the needs of modern Kenya and shaking off
unwanted shackles inherited from the colonial government.

Right from independence, the government of Kenya attempted to address the
challenges through appointments of different educational commissions, committees and
taskforces to review all aspects of education and to make recommendations on appropriate
ways of improving education. The first such commission culminated in *The Ominde Report*
(1964). The landmark findings of this report highlighted Kenya's need for an education
system geared towards national unity and towards the creation of adequate human capital for
national development. The direction of post-independence education in Kenya was set.

The National Committee on Educational Objectives and Policies (*The Gachathi*
Report, 1976) was the second to be appointed. Its aim was to more tightly align the education
system policies and objectives with what was perceived to be the needs of Kenyans at the
time, namely national unity, social and cultural aspirations. One of its recommendations was
the establishment of the National Centre for Early Childhood Education (NACECE) to
coordinate and oversee preschool education. Eight years later in 1984, the NACECE was

finally launched. The NACECE still plays a pivotal role in early childhood educational research, curriculum development and teacher training (see Preschools, below).

The current state of education in Kenya is that education is considered the right of every child, a right enshrined in the *Education and Training Act* (Republic of Kenya, 2005a). From 2003 all public primary school education became free, but it is not compulsory. There are ongoing plans to introduce free secondary education.

The provision of adequate quality education to all its citizens continues to present challenges to Kenya. Main challenges include "access, retention, equity, quality and relevance, and internal and external efficiencies within the education system" (Republic of Kenya, 2005b, p. 3). To date, there are marked disparities in the number of schools and subsequent enrolments among the different provinces with Nairobi having high number of schools against the number of eligible children at all levels and overall enrolments percentages compared to the other provinces as shown on Table 1.1 (page 11).

Table 1.1: School enrolments in the different provinces during the 2009 population census

Province	Pre-primary	Primary	Secondary	University
Kenya (Total)	2,247,071 9	9,425,390	1,796,467	198,119
Nairobi	155,936	490,314	176,837	69,345
Central	220,621	987,348	265,881	25,321
Coast	250,380	758,062	108,401	8,941
Eastern	257,690	1,509,526	268,751	13,645
North Eastern	24,383	414,541	60,133	2,431
Nyanza	426,046	1,513,952	309,130	18,359
Rift Valley	640,044	2,475,352	411,416	49,061
Western	271,971	1,276,295	195,918	11,016

Source: http://www.knbs.or.ke/censuseducation.php

Education in Kenya is provided through a patchwork of formal and non-formal systems, public/government and private. In the formal system the entry age to primary education is six years. This is followed by eight years in primary, four in secondary and four at university. Formal schools in Kenya are broadly of two types, *inter alia* public/government and fully private.

Public/government schools make up the largest number of schools in the country. One of the distinctive characteristics of these schools is that the government pays teachers' salaries and provides subsidies for textbooks and school feeding. The government also provides supervision, curriculum development, and pedagogical development and in some schools the non-teaching staff salaries are paid by local authorities (city or county councils). Most of these schools were established through the "Harambee" initiative but were later taken up by the government (UNESCO/OECD, 2005). Community involvement consists of construction of school buildings, salaries for non-teaching staff and other operational costs.

Private schools are owned by individual entrepreneurs, religious bodies, non-government organisations (NGOs) and companies. The schools are managed through school fees as well as support from sponsors. The schools therefore vary in terms of resources depending on their localities with some being well funded while others are poorly funded. Some of the schools are established in private premises.

At the completion of public/government funded primary schooling, there is a highly competitive Kenya Certificate of Primary Education examination (KCPE). Performance in the examination determines what secondary schooling will be offered. Secondary government schools are stratified into national, provincial and district levels. The national schools select the ablest students and moderately able students go to provincial or district schools. Most district schools comprising of former Harambee schools, are rural local community schools,

and are of poorer quality compared to the national and provincial schools in terms of class sizes, teacher training and facilities (Buchmann, 1999; Republic of Kenya, 2005b). Fully private schools (particularly the primary schools) tend to be high cost and prestigious. A few follow British curriculum so successful secondary school alumni have internationally recognised attainments in the form of O and A Levels. The others, together with government schools, work towards the Kenyan Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE). Issues surrounding fully private schooling are more fully dealt with below in this chapter and also in Chapter Two.

The non-formal system of education caters for disadvantaged children in Arid and Semi-Arid Lands (ASAL) and the urban slums by offering literacy and vocational skills to young children and youths. In 2003, the government started to fund non-formal schools, which up to that date were funded by NGOs, religious bodies and local communities. An example of non-formal education is the Integrated Islamic Education Program supported by Muslim communities and United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) in some predominantly Islamic areas (Republic of Kenya, 2004, 2005c). Table 1.2 summarises the formal education provision in Kenya in terms of enrolments, school numbers and teacher numbers at the primary level in 2010/2011. Table 1.3 shows the current formal education provision in Kenya in terms of enrolments, school numbers and teacher numbers at the secondary level in 2010/2011.

Table 1.2: Enrolments, school numbers and teacher numbers at primary level.

Enrolments	2010	2011
Number of schools	27,489	28,567
Total enrolment in primary	9.38m	9.86m
Gross enrolment rate for boys	109.8%	114.8%
Gross enrolment rate for girls	109.9%	115.1%
Number of teachers	173,388	174,267
Pupil/teacher ratio	54.1	57.1

Source: (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, 2012b).

NB: The over 100% percentages indicate over-age students who enrol at primary school level.

Table 1.3: Enrolments, school numbers and teacher numbers at secondary level.

Enrolments	2010	2011
Number of schools	7,268	7,297
Total enrolment	1.65m	1.77m
Gross enrolment rate for boys	109.8%	114.8%
Gross enrolment rate for girls	109.9%	115.1%
Number of teachers	53,047	56,735
Student/teacher ratio	31.1	31.1

Source: (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, 2012b).

NB: The over 100% percentages indicate over-age students who enrol at secondary school level.

Early childhood education and care (ECEC) services. According to Kenya's latest census in 2009, about 2.25 million children aged 4–5 years old were enrolled at preschool (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (KNBS), 2010). Preschool is not currently part of the public education structure, although there have been proposals to make it so (Republic of Kenya, 2005b). To date, this has not been implemented (Republic of Kenya, 2012). At present, the government's support is limited to teacher training, registration of preschools and quality control. However, primary schools routinely expect children to have completed two years of pre-primary at the time of enrolment, especially in the urban areas (Ngaruiya, 2004)**.** This expectation has resulted in the term 'preschool' being used in Kenya to refer to any ECEC for children before they reach primary school.

Preschools have existed in Kenya since the 1940s, providing worker parents with custodial care for their children and preparing children for formal learning. Immediately after independence there was a rapid expansion of services. In line with the African tradition of community responsibility for children, communities combined resources to establish new centres, financed and hired teachers, cooked for children and set fees for the centres. Ten member committees were elected, which helped with the administrative roles in the centres such as setting and collecting fees from parents, hiring and paying teachers, putting up physical structures, assessing centre needs and mobilising community resources. In preschools teachers were generally volunteers who had, at most, primary school education.

The first government involvement in ECEC programmes in Kenya began in 1970 on a partnership basis with the Bernard van Leer Foundation. The Bernard van Leer Foundation is an international grant-making foundation based in The Hague. Its 'mission is to improve opportunities for children up to age 8 who are growing up in socially and economically difficult circumstances' (http://www.bernardvanleer.org/). The Foundation remains one of the major donors and bilateral partners of ECEC services in Kenya today. The partnership's 10-

year Preschool Education Project ultimately culminated in the funding of the establishment of the National Centre for Early Childhood Education (NACECE), a national endeavour aimed at harmonising the growth, evaluation and overseeing of ECEC in the country.

The stated goals for preschool programmes in Kenya encompass health, nutrition, education and care of young children. They aim to increase efforts in empowering and building parents' and communities capacities to sustain and improve efforts in providing suitable environments for a holistic development of their children especially in the formative years (Kipkorir & Njenga, 1993; National Centre for Early Childhood Education [NACECE], 2002; Republic of Kenya, 2005c; Swadener, et al., 2000).

To coordinate the different providers of preschool services in Kenya and as a recommendation from the *Sessional Paper No 5* (2005) in 2006, the government through the Ministry of Education developed the *National Early Childhood Development Policy Framework 2006* (hereinafter referred to as Policy Framework), (Republic of Kenya, 2006b, p. 5) that was intended to:

- Regulate the provision of services for infants and children, to provide broad guidelines for the coordination and harmonisation of quality services across sectors.
- Guide the activities of the various partners in the provision of services for young children.
- Amalgamate and harmonise all policy statements to ensure better co-ordination in the provision of services and better utilization of resources.
- Operationalise an inter-sectoral and supportive monitoring to assure adherence.

In the same year, the government also developed the Early Childhood Development Service Standard Guidelines to:

…operationalise the Policy Framework and the *Children Act* 2001 to ensure that all Early Childhood Development service providers including the parents, communities,

community based organisations, faith based organisations, government ministries, multi-lateral and bi-lateral partners, universities and private sector provide quality, accessible and equitable ECD [early childhood development] services for young children (Republic of Kenya, 2006a, p. iv).

Kenya currently has a strong government policy rhetoric informed by international recommendations and research for the performance of high quality ECEC. It recognises the benefit to children of high quality, holistic services and the importance of parental involvement in the formulation of those services. Enrolments rates show that compared to other African nations, Kenyans appreciate the importance of ECEC services in the early years of their children (UNESCO/OECD, 2005). However despite rhetoric, the sector continues to experience major challenges especially in terms of poor funding and patchy quality of these services (Republic of Kenya, 2004, 2005a; Swadener, et al., 1997, 2000; UNESCO/OECD, 2005).

Three modes of delivery can be identified in the ECEC services in Kenya – the institutionalised, home-based and market-based (Ngaruiya, 2004).

- Institutionalised ECEC services are mostly provided by the community, the local government, NGOs, religious bodies or by private-for-profit businesses. They fall under two broad categories, public or private.
- The home-based care centres are mainly found in urban slums and mostly provide custodial care for children under three. They also provide feeding programmes and early stimulation [used to refer to school readiness] for children. Communities with the support of NGOs manage them. They charge minimal fees but are still not affordable to most poor parents. As a result, enrolment is very low. The facilities are minimal and of

poor quality, although all the centres provide feeding programmes, but there is little emphasis on early stimulation with most of the caregivers having no training.

- The market-based preschools are found in market places where mothers take care of infants in turns while other mothers continue with their business.

Within the institutionalised ECEC service providers, preschool teacher training is an issue. In the *Policy Framework for Education and Training Sessional Paper No.1* (2005), the government promised to develop a formal scheme of service for preschool teachers (Republic of Kenya, 2005c; UNESCO/OECD, 2005); however, the policy is yet to be implemented. In practice, teacher training in institutionalised ECEC services is provided by two organisations, district early childhood education centres (commonly referred to as DICECEs) and the Kindergarten Headmistresses' Association (KHA).

DICECEs are situated in all the districts in Kenya and are run by municipal councils. The centres are coordinated by NACECE hosted at Kenya Institute of Education (KIE) under the Ministry of Education Science and Technology (MOEST). DICECEs provide in-service early childhood education training that takes two years. After a six-week induction, trainees are attached to a DICECE community. The training provided is not considered as of high quality as that provided by KHA centres (Adams & Swadener, 2000).

The KHA was formed in 1973. It is a non-profit organisation of unaided nursery and kindergarten schools in Kenya and offers training in early childhood education. It offers a variety of well-regarded diplomas: KHA Teachers Diploma in Education; KHA Nursery Teachers Certificate; KHA In-Service Nursery Teacher Certificate; KHA Diploma–Special Needs. The KHA also offers refresher courses and professional development workshops for early childhood teachers. KHA centres charge higher fees and tend to target an upper and middle class clientele (www.khteachertraining.org)**.**

UNESCO/OECD has identified seven different institutionalised ECEC services in Kenya: nursery school, pre-unit class, kindergarten, day nursery, playgroup, Madrasa (The word "madrassa" is Arabic for school, and is commonly used throughout the Arab and Islamic world to refer to any place of learning. In Kenya it is used for early learning centres in regions that are predominantly Islam intended to teach Islamic teachings as well as school readiness. Home-Based Care Centres are particularly found in urban slums, semi and arid areas. Usually community members volunteer their places as well as carers. (Table 1.4 on page 20).

All these categories of ECEC services are found in Nairobi. According to Ngaruiya (2004) 80% of the ECEC services in Nairobi are private. Being semi-formal, there are no available statistics to show how many of the eligible children are enrolled in each of these institutions.

Noteworthy contributors in the preschool private sector are private companies, religious organisations and private organisations and individuals that run preschools for commercial gain. For instance: Some companies such as the Export Processing Zone run free day care services for the children of their women employees. Religious organisations support parents and local communities' initiatives by providing funds, technical skills and advice. The funds are used to build and maintain the physical facilities of preschools to buy equipment and other materials, pay teachers' salaries, train and provide feeding programmes. Most preschools supported by religious organisations target children from the most vulnerable communities. They charge minimal fees that most parents can afford, and provide feeding programmes and clothing or uniforms, as well as medical care for orphans and other vulnerable children. The Integrated Islamic Educational Program supports Madrasas.

Table 1.4: Available institutionalised preschool services in Kenya.

	Nursery School	*Pre-unit Class*	*Kindergarten*	*Day Nursery*	*Playgroup*	*Madrassa*	Home-Based Care Centre
Child age	3+ – 5+	5+	2+ – 5+	2+ – 5+	2+ – 5+	2+ – 5+	0 – 3+
Location	Rural and urban	Primary schools in some urban areas	Rich urban	Nairobi only	Rich urban	Rural and urban	Urban slums, arid or semiarid areas
Focus	Care and education	Education	Care and education	Care and education	Care and education	Care and religious education	Care
Opening hours	4 hours daily	4 hours daily	4 hours or 8 hours daily	4 hours or 8 hours daily	4 hours daily	Usually in the evening	8 hours daily
Required educational level for teachers	Primary or secondary education	Secondary education	Secondary education	Secondary education	None	No formal education required	Primary or secondary education depending on the area
Training requirement	2 year DICECE in-service	2 year DICECE in-service educational or 1 year training with KHA	2 year DICECE in-service level or 1 year training with KHA	2 year DICECE in-service teachers or 1 year training with KHA	2 year DICECE in-service	Integrated Islamic Education Programme Induction	No requirement
Responsible ministry/ authority	MOEST	MOEST	MOEST	MOEST	None	MOEST	None
Funding and management	Public and community	Public and private	Private	Public	Private	Public/ Muslim communities and donors	Public and community

Source: Modified (UNESCO/OECD, 2005, p. 11)

Private organisations and individuals that run preschools for commercial gain is the commonest model in urban areas. To cover the costs of superior facilities and teachers' salaries as well as returning a profit, most of these preschools charge high fees, which are affordable only by parents in the middle- and upper-income brackets (UNESCO/OECD, 2005). Teacher qualifications are higher, usually diploma graduates in early childhood education and, in some cases, degree graduates. There is emphasis on early stimulation and learning. However the extent to which these services offer appropriate early childhood pedagogy is debatable – see Chapter Two.

It is the experiences of educated professional parents living in urban Nairobi who send their children to private-for-profit preschools that is the focus of this research.

Parents and community in partnership policy in education. Partnership policy in Kenyan education involves the collaboration of a variety of stakeholders, namely parents, local communities, local authorities, charitable organisations, religious bodies, Ministry of Education, other ministries and partners such as the Bernard van Leer Foundation, United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the Aga Khan Foundation. Partnership policy in the provision of services is considered one of the strong points of ECEC in Kenya (Swadener, et al., 1997, 2000).

Parents and local communities are the most important stakeholders with 70% of the community-based ECEC services in the country being managed by them (Swadener, et al., 2000). It is important to acknowledge the use of the Kenyan government's term 'partnership' as operating on two levels. It refers to, firstly, the actual provision of services through the establishment and funding of centres and teachers and secondly, the development of ECEC policies and programmes (that is, the actual content of the service delivery). What has occurred in Kenya is that the community and parents have borne the brunt of the financial burden while government bodies have formulated policies and programmes. More often in

community based services; parents bear the financial burden of the day to day running of the services.

'Harambee' is a key Kenyan concept. It means 'pulling together' in Swahili. Harambee was adopted as the national motto at independence. It refers to the strong Kenyan tradition of Kenyan communities organising self-help. The emphasis on community initiatives in the development of schools has fostered a sense of national unity and ownership which, although widely lauded, some critics feel has taken community attention away from the limited government resources that were being devoted to education (Buchmann, 1999), more especially to the preschool sector. Swadener et al. (2000) supported by other government's documents within (KIE-NACECE, 2004 ; Republic of Kenya, 2005a, 2005c) agree with this criticism by highlighting a recent discontent with the notion of 'Harambee', which is perceived as putting pressure on parents sometimes beyond their financial means. They call for the government to supply salaried teachers to the community ECEC services. Sharing a similar notion, Owino and Abagi (2000) posit that funding education remains problematic because parents and communities are constricted by poor micro-economic performance.

Notwithstanding, Kenya has been hailed as a showcase for successful partnership in establishing ECEC in Africa (Pence & Unesco, 2004). In 2002, the then Executive Director of the Bernard Van Leer Foundation commended the partnership approach in the provision of ECEC programmes:

Kenya is the only country in Africa to have such a highly developed network of national and district centres for ECEC.... levels of coverage in the preschool age group that are unparalleled in Africa... high levels of community initiative in expanding opportunities

for young children – part of Kenya's exemplary Harambee tradition (Laugharn, 2002, p. 13).

Discussing care for under three year olds, Swadener et al. (1997, 2000) argued that 'parental and community support of early childhood NACECE programmes, including those relating to health, nutrition, nursery school, and various in-home care models, was pervasive and strong' (Swadener, et al., 1997, p. 295). Parents and local communities help where they can, for example in some centres they help teachers to develop learning and play resources from locally available materials, and while in other centres they carry out growth monitoring and children's health promotion.

One major sticking point to an even further penetration of NACECE programmes is a financial one. Although local communities often contribute in various other ways, it is families, rather than private companies and religious organisations (see above), that are the main payers for ECEC. Costs vary according to the level of ECEC service provided. Much of what parents pay is used to pay teachers. The government contributes 1% of its annual gross domestic product (GDP) on the ECEC sector (Belfield, 2007; Institute of Policy Analysis and Research [IPAR], 2008; Republic of Kenya, 2005a, 2005b, 2005c). In the OECD countries investment on ECEC ranges between 2% of GDP in Denmark to about 0.3% of GDP in Canada (OECD, 2006).There is an obvious difference in the actual amounts of monies invested considering Kenya is a developing country, therefore the percentage translates to very little money devoted to the sector.

Another major sticking point is mutual respect of stakeholders. While the government on one hand acknowledges and refers to parents as key stakeholders in ECEC and as partners (Republic of Kenya, 2005b, 2005c, 2006b), on the other hand it tends to portray parents as being too limited in knowledge, skills and resources to participate effectively in this role. For

example, in 1987 the then Minister of Education cited research that had been done on the Kenyan child:

> It has been established conclusively that parents will have to play a bigger role in provision of primary health care and good balanced diets as both are vital at the early stage of children's development. ... the ministry has expanded early childhood education to include education for the members of society, particularly parents, on what is required to provide for proper growth of children (National Centre for Early Childhood Education [NACECE], 1987, p. 17).

Furthermore, as well as being considered ignorant in child growth and development, the Kenyan parent was also posited as not being knowledgeable enough about high quality ECEC and the importance of such services. In one of its reports (UNESCO/OECD, 2005, p. 19), the government indicated that there was need 'for persuading parents of the need for quality ECD services'. The report singled out ignorance and poverty as the main factors that prevent children from benefitting from the rich experiences offered by preschools, seen by the report as 'a head start and a solid foundation for the development of life-long learning'. Such paternalism by the government became more nuanced when, in 2002, the importance was acknowledged of analysing the community's capacity to assess their needs (NACECE, 2002).

Later, the government made definite steps to redress the balance. In the Policy Framework (Republic of Kenya, 2006b) it acknowledged its lack of appreciation of the role that parents and communities play in the development of ECEC programmes. The Framework intimated that there was inadequate coordination and partnering with the communities. This was attributed to 'lack of appreciation of communities' role in their own development and as agents of change, leading to underdevelopment of communities, lack of

community ownership and sustainability of community-based programmes'. The government also acknowledged that there had been 'top-down planning processes that do not adequately involve the communities in the process of community-based programme development" (Republic of Kenya, 2006a, p. 32)). The top-down approach to parents and community involvement is not unique to Kenya. For example, Irvine (2005, p. 3) acknowledges a similar practice in Australia when she states that: "In spite of the emphasis on parent and community involvement, this has been primarily top-down policy process allowing only a limited consideration of parents' views". The Kenyan government committed itself to:

> develop and implement mechanisms to enhance effective interactions among stakeholders in early childhood development service provision at all levels, to empower communities in their roles as service providers and to facilitate the coordination of communities and service providers for more accessible quality service provision in a timely and equitable manner for all children, ... (Republic of Kenya, 2006b, p. 32).

This concept of partnership policy in Kenyan education, in particular between ECEC services and parents, is a fundamental anchor of this research.

The Researcher and Researcher's Experience in Choosing ECEC Services
I grew up as the daughter of peasant farmers in Kenya, speaking my vernacular (Gikuyu) at home and in the wider community. English was introduced as a subject in the early years of primary school and in upper primary school as the language of communication and instruction. Although my parents and teachers were strict, even harsh, and there were few material possessions or modern conveniences, I construe my childhood as having afforded abundant opportunities for growth, creativity, learning and play. When I was six years of age I joined a nursery school in the neighbourhood. Formal education began at the age of seven and took seven years. I was one of only four in my class of twenty to graduate from primary school. I moved to boarding school to complete high school education, which took six years.

At university I completed a Bachelor of Education (three years) and Master of Philosophy in Educational Communication and Technology (two years). These experiences, along with my professional training and move to Australia to take up doctoral studies, position me to bring to the research, both as an insider and as an outsider, a capacity for theoretical sensitivity and reflexivity.

'Preschool' in the Kenyan vernacular refers to ECEC services. It is a widely used term. Unlike in other countries where 'preschool' is restricted to the 4–5 year age band, in Kenya a 'preschool' can take children 2–5 years. Although I had attended government schools, I wanted my children to have a more secure, reliable access to a broader education. Like most others in my social and geographical situation I was strongly attracted to the institutionalised ECEC services of a private-for-profit model. Private-for-profit ECEC services are readily available especially in most residential areas, and are generally thought to be of higher quality than the community based ones especially in the urban areas. Such pre-unit classes in community preschools are restricted to the 4–6 year age band. Parents wanting to enrol their children earlier and in a preschool with an emphasis on didactic education choose the private-for-profit model.

When she was three years, all my neighbours wanted to know why my older child was not at 'preschool' when all her age peers were. Because my daughter was the only 'big' girl not in preschool, she was teased by her playmates. When I eventually took my daughter to preschool she was four years old. The teachers wondered why I had not enrolled her earlier because to them she was too 'big' and 'old' not to have joined preschool sooner. They wanted to either put her in a class behind her age peers (baby class) or give her remedial classes to catch up. However, I insisted that I wanted her with the rest of her age group. Although I had held out against the pressure to send my first child to 'preschool' before I felt

it was developmentally appropriate, when my second daughter was three and a half years of age, I gave in and let her go to preschool like her sister.

In Kenya most of the private-for-profit primary schools have their own preschools. They give preference to the children from their preschool. Only then do they take children from other preschools. The practice is that one has to acquire admission to the primary schools four to six months prior to the year your child will be joining the first year of formal, compulsory schooling, known in Kenya as 'Standard One'. As a result, most of the interviews are carried out at mid-year or August of the previous year. Advertisements for the interviews are put on the schools notice boards. This advantages those who already attend the preschool and disadvantages outsiders or newcomers.

Children are expected to attend an interview to qualify for admission into any of the formal private schools their parents may be considering after preschool. I had to take my daughter to several schools to increase my alternative choices. The child, usually between four to five years old (depending on when he/she started school) is dropped at the school and picked up after the interview. The interview is a two hour exam with two sections: the first is written and tests English, Mathematics and Kiswahili, and the second is oral. The reading is in English (the instructional language) and Kiswahili (the national language). The structure of the exam is not standardised and varies from one school to another. Individual schools decide what to test depending on their curriculum. Although there is a government ECEC curriculum, most private preschools do not use it but opt to use other forms of curricula, such as Montessori or KHA. Some schools may also decide to buy exams from exam setting private business entities. The interview charges range from 500–1000 Kenya shillings (approx. $10–$20 Australian dollars), a figure that many low income earners would find hard to raise, so they are purposively excluded.

Individual schools mostly release the results of the interview one or two days later. The results are displayed on a notice board, indicating those who have reached the pass mark and therefore gained admission to the particular school and those who did not attain the pass mark. Pass marks are set by individual schools, depending on the vacancies available. Individual schools provide a coaching study programme for those children who fail to reach the pass mark whose parents plead for them to be admitted.

Government schools do not require children to sit for the interviews and students attend classes appropriate to their age band. However, private-for- profit schools allow children to start Standard One as soon as they are able to pass the entry interview.

Study Design

The study design of this thesis employs constructivist grounded theory, which is a qualitative research methodology often used in educational research. From the systematic analysis of collected data, categories are built to generate new ways of understanding the data. The rationale for this study design is discussed at length in Chapter 3.

Statement of the problem. As a first generation middle-class parent and early childhood educator living in Nairobi, I was alarmed by the social pressure I experienced to conform to the trend of enrolling children as young as two years in private-for-profit ECEC services. This is contrary to NACECE guidelines but is nonetheless a widespread practice in urban Nairobi. The trend is a social phenomenon that has not been researched before but has significant ramifications. Notwithstanding the rhetoric associated with partnership policy in education in Kenya, parental views and experiences in ECEC, particularly those in the private-for-profit sector are important in informing policy and implementation of programmes responsive to family as well as the individual child's needs.

The research focus. The following questions guide this study:
For tertiary educated parents living in urban Nairobi choosing to send their children to private-for-profit ECEC services:

- What are parents' aspirations for their children within private-for-profit ECEC services?

- What are parents' experiences in finding and choosing private-for-profit ECEC services that meet their aspirations for their children?

- How are parents' aspirations and their choices impacted on by the prevailing practices of the system of education and social discourses?

Rationale for this study. Guided by the principles of constructivist grounded theory, the purpose of this study is to explore parents' ideas, aspirations and choices of private-for-profit ECEC services. Within policy literature globally and nationally, parents are positioned as major stakeholders in the provision of quality ECEC (Irvine, 2005; OECD, 2001b; Republic of Kenya, 2006b). Yet it is unclear how parents are positioned within the lived experiences of choosing private-for-profit ECEC for their children.

This study is significant for three reasons:

1) It gives legitimacy to parents' voices in their role as primary caregivers and stakeholders in ECEC

2) There is an identified gap in the research literature addressing parents views of what is important in ECEC services

3) It has the potential to initiate and inform dialogues on ECEC policy and practice in Kenya.

Possible benefits of the research. This study is innovative in that it employs a grounded theory approach to give voice to parents' views and experiences about what they value for their children in ECEC programmes, the opportunities such values create for their children; and how such values are actualised in the choice that parents make for their children. The contribution to the literature that this study will provide is that it has the potential to inform future formal ECEC policy direction in Kenya.

Conclusion
In this chapter, I have looked at the geo-historical, social, economic and political factors of Kenya framing this study. Kenya has undergone many changes since independence, among them high population growth, fluctuating economy and a volatile political situation. These challenges together with a colonial legacy of a highly segregated education system have had a negative impact on Kenya's attempt to develop a high quality education system that is relevant to the needs of her people and at the same time accessible. ECEC that emphasises partnership with parents and communities has been recognised and formalised in the development of Kenya's education system. Despite rhetoric of partnership, parents continue to carry the major burden of ECEC expenditure and there has been evidence of lack of mutual respect of parents as equal partners in the partnership, with parents being portrayed as lacking in knowledge about high quality programmes. Against this backdrop parents must choose preschools that meet their aspirations for their children.

Organisation of Thesis
This study has seven chapters, with Chapter one providing a curtain raiser in a way of a vignette based on my experience as a parent in Urban Nairobi choosing a preschool for my children and their experience in the preschool. The chapter also highlights the geo-historical, social, economic and political contexts, and the school system of education with particular emphasis to ECEC services necessary to making meaning of this research.

Chapter Two is the survey of national and international literature relating to how quality is articulated in ECEC and how parents are positioned in the processes informing quality and service provision.

In Chapter Three the conceptual framework of constructivist grounded theory adopted in this study is discussed, while Chapter Four is the exposition of the methodological approach used including detailed explanations of data collection and the analysis processes.

The research findings are presented in Chapters Five and Six. In Chapter Five, data are presented of parents' aspirations in their descriptions of their 'ideal' ECEC. Chapter Six presents data on parents' 'real' experiences in choosing ECEC services as well as their lived experiences with the preschools that they chose for their children.

Chapter Seven is an interpretive discussion of the research findings. It provides a synthesis of the whole study, recommendations, areas for further research and conclusion to the study.

<center>**Chapter Two: Survey of the Literature**</center>

Introduction

How ECEC is understood, defined and contextualised is central to making sense of parents' aspirations, experiences and choices of ECEC services for their children. Therefore this chapter reviews a range of national and international literature that addresses how quality is articulated in ECEC and how parents are positioned with regard to processes informing quality and service provision.

The Importance of High Quality ECEC

The rationale for provision of high quality ECEC is to optimise children's development, with a particular focus on improving success at school and in later life (McCain & Mustard, 2002; Mustard, 2005, 2007). The importance of high quality programmes in ECEC re. improving children's social, intellectual, language and behavioural skills, has been extensively documented in international studies. For example, in a 1991 USA study examining how differences in child care experiences relate to children's social, emotional, intellectual and language development as well as to their physical growth and health, the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (1997) found that children in higher quality child care had better language and cognitive development during the first 4½ years of life than those in lower quality care.

Nine years later in a study examining how the quality of ECEC relates to early cognitive and language development, Burchinal et al. (2000) observed 89 African American children over a two and a half year period as they progressed from six to 36 months of age. Results from the Bayley Scales of Infant Development, Sequenced Inventory of Communication Development, and Communication and Symbolic Behaviour Scales indicated that higher quality ECEC was related to higher measures of cognitive development, language development and communication skills, even after adjusting for selected child and

family characteristics. Similar results were reported by Love et al. (2005) who conducted a large scale randomised control trial of 3,001 families in 17 Early Head Start programmes. Data collected when children were three years of age included interviews with primary caregivers (who were diverse in race/ethnicity, language, and other characteristics), child assessments, and observations of parent-child interactions. Regression-adjusted impact analyses showed that children attending the Early Head Start programmes, which were considered to be of higher quality, performed better in cognitive, language development and sustained attention than did children in the control group.

Children in high quality ECEC programmes have also been rated more highly in both behaviour and social skills. For instance, Melhuish, Belsky, Leyland and Barnes, (2008) conducted a quasi-experimental observation study on the Sure Start Local Programmes (SSLP) intended to improve services for young children and their families in deprived communities and to promote health and development and reduce inequalities in the UK. The study compared 5,883 three-year old children and their families from 93 disadvantaged SSLP areas with 1,879 three-year old children and their families from 72 similarly deprived non-SSLP areas in England. After controlling for background factors, findings showed that children in SSLP had better positive social behaviour and had greater independence/self-regulation. The implication from all these studies is that children have the potential to develop and improve their cognitive, language, sustained attention and communication skills if they attend high quality ECEC programmes.

Furthermore, there are long-term economic gains associated with high quality ECEC. Among these gains are educational attainment, employability and responsible citizenship. Belfield et al. (2006) studied 123 African Americans who from 1962–1967, at ages three and four, were randomly divided into a programme group that received a high quality ECEC programme based on High Scope's participatory learning approach and a comparison group

who received no ECEC programme. The results from the survey indicated that adults at age 40 who had attended the preschool programme had higher earnings, were more likely to hold a job, had committed fewer crimes, and were more likely to have graduated from high school than adults who had not attended ECEC services.

Longitudinal studies that followed children from preschool to adulthood, such as Barnett's (1995) study of Head Start participants and cost-benefit analysis of Perry Preschools (Schweinhart et al., 2005), Carolina Abecedarian (Masse & Barnett, 2002) and Chicago Child-Parent Centres (Reynolds, Temple, Robertson, & Mann, 2002) corroborate these findings of educational attainment, employability and responsible citizenship. Additionally, the findings of cost-benefit analysis studies (Belfield, Nores, Barnett, & Schweinhart, 2006; Reynolds, Temple, White, Ou, & Robertson, 2010) indicate that the benefits exceed the costs of these programmes. These cost benefits are an important driver compelling governments and funding bodies to enter the field of ECEC service provision and regulation.

The importance of attending to issues of quality in ECEC becomes particularly critical when considering the amount of time young children spend in ECEC centres and services. In a large-scale study in different care centres in Israel, Sagi et al. (2002) examined whether different child care services correlated with differences in infant attachment. After controlling for variables likely to influence attachment including mother characteristics, mother-child interaction, mother-father relationship, infant characteristics and development and the environment, the study found a positive correlation between centre-care and insecure attachments to mothers compared to infants who were either in maternal care, individual non-parental care with a relative, individual non-parental care with a paid caregiver, or family day care. When the reasons behind insecure attachments were investigated, the study identified poor quality of centre based ECEC and high infant: caregiver ratios as contributing factors.

Studies such as these have contributed significantly to the widely accepted view that children, families and the wider society will benefit from children participating in high quality ECEC programmes. Recognition that low quality ECEC programmes have the converse potential to be detrimental is important. The issue is therefore how quality in ECEC is conceptualised and defined.

Conceptualising and Defining Quality in ECEC

Despite its importance in affecting children's growth and development, how the concept of high quality in ECEC is defined and measured continues to be problematic. The previously assumed view of high quality as "an inherent attribute, some universal and knowable thing waiting 'out there' to be discovered and measured by experts" (Dahlberg & Moss, 2008, p. 4) has been profoundly questioned. Debates about what constitutes quality have highlighted that it is the person or group defining quality that determines its scope, and the definitions change from one context to another and under specific circumstances (Dahlberg, Moss, & Pence, 2007; Woodhead & Keynes, 1996). Therefore, any meaningful definition of quality in ECEC must of necessity consider different perspectives about its goals and functions (Kamerman, 2000, 2001).

Within the existing frameworks of early years' services, there are multiple approaches to definitions of quality. It is important then that policy makers provide the necessary space and mechanisms for this pluralism to be realised. Moreover, Woodhead and Keynes (1996) contend that those involved in childhood development must recognise that their valued views of children are cultural constructions.

Some consensus about process and structure of quality. Despite variations in perspectives, there is some consensus on the key components that comprise high quality ECEC programmes. For ease of identification, evaluation, measurement and funding,

components of quality are commonly organised into two categories: process components and structural components. Components of process quality emphasise the actual experiences that occur in ECEC programmes whereas components of structural quality include tangible elements that are often identified in regulations governed by policy and legislation such as teacher training, qualifications and experience, staff: child ratios and group size. Identifying components recognised as promoting high quality ECEC service delivery provides a framework through which parents' ideals and experiences of quality can be viewed.

Process quality emphasises the actual experiences that occur in a learning environment. These may focus on the interpersonal aspects of care that children experience including the warmth, sensitivity, and responsiveness of the caregivers and the emotional tone of the setting. These experiences also relate to the types of activities available to children, the developmental appropriateness of activities and the learning opportunities available to children.

Environments with high process quality components have shown to accrue benefits in a number of domains. Research has demonstrated that these benefits continue into elementary years and enhance children's abilities to learn and succeed in school and later life. An important component of process quality that has been associated with academic and language skills benefits is the relationship between the teacher and the child. For instance, Peisner-Feinberg et al. (2001), who observed classroom practices related to child's language and academic skills, found that the closeness of the teacher to the child was related to both cognitive and social skills. Similarly, Burchinal and Peinsner-Feinberg (2002) surveyed 511 children beginning in the second-to-last year of child care through to the third year of elementary school via parents and teachers. From their data, they discovered that children with strong relationships with their teachers had higher academic and language skills.

Another important component of process quality related to teacher-child relationship is the number and type of adult to child interactions in the learning environment. Overall, teachers' emotional and instructional instructions have been found to contribute to academic, language and social skills. In more recent research, Mashburn et al. (2008), using three methods of measuring pre-kindergarten quality: (a) adherence to nine standards of quality related to program infrastructure and design, (b) observations of the overall quality of classroom environments, and (c) observations of teachers' emotional and instructional interactions with children in classrooms, examined development of academic, language, and social skills among 2,439 four year olds in 671 publicly supported ECEC programmes in 11 states in the USA. Adjusting for prior skill levels, child and family characteristics, programme characteristics and State where they lived, the quality of teachers' instructional interactions were found to predict academic and language skills and the quality of teachers' emotional interactions predicted positive social skills. More recently, through multilevel modelling techniques, Curby et al. (2009) investigated the relationship between teacher-child relationship, teacher-child interactions and pre-kindergarten children's academic growth and social competence of children. They found that children in classrooms that were rated high in emotional support dimensions were also rated higher in social competence the following year.

The nature of social environment of early childhood settings is also a crucial component of process quality. Programmes that create high quality social environments have been associated with language, academic and social skills. In a different study, Mashburn (2008) surveyed the correlation between quality of social and physical environments in preschools and children's development of academic, language, and literacy skills. Participants comprised 540 four-year old children in Georgia who attended Head Start, the Georgia Pre-Kindergarten Program, or private preschools. Controlling for gender, family

income, race, ethnicity, preschool programme type, and pre-test performance, high quality social environments were found to be positively correlated with children's academic and literacy skills at the end of preschool.

In the early childhood setting teacher-child relationships, with their social and instructional interactions, are dependent on the ways in which the teacher supports and organises the learning processes. The link between these processes and later school success has been documented. For instance, Hamre and Pianta (2005) found that the risk of school failure could be reduced through teacher support. Tracking children 5–6 years of age identified as being at risk of school failure based on demographic characteristics and multiple functional (behavioural, attention, academic, social) problems, they found that by the end of first grade, at-risk students placed in first grade classrooms offering higher teacher support, had similar achievement levels and student-teacher relationships as their low-risk peers. The at-risk students placed in less supportive classrooms had lower achievements and were more at conflict with teachers. The findings of these studies underscore the importance of social processes in classrooms for establishing the foundations for academic competence in the early years and indicate that strong instructional and emotional support compensate for children at risk of school failure.

The importance of the relationship between the teacher and child is further underlined in Hamre and Pianta's (2001) study, which examined whether kindergarten teachers' perceptions of their relationships with students predict different school results by following 179 children from kindergarten through to eighth grade. Findings demonstrated that Relational Negativity in kindergarten, characterised by conflict and dependency, correlated with academic and behavioural outcomes through to eighth grade, especially for children with high levels of behaviour problems in kindergarten and generally for boys. These

associations remained significant after controlling for gender, ethnicity, cognitive ability, and behaviour ratings.

These studies call attention to the quality of teacher-child relationships at the ECEC level as a critical element of process quality associated with immediate benefits that have been found to affect school outcomes at higher levels. It is apparent that the social-emotional climate of the classroom is directly related to the quality of interpersonal relationships, particularly the relationship between teacher and child as it is played out in instructional style and teacher responses to children's behaviours.

Structural components of quality are also crucial. Using data from the NICHD Study of Early Child Care, Clarke-Stewart, Vandell, Burchinal, O'Brien and McCartney (2002) examined whether regulated features of ECEC such as teacher qualifications affect child development and found that children in classrooms with teachers who had current and higher levels of training were rated higher in learning, and in cognitive and language development than those with teachers who had low training levels or no training.

Formal education, in particular a Bachelor degree in early childhood education, has been shown to be a significant predictor of quality ECEC in a number of studies. In a recent study, Saracho and Spodek (2007) explored the importance of higher education for ECEC teachers. They carried out a critical analysis of 40 studies on ECEC teacher preparation and the quality of their educational programmes published within a 15-year period (1989–2004). Literal and allegorical critical analysis and interpretative critical analyses of the publications produced results in three main areas: the professional development of the teachers, the importance of a Bachelor's degree and educational standards for early childhood education teachers. Overall, they determined that a Bachelor's degree and specialisation in early

childhood training positively affected teachers' behaviour and the quality of their early childhood programmes.

Professional development of teachers also contributes to the overall quality of early childhood programmes. In an earlier study, Burchinal, Cryer, Clifford and Howes (2002) examined the association between classroom quality and both the highest level of formal education and professional development opportunities offered in the workplace, in the community or in other professional settings. Results indicated that caregivers with formal education in early childhood or who had attended professional development workshops were more likely to have higher quality classrooms than caregivers with other training at lower levels or no professional development. It is worth noting that staff who had participated in professional development workshops demonstrated higher quality interaction skills leading to higher language scores, regardless of the caregiver's educational background. However, those without a college degree, who reported attending professional development workshops, were still rated as less sensitive and as providing lower quality care than the caregivers with formal education in early childhood who did not report attending workshops.

It is evident from research that teacher education and on-going professional development such as workshops have been positively correlated to high quality preschool environments. However, Early et al. (2006) warn that, on their own, teacher credentials may not necessarily lead to better child outcomes or higher quality preschool settings. Quality is necessarily determined by what happens in the classroom (Bogard, Traylor, & Takanishi, 2008) and what happens in the classroom is impacted by other structural components of the ECEC environment such as adult: child ratios, group sizes and the physical setting as well as by the qualities and qualifications of ECEC teachers.

The adult: child ratios and group size have been highlighted as indicators of structural quality in a number of studies. Phillips, Mekos, Scarr, McCartney and Abbott-Shim (2002) in their multisite study of centre-based child care and children's development focused on: (a) associations among quality of care defined by structural features, process indicators, and compliance with state regulations, (b) variation in quality based on the stringency of state child care regulations and centre compliance, and (c) specific quality indicators that show especially strong links to children's experiences in child care. High adult: child ratios and group size were positively correlated to high quality classroom processes. Similarly, Clarke-Stewart et al. (2002) reported that centres that observed age-weighted group size cut-offs had caregivers who provided more positive care.

Therefore whether or not they are direct or indirect predicators of quality, there seems to be a consensus that adult: child ratios and group size, together with other components such as highly qualified teachers, emotional support, teacher responsiveness and sensitivity are important indicators of high quality ECEC programmes. Evidently, both process and structural components of ECEC programmes are germane so when defining and advocating for quality, no one component can guarantee quality. It may be possible to identify different components that make up quality but these components and their interrelationships are not fixed. Instead, they are mediated by a combination of specific circumstances viewed from specific and diverse perspectives and cultural contexts.

Any definition of 'quality' includes subjective values. It can have different perspectives and can include different indicators. Additionally, it can be challenged by those who hold different priorities or perspectives. Consequently, definitions of high quality ECEC *ipso facto* are context specific and open to change. This being the case, understanding quality from different stakeholders' perspectives can broaden the views of quality to cater for

children's developmental needs and the needs of families and societies in different cultural contexts.

Contextualisation of 'Quality'

Concerns about the degree to which quality is objective, fixed and static or subjective and dynamic reflect a prevailing concern with defining, evaluating and measuring key components of public services. Objectivity is the foundation for developing high quality measures. However, definitions of quality should move beyond this and involve discussions and reflections among different partners who are 'doing quality' in early years services (Dahlberg & Moss, 2008). This is particularly important when international organisations such as United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) increasingly influence policy developments in many developing countries and where hegemonic views such as neo-liberalism continue to permeate all spheres of life in general but in particular that of education.

Considering the different contexts in which ECEC services are situated and differing levels of quality of these services, the need for contextualised studies exist. Phillips et al. (2002) assert that there are few studies devoted to understanding the "relative, joint or compensatory effects of various dimensions of care on the quality of care that children receive" (p. 493). Additionally, measurements of the benefits of ECEC need to be broadened beyond cognitive development, language development and social skills to incorporate cultural values and beliefs. Pointing out that empirical studies dominate the field, Fleer (2000) argues for the need for qualitative studies that can provide rich and nuanced descriptions of cultural contexts and the contextual variables that impact quality. Longitudinal studies on the effects of ECEC services should capture other components of quality that may not necessarily be related to increase in normative measures of development. Failure to consider other opinions and ways of defining quality may lead to meanings and

standards reflecting the beliefs, concerns and lifestyles of the dominant group. In the case of developing countries, this dominant group may be speaking from, or influenced by, distant socio-cultural contexts.

Recognising that the indicators of, and influences on, quality are necessarily subjective and contextual, points to 'quality' as a concept and practice in ECEC being highly complex. In a project funded by the Bernard van Leer Foundation seeking to establish what are good environments for children, how they can be improved, and what research says about such environments Woodhead and Keynes (1996) analysed data from four local studies in differing contexts – India, Kenya, Venezuela and France, and concluded that:

> Any early childhood programme is a complex human system involving numerous individuals and interest groups. There are many different potential criteria of quality, which are closely linked to beliefs about goals and functions. These beliefs are in turn shaped by perspectives on childhood, by cultural patterns and personal values as well as by social structures, levels of poverty and wealth, and so on. Instead of expecting to identify universal, objective indicators of quality, we have to look towards a policy framework that can encompass multiple perspectives, multiple beneficiaries and multiple benefits (p. 23).

Any attempt to understand quality must of necessity accommodate this multiplicity by considering the social context, systems and cultural values in which an ECEC programme is situated. Viewed through the lens of Bronfenbrenner's nested bio-ecological model (1979), the importance and complexity of considering and integrating social context, systems and cultural values in advancing research and practice in the name of high quality ECEC service provision becomes apparent (Marshall, 2004) . These systems addressed by Bronfenbrenner's nested bio-ecological model include: micro-system (consisting of the child's most immediate

environment: physically, socially and psychologically); exo-system (which represents the contexts that the child experiences indirectly and yet directly impacts on the child); macro-systems (which are the wider cultural beliefs, societal values, political trends, and community happenings); meso-systems (which help to connect two or more systems in which child, parent and family live); and chrono-systems (which represents the historical context in which family dynamics are mediated) (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). Attention to each of these makes evident that any given context will present opportunities for variations in defining and implementing high quality.

Therefore, subcultures and multiplicity of values in societies mean that there can be no one absolute definition of high quality in ECEC. Contextualising quality in ECEC services in ways that are relevant to the values of the particular society and service users is important in meeting children's and families' needs in culturally nuanced and meaningful ways. However, the broader social and economic influences also need to be taken into account.

Different stakeholders: Different definitions of quality. Unsurprisingly, different stakeholders have been found to differ in what they consider important components of high quality ECEC. For instance, in a consultation involving different groups of stakeholders in ECEC services in the UK, Mooney and Munton (1998) found that definitions of quality provided by different groups of stakeholders reflected differences in beliefs, values and needs. In a more recent study, Tanner et al. (2006) found similar results. Looking at a large urban local authority in the U.K., for some of their stakeholders, education was central to a high quality service, whilst for others high quality was largely about safe and happy children. Studies such as these highlight how 'quality' needs to be understood as "a subjective, value-based, relative and dynamic concept" and it cannot "be taken for granted" (Dahlberg & Moss, 2008, p. 4).

Partnerships move definitions of quality from static official definitions that tend to prescribe standards (mostly structural components) towards pluralism where different stakeholders' views come into play. Tanner et al. (2006) argue that:

> It is important, therefore, that national policy makers ensure that the way in which they discuss, write about, and implement policies on the issue of quality leaves room for the pluralistic nature of quality to be realised at the local level (p. 15).

Critical among the primary stakeholders in the process of defining quality are parents. Parents are considered to be the primary caregivers of their children or are responsible for alternative care.

Parents' judgement of quality. The argument in the literature that parents are not knowledgeable enough about quality apparently stems from the studies where parents have been found to be satisfied with child care that has been rated lower by professionals. Peyton, et al. (2001) in particular examined demographic and family process factors related to the reasons mothers selected a particular care arrangement for their three-year old children along with the type and quality of care the children received and the mothers' satisfaction with that care. They grouped reasons for selecting care on quality, practicality, or preference for a specific type of care arrangement. One of the strengths of their study is cited to be the use of trained observers to judge service quality. Mothers were said to lack training in evaluating quality of care due to their limited contact with the care settings during drop-off and pick-up times. Additionally, the parents did not see the varying interactions caregivers have with the children and were unable to accurately capture the nature of the care giving environment.

Parents' overestimation of the quality of their children's programmes, or their failure to judge when they are not obtaining high quality with respect to those aspects of quality that they value most highly, are not necessarily indications that they are not knowledgeable about

quality. An earlier study by Cryer and Burchinal (1997) surveyed child related values and quality assessments of parents as child care consumers. They suggest that "imperfect information" about the quality of services may mitigate "parents demanding the aspects of high quality child care which they believe to be important for their children" (p. 53). These concerns about parents' access to information about services seems particularly significant in light of families valuing access to information, opportunities for families to network, good inter-personal relationships with staff, and a philosophy of empowerment (Mitchell & Sloper, 2001).

Parents' subjective assessment of quality often differs from that of ECEC professionals investigating childcare centres. Goodfellow (2003) points out that parents' values and beliefs influence the type of quality care arrangements they choose, how they respond to different child care environments and whether they are satisfied or not with those environments. Parents may express their subjectivity in their choice of child care by the preference of informal or formal child care. Duncan, Edwards, Reynolds and Alldred (2004, p. 262) argue that parents' "preference for informal care does not stem from lack or experience of anything better, but from a deeper assessment of the nature and quality of the care provided, however 'good' the 'quality' of formal, group-based care provision". This position is supported further by Vincent and Ball (2001) who analysed the ways in which 12 middle class mothers, mainly white, operate within the childcare market in Britain. Half of the mothers used informal care although able to pay for formal child care while a third used formal care. A relative or a friend was seen as an assurance and love, whatever the other failings. Although parental perceptions of quality are subjective and therefore inherently biased, they are nonetheless important considerations in determining programme quality. (Jinnah & Walters, 2008)

What is valued may vary among different parents and/or different contexts. For instance Swadener, Kabiru and Njenga (1997, 2000) found that different Kenyan parents valued different aspects of ECEC provision. At a community level there were concerns about children's health and nutrition, also about cultural transmission and maintenance. More traditional communities like the Samburu and Maasai placed high premium on grandmothers' roles in such transmission. At a parental level, concerns included safety and custodial care especially for children under three years old. Most parents also valued preparation for school readiness, which they considered as a requirement to join the highly competitive and exam oriented education system.

This information of what parents value as comprising high quality ECEC programmes differs from other stakeholders is well documented. Evidence can be found in Ceglowski's (2004) study of what different stakeholders in Minnesota valued in ECEC programmes. Parents most frequently talked about culturally responsive (45%), welcoming and supportive environments (24%), and safety and adequate facilities (18%) as predictors of quality. Family child care and centre-based childcare staff, program administrators and teachers, and child care resource and referral staff most frequently talked about professionalism and training as a characteristic of quality childcare providers. Early childcare providers most frequently talked about communicating with and providing resources to parents as characteristics of high quality programmes. Ceglowski (2004) concluded that it is expedient to re-examine the construct of child care quality to consider other perspectives, namely that of parents.

Similar views were expressed by Tanner et al. (2006) who indicated that parents were more likely to define quality in terms of the well-being of the individual child. They found that parents were more concerned with teachers' characteristics, experiences, common sense, maturity and personality rather than levels of qualifications. Parents rarely talked about education *per se* although many of them considered learning an important aspect of quality

and talked about a balance between learning and play. Their primary concerns were about the safety and happiness of their children. Some parents referred to quality as something intangible without specific components using such words as 'good vibes' or 'ethos'. For these parents, quality was used to denote the atmosphere, nature of interactions as well as concern for the child.

Other studies also emphasise the value that parents attach to caregivers' personal characteristics. Parents consider quality in terms of trustworthiness and bonding of their children with the carers. In her study examining the parents' use of, reasons for and impact of different care arrangements in New South Wales (NSW) in Australia, Goodfellow (2003) reported that parents were most concerned about how teachers bonded with children. Mooney and Munton (1998), in their study on how different stakeholders in the UK define quality, reported that parents felt that quality of care depended more on personal characteristics such as warmth and sensitivity of the teachers than their qualifications. Larner and Phillips (2002) add that parents are sceptical about specialised training for caregivers as they argue: "you can't teach someone to love children". (p. 52)

Interpreting high quality programmes in terms of interpersonal relationships with the carers seems to cut across different cultures as illustrated by different studies in the various parts of the world. In Australia, Goodfellow (2003) found that parents wished that carers could be trusted to meet their expectations. Duncan et al. (2004) in their study in the UK observed that parents valued informal care and that parents needed not only to trust the carer but particularly wanted "someone who would show the child affection… [and] looks after a child in the same way as parents" (p. 259). In a later study, Jatrana (2007) examined the child care arrangements, preferences and the decision making process of working mothers of children aged 0–36 months of age in India. He reported that most parents preferred and used kin-based care arrangements. Kin-based care was seen as the best choice for the child and a

way to maintain ties with grandparents, even if such arrangements meant the child living away from their parents. Similarly, in Kenya, grandparents and older siblings are still significant in caring for children, particularly those who are under three years of age, especially in the more traditional societies like among the Maasai and Samburu communities, and among plantations and rural areas. However, living away from such traditional social networks, the middle and higher income parents living in urban centres usually hire child minders (Kipkorir & Njenga, 1993; Swadener, et al., 1997, 2000).

Researchers concerned about the need to include parents' voices in the quality of ECEC services provided, called for social environments for young children that partner with families and that address the community context in service provision ideas (McCain & Mustard, 2002; McCain, Mustard, & Shanker, 2007). Although parents and ECEC professionals value similar components of quality, some parents' conceptualisations and expressions of these components may vary from those of other stakeholders or even from other parents. Larner and Phillips (2002) acknowledged diversity among parents and their socio-economic resources. They also acknowledged the effects of the free market economy on the provision and use of child care services. To unpack these complexities it is important to look at what parents consider while choosing ECEC services for their children.

How do parents choose high quality ECEC? Although parents generally desire high quality ECEC services for their children, research suggests that parents often do not choose them (Ceglowski, 2004; Jinnah & Walters, 2008). Factors that may influence parents' choices include affordability and availability, family demographics, beliefs, values and preferences, and the age of the child. These factors often become interconnected.

Cost and availability. Cost and availability of child care settings largely determine the choices that parents make for child care. In their studies on reasons for choosing child care in Australia, Peyton et al. (2001) and Harrison and Ungerer (2005) both reported that parents

49

felt deeply about the quality of care and education provided to their children. However, the priority of flexible hours and cost often blunted considerations of quality. Such tensions between parents' expectations and what is available and affordable can create dilemmas for parents in choosing child care. Economic and social pressures can limit parents' choice of these services (Duncan, et al., 2004), sometimes to the extent that parents feel they have almost no choice in child care arrangements (Irvine, 2005).

Balanced against cost is family income, another major factor in determining the type of care that parents use. Harrison and Ungerer (2005) reporting on a longitudinal study of Australian infants' and 4 to 5 year olds' experiences of early childhood education and care state that the cost of formal services made many parents choose informal arrangements which were less costly, especially for the infants . Del Boca, Locatellin and Vuri, (2004) a year earlier had made similar findings that the cost of child care is particularly associated with the age of the child, with the cost of care for under three year olds being higher than for the older children and therefore influencing the choices that parents make.

Availability of services further restricts the types of care arrangements that parents ultimately choose. The question of availability of ECEC as a key factor of choice cuts across those countries where ECEC services are funded by the government, such as in Norway (Kornstad & Thoresen, 2007), Germany (Kreyenfeld & Hank, 2000) and Italy (Del Boca, et al., 2004) and those like the USA, the UK and Australia where parents have to pay for services. Konstard and Thoresen (2007) who did their research in Norway, maintain that availability of services include whether centres are flexible in accommodating parents' needs, especially for mothers whose working hours are not fixed. They argue that maintaining high quality day care must meet the demand for more flexible and extensive (full-time) day care for children of all ages. Peyton et al. (2001) indicate that although parents in USA have to pay for child care, availability of certain types of care impact on the choices that parents

make, particularly for those with infants and with low incomes. Similar observations are made by Goodfellow's (2003) who observed that parents in Australia were limited in their choice of care by the available services.

Family demographics. Family demographics, such as single parenting, family income, education levels and nature of work, influence parents' reasons for choosing various child care arrangements. Swadener et al. (1997, 2000) found in Kenya that single mothers from urban centres, plantations and urban slums with low incomes considered ECEC important for custodial care, health (where feeding programmes were available) and school readiness. For middle and upper class families, they chose preschools for enrichment and school readiness experience but not for care as they had the option of employing at-home minders. Peyton et al. (2001) studied demographic and family process factors related to mothers' choices of care arrangements for three-year olds and observed that mothers with high incomes and those who worked few hours selected care arrangements based on quality while those with lower incomes selected care for practical logistic reasons. Informal care is the preferred model of child care of employed mothers in Britain irrespective of the age involved (Duncan et al. (2004). Partners and grandparents are the most significant carers. The preference for informal care remained high even when parents were asked about 'ideal' child care arrangements when cost and availability were not constrained.

Parents beliefs and values. Parents' deep-seated beliefs and values are powerful determinants of child care environments they choose for their children (Ball, 2003). Many parents prefer the familiarity and stability of informal home based care providers to care from 'strangers' in formal settings. Jatrana (2007) referred to kin-based care as the most preferred and widely used child care arrangement of working mothers in India. Choice was seen as a product of preferences, or convenience or preference together with convenience, or practicality and availability. The preference of informal care arrangements reported here is in

51

contrast to the Kenyan situation where some parents are reported to prefer sending their children to preschools, (sometimes such preschools may be of lower quality than the home environment) believing that teachers are trained are therefore more skilled to meet their children's needs (Swadener, et al., 1997, 2000).

There are differing views from studies on which of the two arrangements, formal or informal, benefits the child more. Results from the USA indicate that children attending formal care arrangements benefit more than those in home based care (NICHD, 2005), which has been corroborated by findings in Australia (Love et al., 2003). However, in Australia, a combination of both informal and formal care was reported to have improved children's language development (Bowes et al., 2004). Age is a factor, with children under three years of age requiring services that show affection, that communicates with and are responsive to the child. Learning and educational opportunities are more relevant for older children (Alakeson, 2004).

Age of the child. The type of care that parents choose for their children varies with the age of the child. Results from an ABC study in Australia in 2002 indicates that, at the time of the study, 22% of all children under 12 months were regularly cared for by grandparents, with only 5% using long day care. At one-year old, 57% of children were in a form of child care, with grandparents providing 31% of care. As children reached the age of three, more children were in formal long day care services available in the community. The use of formal care increased with the age of the child until the child entered school (Goodfellow & Laverty, 2003). Mothers start associating high quality child care with educational factors from about three years of age (Peyton, et al., 2001) while Goodfellow (2003) observed that parents shifted their concern from that of socialisation at the early ages to that of education as children grew older.

Parents consider that ECEC services play different roles in their families depending on the age of the child. Parents with children below three years of age tend to prefer informal settings or relatives to care for their children. Different reasons have been attributed to parents preferring informal to formal care settings for their young children. Firstly, such parents may look at alternative child care as a substitute for parental care and to compensate for the home environment, which they prefer for their children (Jatrana, 2007). Secondly, as opposed to formal care, informal care is more available and costs less, especially for very young children. Lastly, formal care has such fixed costs such as transportation, clothing and stress associated with taking young children especially where care services are few and when parents want to use the care services for only a few hours (Del Boca, et al., 2004)

Play-based learning. The importance of play in early years in general and in ECEC services in particular is well documented. For instance, according to an OECD (2004) report describing successful preschool practices across countries, learning through play is recognised as a core feature of the curriculum of successful ECEC settings. Furthermore, play as an effective tool for development and learning is referred to in such classic theoretical works as that of Froebel (1893), who stated that play was the purest, most spiritual activity of man at this stage and typical of human life and Vygotsky (1896) who posited that play mediated children's learning with opportunities for risk. In more recent research, play has been associated with the development of cognitive and social skills, self-regulation, memory, oral language and an increase in literacy skills (Bodrova, 2008).

- Adult's input and social contexts are important in making play meaningful for children. Vygotsky (1978) asserts that play has its origins in the social context. Children learn to play through their interactions with their peers, siblings, adults such as teachers and parents and other caregivers. If play is the leading activity during the preschool period, then it follows that pre-schoolers will learn best in the context of

play activity. The teacher then has a key responsibility of moving the child forward into the zone of proximal development afforded by play activities by making them richer and more manageable for the child. Adults can promote the quality of play and enhance its leading role at the preschool age through initiating and demonstrating activity for children, and asking children leading questions intended to evoke reflection (Vygotsky, 1978) and by availing children with the time, space, and materials needed to engage in pretend play (Berk, Mann & Ogan, 2006; Duncan & Tarulli, 2003). More adult interactions, where children work together with adults and have positive relationships, provide children with linguistic scaffolding needed to enhance language and cognitive development and a secure environment to develop social skills (William, Donohue & Tully, 2012)

- Play affords children freedom to experiment without the risk of failure. Bruner (1972) highlights this sense of play as "creative experimentation". According to Bruner, the play context provides the freedom to manipulate objects and ideas in a nonliteral, pretend fashion, without substantive consequences. The freedom from situational constraints that children experience in a play activity provides them with an individual sense of creative control. In a play context, children are free to risk with things they may not yet be confident with. In other words, play provides a scaffold that the child can use to move forward into the zone of proximal development in tentative ways. In effect, play creates a zone of proximal development that provides children with the opportunity to expand their understanding of the socio-cultural world (Berk, Mann & Ogan, 2006; Bodrova, 2008; Duncan & Tarulli, 2003).

Whilst the importance of play in the early years is well documented, implementation of play-based learning is riddled with controversies and rhetoric in both developed and developing countries. In Kenya, the Policy framework (Republic of Kenya, 2006b) guiding

ECEC as well as ECD guidelines recommended by the Ministry of Education endorse play-based learning for preschool. It emphasises the child-centred approach and encourages children's learning through play and manipulating, observing, exploring and experimenting (Republic of Kenya, 2006a). Nevertheless a gap between the rhetoric of policy and implementation has been reported in different government reports as well as by individual researchers. For example OECD/UNESCO (Republic of Kenya, 2005c) reported that most community based as well as private preschools used didactic teacher directed methods and only a few private preschools offer play-based learning. The report conjectures that parents' understanding of early childhood care and education as being focused on children's acquisition of learning skills. Furthermore, parents are reported to put pressure on schools to teach writing, arithmetic and numeracy skills. Similar observations were reported by Ngaruiya (2004) and Swadener et al. (2000).

The Kenyan situation is not unique, as international research discovered that parents of young children do appreciate the value of play in learning but see it as only serving a socialisation function. Golinkoff, Hirsh-Pasek and Singer (2006) argue that although generally parents were positive towards play they were particularly unconvinced that it was the best way to foster their children's holistic development. Six years later, Fung and Cheng (2012) reported similar findings. Chan and Chan (2003) in an earlier study had found that although play-based learning was a preferred pedagogy by the teachers, parents were said to be more concerned with the academic performance of their children. Parents' demands are especially powerful because most of the preschools are private and therefore rely on fees for their operations.

Different studies demonstrate controversies over play-based learning with pressure coming from different stakeholders, among them policy makers, administrators, early childhood workers and parents. For instance, in a recent study, through classroom

observations and interviews with parents, teachers, and principals, Fung and Cheng (2012)

examined the implementation of play-based learning in a context that has a heavy emphasis

on academic achievements. Not unlike other countries, both developed and developing, their

study reveals complexities and difficulties in supporting play-based learning in Hong Kong.

Fung and Cheng (2012) discovered that administrators and teachers valued play in promoting

children's motivation to learn and become active learners. However, they lacked consensus in

implementing play-based learning in their centres. Whilst administrators argued that teachers

lacked the necessary competence to effectively use play for meaningful learning, teachers

cited different constraints put on them such as lack of time to cover prescribed curriculum,

insufficient space, inadequate human resource and pressure from parents. In an earlier work,

Munn (2010) acknowledges this tension between the concepts of 'play' and 'learning', by

stating that these concepts:

> …for the most part, an artefact of the way Early Years discourse is embedded within
>
> the discourse of the wider community. Play is held to be essential both as a means of
>
> learning and as a route to healthy socio-emotional development, but it is not always
>
> reflected in practice and policy. In everyday discourse there is a clear distinction
>
> made between play on the one hand (trivial, optional, not assessable) and learning on
>
> the other (serious, compulsory, assessable) and the construction of these two as
>
> opposites can have a complicating effect on the way the early years curriculum is
>
> constructed and read (p. 1).

The need to be accountable by producing measurable outcomes as propagated by neo-

liberalist ideals continue to create dilemmas for teachers who believe in the value of play yet

at the same time must show results of their work in tangible ways. Russo (2012) commenting

on ECEC services in the USA, observes that teachers are increasingly being called upon to

justify the value of play to parents and administrators. The result has been academic exercises replacing play-based activities and increased focus on testing, a common trend globally.

Partnering with Parents in High Quality ECEC
The arguments for making parents partners in providing high quality ECEC globally have been well established in the literature. Authors including Goodfellow (2003), Crozier (2000), Crozier and Davies (2007) and OECD (2006) argue that respectful, reciprocal partnerships with families and communities are critical in strengthening the ability of early childhood settings in meeting the needs of young children. The purpose of partnering, particularly with parents, as outlined by OECD (2006) are to:

a) build on parents' unique knowledge about their children, fostering continuity with learning in the home;

b) promote positive attitudes and behaviour towards children's learning;

c) provide parents with information and referrals to other services; and

d) support parent and community empowerment (p. 148).

Partnership between parents and teachers has been identified as among the most important components of high quality ECEC programmes. Jeynes (2005) posit that parents' involvement influences children's academic success, which could be accounted for by the improved cognitive, language and social development associated with such involvement. Hayden, De Gioia and Hadley together with the New South Wales Department of Community Services (2003) examined how partnership between early childhood settings and families from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds could be enhanced. They found that teachers also benefited from their partnership with parents because teachers became confident in their efficiency to teach children, by drawing from the community funds of knowledge. The community funds of knowledge as articulated by Fantuzzo, McWaynce, Perry and Childs (2004) include the competencies that children and families bring to the

preschool context. Longitudinal studies of the effects of high quality ECEC services on children have already shown familial factors are significant in influencing children's early development and later in life.

Policy makers and scholars have called on service providers to design strategies that will create effective partnerships between parents and ECEC staff. This partnership with parents and ECEC staff must occur at two key levels of ECEC service provision: policy and implementation. Policy provides a platform for parental involvement linking to legislation that requires services to fulfil certain procedures and regulations. How policy is implemented by service providers is the site within which policy and quality are played out.

Partnering with parents at policy level. Governments play a major role in influencing the delivery and practice of ECEC services in the form of policy provisions. Partnership, particularly with parents, is circumscribed by the way in which national policy makers discuss, write about, and implement policies on the issue of quality. In recognition of the importance of creating space for partnering with parents at policy level, *Starting Strong* (OECD, 2001b) states:

> Supporting young children's early development and learning requires ECEC staff to
> form a partnership with parents, which implies a two-way process of knowledge and
> information flowing freely both ways. … Parents can much assist programme staff to
> tailor programmes to the needs of particular children or particular groups (p. 117).

Tailoring programmes to specific groups increases benefits for behaviour, learning and later life for children and families from different socio-economic groups (McCain & Mustard, 1999). Later, OECD in *Starting Strong* (2001b) underscored the importance of community involvement in ECEC for provision of increased services and "as a space for partnerships and the participation of parents" (p. 118). It called for a participatory and

democratic approach to engaging parents, staff and children in public policy and service development in its member countries (Bertram & Pascal, 2001).

This participatory approach is a way of including different views in the development of quality ECEC services. In an even more recent report, *Starting Strong II* report OECD reiterated that:

> While government should play a large leadership role, regional and local authorities, business representatives, organised civil society, and community groups should be involved in the formulation and implementation of the ECEC policy agenda. This inclusive and participatory approach will help ensure broad public support for ECEC and ensure that multiple perspectives contribute to decision-making. In particular, parents need to be considered as the central partners in policy and programme development in the field (OECD, 2006, p. 53) .

Responding to the call for a more inclusive and participatory policy development process in high quality ECEC services, different countries, including Kenya, the USA, Australia, Finland and the UK, have adopted various strategies to include parents at the policy level. The early childhood Policy Framework in Kenya, acknowledges parents as the primary caregivers of their children and therefore equal partners in the provision of high quality ECEC with the need and the right to be supported to play their role more effectively (Republic of Kenya, 2006a). Cryer and Clifford (2003, p. 52) observe that in the USA, there is diversity in the provision of ECEC services with "room for parental choice, …an unlimited number of programmes, …adhering to a wide range of philosophies, [and] … involving parents in participatory strategies." Meanwhile, the Quality Improvement and Accreditation Scheme in Australia, requires good staff-parent communication for eligibility for federal government funding (Hayden, et al., 2003). Centres are expected to develop strong staff-

parent partnerships by involving parents in planning their programmes, managing services and evaluating quality (P. Hughes & MacNaughton, 2001).

In Finland, consultative and collaborative strategies are ingrained at policy level in a decentralised ECEC system developed in the 1990s. Parents are given a central role to ensure that programmes are responsive to children's interests and needs. National projects such as the Educational Partnership (2003–2005) and Early Support (2004–2005) look for ways of responding to parents needs through enhancing staff's capacity to support parents and enunciating parents' role in early intervention respectively (OECD, 2006). While the UK government emphasises the shared responsibilities of parents and professionals in the development of young children and supports the development of more family friendly employment practices and provision of flexible and diverse systems responsive to a range of parental needs (Bertram & Pascal, 2001)

Partnering with parents at programme level. Partnering with parents at the programme level is critical in developing high quality ECEC programmes. Involving parents in their children's learning promotes the potential of both the home and the school environments in meeting the needs of children. Wise and Sanson (2000) found that child and family factors are the greatest determinants of child care outcomes. Data from the first Early Years Studies in British Columbia (McCain & Mustard, 1999; Mustard, 2005, 2006) emphasised that healthy, nurturing relationships, responsive interactions and purposeful play, all based on strong parent-child relationships, are the most powerful influences on children's early development during the sensitive periods of brain development. These views have been emphasised in Mustard's later studies with others: Early Years Study 2 (McCain, et al., 2007) and Early Years Study 3 (McCain & Mustard, 2011). This appreciation of the link between the home and school becomes vital if the needs of individual children are to be best met.

However, congruence between home and school can be interpreted differently by different parents and teachers and for different children. With congruence, the child's experiences in the school and home environments build on each other, usually on the basis of similarity, although some parents deliberately choose environments that supplement the home environment by providing new and different experiences for the child's benefit (Larner & Phillips, 2002). Incongruence between home and child care contexts can negatively influence behaviour, social and cognitive outcomes (Wise & Sanson, 2000). If children are to benefit from the expertise of professionals, it is important that ECEC centres reach out to parents as partners in order to ensure there is continuity between the home and the childcare centre.

Partnership between parents and teachers has been identified as among the most important components of high quality ECEC programmes. Jeynes (2005) posited that parents' involvement influences children's academic success, which could be accounted for by the improved cognitive, language and social development associated with such involvement. As has been alluded to previously, longitudinal studies on the effects of high quality ECEC services on children have shown familial factors as strongly significant in influencing children's early development and later in life. However, Hand et al. (2006) posited that the potential benefits to the child of parent's participation in ECEC services are likely to be undercut if parents and carers have different objectives on what they want to attain from their interactions with children. Providing space for parents to express their views on what they value for their children in the early years is critical in achieving congruence.

Involving parents: Rhetoric or reality. Yet, within the current global trend towards involving parents as key partners in the provision of high quality ECEC, there appears to be a paucity of parent participation in ECEC research, policy and practice. Despite parents being acknowledged as the primary caregivers and therefore key stakeholders in the provision of

high quality ECEC, they are mostly absent at policy and implementation levels of ECEC service provision. Bernie and Lall (2008, p. 14) are eloquent about this as they reflect on educational reforms in the USA.

> Despite increased calls by educational reformers in the US for the inclusion of parents and community members in efforts to improve schools, parents have been denied access to the discourse of the reforms being characterised as obstacles …. Rather than partners in the child's education …schools and parents are most often cast as opponents in a struggle for power and influence, with schools believing that parents should support the reform recommendations and programmes determined by professional educators. …excluding parents from the discourse of educational reforms will likely lead to the failure of those reforms (p. 14).

Despite policy rhetoric that promotes parents' involvement at the implementation level, the experience in many countries is that educational institutions seem to have difficulties in involving parents. Among these difficulties are: teachers' perceptions of parents as being indifferent or difficult to engage (Crozier & Davies, 2007; Hand, et al., 2006); tensions between what parents want and child care legislation and accreditation guidelines (Deslandes, 2001); and tendency of carers to value professional knowledge more than parents' own knowledge about children and childrearing (Crozier & Davies, 2007). Berthelsen and Walker (2008) suggested that there may be cultural capital inequalities between parents and teachers, which echoes the findings of Vincent and Martin (2002) who discovered that the extent to which parents access and use different social resources had a significant effect on how easily and over what issues they approached the school. Sullivan (2001, p. 893) citing Bourdieu (1977), explains that cultural capital comprises of an understanding of the prevailing culture in a society particularly the "ability to understand and use 'educated' language".

Teachers' failure to acknowledge parents as equal partners impedes their partnership with parents for ECEC programmes. In practice, many countries report that very little is done in schools to include parents or to partner with them. For instance, Heysek (2003) in a qualitative study investigated teacher parent partnerships in the former black schools in South Africa. He reported that although partnerships is emphasised in the legislation of the *African School Act 1996*, there was minimal participation of parents in schools. Angelides, Theophanous and Leigh (2006) investigated teacher-parent partnerships through case studies of two pre-primary preschools in Cyprus and found that teacher-parent relationships were riddled with confusion and contradiction. Although teachers considered it ideal to partner with parents, in practice there was little parent inclusion.

Parallel results are reported by Hand et al. (2006) who stated that both centre and family carers were eager to work with parents using both informal as well as formal forms of communication. However, they observed that communication was mostly one-way, with the carers informing parents about their child's experiences. Family day carers however reported "that they actively sought information from parents when the child commenced care and as a part of their day-to-day communication" (Hand, et al., 2006, p. ix). Carers in both centre care and family day care settings identified time, perceived disinterest of some parents, language difficulties, legislation and accreditation as the commonest impediments to them involving parents.

The challenges to involving parents have led to the notion that parents are hard to reach. Using a grounded theory to investigate home-school relations of families of Bangladeshi and Pakistani heritage in the North-East of England, Crozier and Davies (2007) question the assertion of "hard to reach" parents, rather than the parents not matching up to the values and requirements of the school. They found that "...it is frequently the schools themselves that inhibit accessibility for certain parents" (p. 296). Although Crozier and

Davies (2007) argue that a negotiated model of involvement to create shared meanings and understanding would be difficult, Hughes and MacNaughton (2001) did suggest in an earlier study that professionals need to be more positive and tolerant, willing to listen and learn from family members. Fantuzzo et al. (2004) argued further, that the schools have a responsibility to create an environment that recognises parents as critical partners in the education and development of their children through changed attitudes, policies and practices.

Involving parents occurs in a powerful social context. The environment created by teachers, administrators and other staff is critical in determining the extent to which effective partnerships between families and teachers are formed and parents are empowered. Unfortunately, in most cases, professionals do not value parents' knowledge. For instance, Hughes and MacNaughton (2001) in an exploratory study of 15 early childhood professionals in three childcare centres in Melbourne, acknowledged that parental knowledge, though seen as important, was not given as much weight as the professional knowledge of the carer. ECEC professionals found "substantive" parent involvement especially challenging to their "status as professionals and experts". They conclude that involvement that values parents as experts of their children will need preschools to address the "local politics of knowledge …by giving parents a real voice without directly threatening staff's professional identity and expertise." (Implications section, para. 2)

Negotiating the Preschool Market

School choice has become "a mantra of education policy in different English-speaking democracies" (Campbell, Proctor, & Sherington, 2009, p. 1) making claims for improving equity, efficiency and access. School choice is associated with a neo-liberal agenda of giving citizens more control of their families' futures. This rhetoric includes a preoccupation with (school) choice within which parents are redefined as consumers and education as a product in a 'free' market where quality will be largely regulated by supply and demand.

64

Neo-liberalist education reformers urge governments to adapt market strategies by increasing suppliers and "empowering citizens to shop across this expanded choice set" (Schneider, Teske, Marschall, Mintrom, & Roch, 1997, p. 82). Parents are redefined as consumers, selecting options that meet their preferences with the right to be knowledgeable and informed about their choices supported by governments (Apple, 2001c; Campbell, et al., 2009; Hursh & Henderson, 2011). The argument is that "just as consumers have a right to express their preferences, so should parents in their choices of educational policies and practices" (Lingard et al., 1995, p. 92). One of the main tenets underpinning this market view is that the efficiency of government services are improved by allowing parents as consumers to choose the most appropriate services for their children.

Neo-liberalism emphasises decentralisation, the introduction of market-based competition within, as well as between, public and private institutions, and the construction of markets. Advocates of neo-liberalism believe that introducing new players in the market, in particular private schools and encouraging parents to "vote with their feet" will increase efficiency. It is argued that, as schools compete for parents and dollars, competition will make them more attentive to parents' needs and preferences; those schools who lose students will be challenged to improve their services (Campbell, et al., 2009).

The ideologies of neo-liberalism permeate government policies both for developed and developing countries. In particular, 'free trade' as a neo-liberal policy ideal has been imposed on developing countries through the World Bank and the IMF (Hursh & Henderson, 2011). Hursh and Henderson (2011) continue, that through the model of free trade, neo-liberal policies, open up markets to multinational corporations, reducing government's expenditure on social services, or adapting market approaches. As a result, the role of the government in assuring minimum standards and providing social services including

education has declined "leading to what some have described as the hollowing out of the state" (Hursh & Henderson, 2011, p. 174).

In many developing countries, market approaches with associated reduction of government expenditure on social services have led to governments introducing such measures as cost-sharing (in the form of tuition or user fees), cost-recovery (student loans), and encouraging parents and communities to finance public education (Kitaev, 1999). Market approaches (non-public, non-government or quasi-public) were seen as the only sure way of filling the gap of access, coverage, internal efficiency, curriculum, teaching/learning conditions and quality of education which the governments could not fill (Kitaev, 1999).

Private education therefore, in most developing countries may be seen as being complementary to the public schools rather than competitive. Looking at private education in the sub-Saharan Africa, Kitaev (1999) argues that when public education is inadequate to guarantee equal access and/or good quality, demand-driven private schools of different types fill the gap. Generally in Africa and more specifically in Kenya, there has been an increased development of private schools at all levels; preschool, primary and secondary school, due to an ever rising demand for education. As in any other country that has embraced the neo-liberal policies, choices of educational opportunities have become more stratified, with those able to pay having more options than those unable to because they can pay for a variety of services.

Negative effects of choice and market. Critics argue that such policies in education emphasising privatisation, marketisation, performativity and the 'enterprising individual' have resulted in greater inequalities and stratification in societies (Apple, 2001a, 2001b, 2001c; Campbell, et al., 2009; Hursh, 2005; Hursh & Henderson, 2011; Lingard, 2010; Lynch, 2006). Campbell et al. (2009) argue that school market enforces rules through the use of different strategies. These include: requiring students to fill in application forms,

interviews, and expelling those students who do not fit. Arsen et al. (1999) found that schools adapted different strategies as a response to increased competitive pressure from other schools. Among these included increased marketing to make themselves attractive to parents and students, and increased trends towards social sorting of students, families and communities by targeting specific niche markets. Schools were also selective of low-cost students and excluding high-cost students to reduce their average costs.

Whilst the reforms of neo-liberalism were promoted as a way to ensure opportunity for all, the educational systems in countries embracing neo-liberalism key, among them the USA and the UK, have grown more stratified (Apple, 2001a; Campbell, et al., 2009; Hursh, 2005; Hursh & Henderson, 2011). In the USA, the implementation of standards and standardised testing in states such as Texas and New York has resulted in more students leaving school, among them those students living in poverty and students of colour, and an increasing gap between the wealthier and poorer districts (Havey, 2000 cited by Coles, 2008). In Great Britain, schools compete for the more privileged students who are more likely to raise the schools aggregate test scores, which are usually dispersed in the yearly school 'league tables'. These students require few financial resources than their counterparts affected by poverty, disabilities, or having English as their second language. Schools with most children of colour, economically deprived children, and English-language learners are likely to struggle to keep their more capable students and even to retain their enrolment. Schools that are already advantaged are likely to become more so (Apple, 2001a; Ball, 2003; Hursh, 2005).

An associated problem with competition among schools is that it changes the emphasis from that of a student's needs to students' performances. Monies that would otherwise be used to help the student who is now labelled as having special needs, are used for marketing and public relations (Apple, 2001a, 2001b, 2001c; Campbell, et al., 2009;

Hursh, 2005; Lynch, 2006). A neo-liberalism emphasis on efficiency and performativity introduces and upholds high-stakes testing/standards and assessments. Policy makers justify the implementation of standardised tests as a way of safeguarding quality education for all students. Apple (2001c) argues that there is a strong link between two underlying forces operating in neo-liberal reforms, 'free' markets and increased inspection. In many contexts, marketisation has been linked to a set of particular policies among them external supervision and regulation. Apple (2001a) argues that paradoxically a national curriculum and especially a national testing program are the first and most essential steps toward increased marketisation. Centralised curriculum and testing are used to generate data for comparison and competition in the market.

Among the effects of over emphasis of measurements in the school market cited by many scholars include a narrowing down of the curriculum. Instead of developing the skills required for the person to become a well-rounded educated person, the goal of education becomes that of producing a competitive individual in the market (Hursh, 2005). More often than not what is measurable is emphasised more than what is important. Lingard (2010, p. 15) posits "what is counted is what ultimately counts". Any education that has no market value is demeaned and considered to be inferior (Lynch, 2006).

At the school level, teachers become more preoccupied with improving test scores, and coaching students to be better test takers on the narrowed down curricula (Lingard, 2010). Because of the focus on visible measurable performance, school league tables become part of new policy management and parental school agendas (Lingard, 2010). Such testing, though with some short-term benefits, may be detrimental in the long run and are ultimately counterproductive (Stobart, 2008).

Choice is said to exist more for some than others (Ball, 2003; Campbell, et al., 2009; Hursh, 2005; Hursh & Henderson, 2011). Robertson and Launder (2000 (cited by Hursh,

2005, p. 8) contend that choice may be about "fitting in" and "operates as a social class process with social class consequences". Studies in England (S Ball, 2003; Hursh, 2005; Hursh & Henderson, 2011) and elsewhere like in Australia (Campbell, et al., 2009; Lingard, 2010) have shown that middle class parents have the social and cultural capital to take full advantage of the school market and choice policies.

Social class and school choice. Schools seek parents/consumers who are more skilled, and who possess social, economic and cultural capital for exploiting market mechanisms in education. More often than not, middle class parents "have the knowledge, skills and contacts to decode and manipulate what are increasingly complex and deregulated systems of choice and recruitment. ... The middle class also, on the whole, is more able to move children around the system" (S. Ball, 1994, p. 54). Their possession of informal knowledge and skill (what Bordieu (1984) calls the "habitus") help them to better understand and navigate the language of the market, which they use to their advantage. Apple (2001c) calls this "confidence" which is gained through experience of past choices that "is the unseen capital that underpins their ability to negotiate marketed forms and work the system" through sets of informal cultural rules (Ball et al., 1994 cited by Hursh, 2005, p. 6).

Social capital consists of social networks and connections:- "contacts and group memberships which, through the accumulation of exchanges, obligations and shared identities, provide actual or potential support and access to valued resources" (Bourdieu, 1993 cited by Yan & Lin, 2005, p. 116). Social capital comes from the strength of the relationships between adults and children, parents' access to social networks and information (Coleman, 1997, 1991 cited by Berthelsen & Walker, 2008; J. S. Coleman, 1988; Yan & Lin, 2005). As parents form relationships with teachers, they learn about school policies and practices, and parents also learn from other parents about school expectations. Social capital is also seen in the form of interactions that parents have with their children and through

monitoring their children's progress and engagement in learning (Berthelsen & Walker, 2008). Social capital expands with increasing appropriate exposure.

In contrast, Bourdieu (1977) argued that there are inequalities in the amounts of cultural capital that individuals either hold or can obtain. Schools by their nature tend to represent and construct middle-class values and forms of communication. Families having congruent social and cultural capital therefore tend to be more comfortable with teachers and schools and are therefore more engaged (Lareau, 1987). The reverse situation though is more likely for parents who have a different cultural frame of reference because of socio-economic circumstances or ethnic backgrounds.

Choice of ECEC services. While there is a growing body of research that records the rise and impact of neo-liberal views in education and schooling generally in Australia (Lingard, 2010; Marginson, 1997), the United Kingdom (S Ball, 2003, 2007; S Ball, Vincent, Kemp, & Pietikainen, 2004; Vincent & Martin, 2000) and the USA (Apple, 2001a, 2001b, 2001c; Hursh, 2005; Hursh & Henderson, 2011), there is however less research relating specifically to ECEC (Ashby, Kennedy, & Mellor, 2002; Irvine, 2005; Moss, 2003). Notwithstanding, Irvine (2005) indicates that market policies and choice seem to operate similarly within the sector in Australia. She outlines four transformational policy events during the 1990s as indication of market theory discourse and the emergence of the ECEC quasi-market in Australia. Irvine (2002) contends that each of these events has strengthened the ECEC market in Australia, and the image of parents as consumers of ECEC.

Scholars have also been critical of the rhetoric of school choice policies in the ECEC sector. For instance, Irvine (2005), exploring parents conceptions of their role in early ECEC policy and service development in Australia, argued that parents' choices are circumscribed by their ability to engage with the market. On the same note, Phillips and Adams (2001) point out that ECEC choices are "shaped by constraints and compromises, as much as by

preference" (p. 45). Parents' choice of preschools is multifaceted where resources, values, preferences and available options differ among families, demographics and locations (Duncan, et al., 2004; Vincent & Ball, 2004; Vincent & Martin, 2002). Both systemic factors and individual circumstances work together to potentially limit parents' choices.

Middle Class in Kenya
Like in the rest of Africa, the middle class in Kenya are said to be on the increase especially in the urban centres. Although there are no official data provided, especially by KNBS, different authors allude to the growth and increase of the middle class in Kenya. Barkan (2011) points out that among the factors that are said to have fuelled an increase of the middle class are urbanisation (particularly of Nairobi, considered to be the largest and most cosmopolitan city in East Africa), positive economic growth as well as political reforms. Education, professions, aspirations, lifestyles, and establishment of stable, secure, well-paid jobs and tertiary education, are characteristics important in defining middle class. Income per se is less important than attitudes, although an income of 25,000 to 120,000 Kshs (approximately) is regarded as being appropriate (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics [KNBS], 2001)**.**

The importance of the Kenyan middle class in maintaining political stability is highlighted by wa Githinji and Holmquist (2012, p. 66) who contend that "an emerging professional middle class, some with international experience and a vision of Kenya informed by broader experiences and somewhat less unencumbered by Kenya's historical experience" is an important social vitality that will add to political accountability. However, this is in a country where memories are still fresh of the 2007/2008 post-election violence where different tribes turned against each other, killing and destroying property. This uncertainty is captured by Barkan (2011, p. 4) who posits that despite the positive economic growth and political stability that has been experienced, there is eminent future risk:

Kenya's economic growth, young population and high level of urbanisation also pose a combustible mix that could fuel future violence. Income inequality has risen in recent years, and the country's unemployment constitute a lumpen class whose members are prone to violence or illegal activities, such as running protection rackets and providing muscle for prominent political leaders (p. 4).

The middle class in Kenya, its importance notwithstanding, faces unique problems not experienced by their counterparts in developed countries. Key among these that continues to have far reaching negative impacts to middle class efforts in economic development is a high level of corruption that has been associated with Kenya over the years. Kenya has consistently ranked low in the Corruption Perception Index globally as well as among other African countries (Transparency International, 2011). Mirugi-Mukundi (2006) contends that although Kenya has pursued anti-corruption strategies since the mid-1970s – it has signed and ratified the UN Convention against Corruption (UNCAC); signed but not yet ratified the African Union Convention on preventing and combating corruption; and has developed internal legal processes like the *Anti-Corruption and Economic Crimes Act 2003*, and the Kenya Anti-Corruption Commission 2011, the misconduct continue relentlessly. Mirugi-Mukundi (2006, p. 39) argues that "lack of political goodwill, excessive bureaucracy and over-regulation, lack of protection for whistle blowers, weak enforcement and patronage networks are some of the factors that make corruption networks thrive."

Furthermore, corruption undermines the rule of law. Mirungi-Mukundi (2006, p. 34) notes that marked:

    …interference of the court process by the political elites, parliamentary and executive branches further undermines the due process of the law. In Kenya, courts are overworked and the backlog of cases is precarious… Justice delayed is justice denied

and this state of affairs provides little or no incentive to the citizen to obey and respect the law as it is viewed as oppressive (p. 34).

The interplay between weakened rule of law, socio-economic and political factors has resulted in high crime rates and insecurity whose main targets are the middle class. In the absence of state protection, the middle class must earn enough money to pay for private protection. The affluent and the elite spend large sums of money putting security measures in place including high perimeter walls, barbed wire fences, electric fencing sophisticated alarms, and CCTV (Wairagu, 2007). As a result there is a feeling of being under siege.

The middle class, more particularly those in Kenya, are highly aspirational about education. For them education, is the path to a brighter future (well-paying jobs at home or overseas, further studies opportunities especially overseas, getting away from insecurity and intimidation). Looking at inequalities in Kenya, the Society for International Development (SID) (2004) argues that two factors are critical: education and the type of employment one is in. The same could be said in considering the economic status. Those at higher socio-economic levels have better access to education than those in the lower levels. SID (2004) further posits that employment is for many in Kenya a major source of income and an important dimension of inequality. SID (Society for International Development [SID], 2004) further highlights that employment status in Kenya takes various types: workers (people employed by others); self-employment; non-workers (people who do not work but do not consider themselves retired); disguised employment (the employed who are not working to their full potential); and the openly unemployed (those who are willing and able to work but cannot find any form of employment). A fewer percentage of the poor are employed compared to the rich. Employment is not only important but the type of occupation one is in determines their rates of return. Most of the poor people are employed in agriculture with the rich working in sales, services and in professional and managerial activities. Education is

seen as a sure way of attaining well-paying jobs and the accompanying economic status, power and freedom is critical for the aspirational middle class Kenyans.

Effects of neo-liberalism on the Kenyan educational system. Parental choice of ECEC is further influenced by its political context. Like the rest of the world, Kenya has been affected by neo-liberal policies through globalisation. Coles (2008) argues that by joining the United Nations, World Bank and IMF soon after its independence in 1963, the country opened channels for international trade, yet at the same time began the process of subsumption by neo-liberal globalisation. She explains that:

> Neoliberal globalization is about reorganizing structures in an attempt to secure access to markets and resources by other countries and corporations. ... The supranational organizations have helped solidify this control by ensuring that countries that belong to these organizations obey the rules dictated by Western hegemonic powers (p. 4).

In effect, engagement with these organisations has trading of knowledge and technologies in a global environment. However, this exchange of social and cultural ideas is greatly controlled by the "hegemonic powers and has led many people to demand the consumer culture of the U.S, which creates countries and communities that have become good 'western citizens'" (Coles, 2008, pp. 4–5). Coles (2008) explains further that these supranational organisations have been instrumental in influencing the past and current education system in Kenya, and in a way been used by the government to shape its people. To her, most governments, including Kenya's, use their education system to establish and promote change in their population. For instance, Coles (2008) argues, right from the time of independence, Kenya aligned its goals of education to the global policies of the time.

Kenya is a signatory to most of the world conventions and recognises education as a human right in line with the United Nations declaration and such global ideals as equality, inclusion and social justice. The implementation of the Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPS) enforced by the World Bank and IMF invited the neo-liberal economic reforms into independent countries. In order to receive loans from the two supranational organisations developing countries are forced to open their economic trades and to reduce government spending on social services, key among them education (Coles, 2008; Swadener & Wachira, 2003).

Conclusion

Academic literature was reviewed showing the importance of high quality ECEC services in terms of both short-term and long-term benefits. These benefits were not only to the individual child in terms of improved cognitive, social and physical development, language and communication skills, but also to families and society in terms of economic gains and citizenship.

What constitutes quality in ECEC was analysed from different standpoints, in particular in relation to process (teacher-child relationship, teachers' warmth and sensitivity) and structure (teacher training, qualifications and experience, staff: child ratios, group size). Literature was reviewed showing the importance of partnering with parents as a key component of quality service provision. How parents make ECEC choices was discussed with respect to cost and availability, family demographics, parents' beliefs and values, age of the child and curriculum namely play-based learning.

Despite consensus that such partnerships enhance both the school and the home environment in meeting children's and families' needs, this academic literature review revealed that the discourses of partnership is riddled with rhetoric. Parents remain largely

silent partners in the partnership with their roles being defined by others especially professionals and researchers.

The political and social context of parental ECEC choice was addressed particularly with reference to the ramifications of the neo-liberal agenda that permeates Kenyan education service provision today. It may be expected that in a diverse society such as Kenya, different parents have different aspirations about the ECEC services and are affected differently by the context already highlighted. Little is known about these aspirations, parents' choices and how the prevailing context impact on their experiences. The lack of evidence necessitates the current grounded theory study to explore and give voice to parents, aspirations, choices and experiences of ECEC services.

Chapter Three: Conceptual Framework

Introduction

This qualitative study adopted a constructivist grounded theory approach (Charmaz, 2000, 2006). In this chapter after a general overview, the evolution of grounded theory is presented, looking at the congruence and differing views of its key proponents. Constructivist grounded theory is then explored in detail. Although there is much debate within the different strands of grounded theory as to details, there are however general tenets that apply to all grounded theory research. These are expostulated followed by the specific tenets of a constructivist grounded theory research design. A rationale is developed as to why the constructivist grounded theory was used for the research design of this study. Finally, issues related to being an insider researcher are discussed.

Grounded Theory Overview

Grounded theory is a qualitative, inductive, theory discovery methodology that allows the researcher to develop a theoretical account of the general features of a topic while simultaneously grounding the account in empirical observations or data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). It emphasises the emergent nature of theories from data, instead of theories or hypotheses being applied to the data under study (Denscombe, 2007; Flick, 2006, 2009). Grounded theory relies on systematic inductive processes for collecting and analysing data about issues that are important in people's lives (Glaser, 1978; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1998) in order to shed light on the primary focus is in how participants constantly resolve their main concern (Glaser, 1992, 2001). According to Strauss and Corbin (1990), grounded theory about a phenomenon "is discovered, developed and provisionally verified through systematic data collection and analysis of data pertaining to that phenomenon" (p.23). Therefore in grounded theory, the researcher "generates a general explanation (a theory) of a process, an action, or an interaction shaped by the views of a large number of participants" (Creswell, 2013, p. 83). Charmaz (2006, p. 2):

Grounded theory methods consist of systematic, yet flexible guidelines for collection

and analysing qualitative data to construct theories 'grounded' in the data themselves.

The guidelines offer a set of general principles and heuristic devices rather than

formulaic rules (p. 2).

Charmaz (2006) emphasises flexibility in using grounded theory, viewing it as a "set

of principles and practices, not as prescriptions or packages" (p. 9), which provides a degree

of autonomy to the researcher. Grounded theory as a systematic approach to data collection

and analysis has definite features that make it distinct from other qualitative approaches.

These are visited later in this section.

Evolution of grounded theory. Grounded theory as an approach to doing research

was originally developed in the 1960s by Glaser and Strauss (1967). These two sociologists

were from two very different, but complementary backgrounds (Glaser, 1992). The

methodology emerged when the two were working together on a study of staff's handling of

dying patients in hospitals. Glaser came from a background that emphasised pragmatic

research and theory development. Conversely, Strauss was imbued in qualitative research

methodology from the University of Chicago, which had a tradition of extensive use of field

observations and interview techniques to collect data. Glaser saw the need for making

comparisons between data to identify, develop and relate concepts. Strauss saw the need to

conceive methods of research centred within the context of the research situation (Strauss,

1987).

Continued development and application of grounded theory methods have led to

divergences within the methodology. Glaser and Strauss eventually took seemingly polarised

stances. For Glaser (1992), data becomes transparent and the basic social process under

investigation emerges in the field through respondents telling what is significant. He

expressed strong concerns about forcing data through preconceived questions, categories and hypotheses rather than allowing data to take its own form and categories to emerge through comparisons of data against data. He argued that the aim of grounded theory is to generate theory and not verification. This strand of grounded theory is called emergent grounded theory. Many researchers using grounded theory as originally proposed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) and later Glaser (1978, 1992) refer to it as orthodox grounded theory (Fei & Hardaker, 2010; Prat, 2007) or Glaserian (Cutcliffe, 2005; Denk, Kaufmann, & Carter, 2012; Goulding, 2002; Heath & Cowley, 2004; Matavire & Brown, 2008).

Later, Strauss had a different opinion (Charmaz, 2000). Strauss (1987) and Strauss and Corbin (1990) proposed more analytical and less prescriptive tools (Charmaz, 2000) to improve data gathering. Strauss and Corbin (1990) indicated that at times when collecting data the research may require the researcher to ask questions and follow leads – if not through direct conversations, then through field notes on what to look for. They posited that verification can add to the richness of the data collection. This strand of grounded theory associated to Strauss and Corbin is sometimes referred to as Straussian (Cutcliffe, 2005; Matavire & Brown, 2008) or systematic grounded theory (Creswell, 2007, 2013).

Both these strands are building blocks which constructivist grounded theory straddles. An appreciation of these building blocks aids understanding of how and why constructivist grounded theory was developed.

Emergent grounded theory. There are four key features that differentiate emergent from systematic grounded theory.

Conceptualisation – Glaser (2001) differentiated conceptualisation from conceptual description. Conceptualisation refers to the generation of concepts that are abstract in terms of time, place and people; generating concepts that have "enduring grab" (Glaser, 2001, p.

22). Conversely, *conceptual description* is defined as "the generation of one concept and then saying everything one knows about that concept" (Glaser, 2001, p. 22). Glaser favours conceptualisation for theory generation.

General wonderment – Glaser (1992) argues that a grounded theory researcher, whether in qualitative or quantitative data, moves into a substantive area of interest with no particular problem to investigate. He moves in with the abstract wonderment of what is going on and how it is handled (Glaser, 1992, p. 22). The key issue or process will subsequently emerge and so any resulting theory should have more "fit and grab". This openness allows the researcher to be more responsive to the participants' problem.

Identifying a basic psychosocial process – According to Glaser (1978) there should be two or more clear emergent stages and these should be differentiated and account for variations in the pattern of behaviour. Without such stages, he argues, the researcher is unable to integrate fully the conceptual elements and generate a theory. According to Cutcliffe (2005), researchers should examine and consider: "Do the findings in my study explain the social or psychosocial organization of the people; do they identify and conceptualize the basic processes that these people use to resolve their key problem? Without this, the theory remains underdeveloped. The fit and grab are diminished, and its workability is limited if not thwarted." (p. 426) As Glaser (2001) remarks: "The emergent theory I develop is, in any case, transitory. New dimensions revealed through further comparisons will alter it" (p. 59).

Emerging versus forcing – Glaser (1992) suggests that by remaining open and allowing the theory to emerge the researcher avoids the temptation to force theory. By trusting the data, engaging in further comparison, allowing one's creativity to be engaged, and facilitating the accessing and application of tacit knowledge (Cutcliffe, 2003), the real value and reward of grounded theory is actualised (Cutcliffe, 2005). In the Glaser approach

this means postponing any interaction with the literature until after data collection and analysis. Glaser (1978) identified neutral questions that could be posed to the data. These include: "What is this data a study of?" and "What is actually happening in the data?" He feels the openness - the 'not knowing' - when entering the area of study, enhances credibility of the emerging theory. Allowing the concepts and categories to emerge from data, the researcher actively avoids allegations of imposing their own agenda or 'pet theory' on the data (p. 246). For Glaser (1978), data is organised in two phases of coding – open and substantive coding:

- *Open coding* entails line-by-line coding with an aim of identifying emerging important, or substantive, codes within the data. Open coding consists of labelling, discovering categories and developing categories properties and dimensions which should fit, work and be integrated into a theory. The researcher should code different incidences into as many categories as possible.

- *Substantive coding* involves coding only for the core variable and coding variables that relate to the core variable (Glaser, 1978, 1992). Data is collected until saturation is achieved, that is no more conceptual insights are being generated.

Systematic grounded theory. Strauss over the years moved away from Glaser's position and became more prescriptive (Charmaz, 2000; Creswell, 2013). Systematic design, also known as Straussian (Cutcliffe, 2005), is associated with the detailed, rigorous procedures identified by Strauss and Corbin (1990) and elaborated in their later works (Strauss & Corbin, 1998; Corbin & Strauss, 2008). There is a focus on validation which is not present in Glaser's approach.

Glaser (1992) criticised Strauss and Corbin's (1990) book, *Basics of Qualitative Research*, as forcing theory. He wrote his 1992 book, *The Basics of Grounded Theory: Emerging versus Forcing* in response to Strauss and Corbin (1990). Cutcliffe (2005) posits that the fundamental methodological difference between emerging and forcing was one of the key differences of opinion between Glaser and Strauss, and which led to Glaser describing Straussian as 'Full Conceptual Description'(Cutcliffe, 2005).

Cutcliffe (2005) appreciates the difficulty of entering the field without a research question. He argues: "there are (at least) two situations which currently inhibit this approach: the current modus operandi for obtaining funding for a study and/or registering for a higher degree, and research 'careers' and their relationship to knowledge generation" (p. 424). General wonderment is considered naive.

Systematic grounded theory has three steps of strict and complex coding procedures:

- *Open coding* – where the researcher forms the initial categories of data by segmenting data. At this stage the researcher identifies categories and their subcategories.

- *Axial coding* – is the second level and is described as "the process of relating categories to their subcategories, termed 'axial' because coding occurs around the axis of a category, linking categories at the level of properties and dimensions" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 123). Its aim is to put "the fractured data together in new ways after open coding, by making connection between a category and its subcategories" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 96). The researcher realises these connections by considering three aspects of the phenomenon: the situation in which the phenomenon occurs (causal conditions); how people react in such situations (strategies); and the consequences of the action taken or inaction (consequences) (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Creswell, 2013; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Corbin and

Strauss (2008) refer to axial coding as "crosscutting or relating concepts to each other" (p. 195).

- *Selective coding* – is the third level and involves selectively coding for a core category (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). During the process, the researcher delimits coding to codes that relate to core codes and other categories become subservient to the core category under focus. The process continues until saturation is reached. This level requires that categories be integrated to form a larger theoretical scheme for the research findings to take the form of a theory. Through this integration, the researcher decides on the core category that may evolve from different categories that represent the main theme of the study. The core category must have analytic power, which gives it the "ability to pull other categories together to form an explanatory whole" (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 146). The theory is developed and expressed towards the end of the study in the form of a narrative statement (Strauss & Corbin, 1990), often in the form of a concept map.

Constructivist grounded theory. Glaser claimed that Strauss and Corbin adopted a forced analysis of data through their preconceptions, analytical questions, hypothesis and methodological techniques (Charmaz, 2000) rather than allowing the data to take its own form and categories to emerge through comparison of data against data. He posited that the purpose of grounded theory is theory generation and not theory verification, the thrust of Strauss and Corbin's work. Charmaz (2006), in her analysis of the above two approaches, asserts that perhaps both are right in different ways. She cautions that every qualitative researcher should take heed of Glaser's warnings about forcing data into preconceived categories through the use of artificial questions. Mills, Bonner and Francis (2008)

conceptualise the evolution of grounded theory as a spiral, with different theorists positioning themselves against different points on this spiral reflecting their underlying ontologies.

Charmaz (2006) claims, Glaser and Strauss' (1967) original work was positivist in nature because of their assumptions of an external reality and a lack of acknowledgement of researcher bias or interactivity with data. Glaser's (1978, 1992) stand on positivism is reflected in his insistence on postponing literature review before and during the process of data analysis, maintaining that one can easily corrupt analysis by importing concepts and forcing meaning on to the data. Strauss and Corbin (1990, 1998) neglect to acknowledge the relationship between the research and the researched in the construction of reality. In other words, that processes and problems will reveal themselves instead of them being defined by either the participants or the researcher. Theoretical categories are also assumed to emerge on their own as the researcher remains passive (Charmaz, 1990). However, Charmaz (2000) acknowledges Strauss and Corbin's movements in position in their book (Strauss & Corbin, 1998), which shows an active researcher constructing categories and concepts.

Charmaz (2000) contends that grounded theory must offer a set of flexible strategies and not rigid prescriptions. She favours a form of grounded theory that has evolved from positivism to constructivism (Mills, Bonner, & Francis, 2006; Moghaddam, 2006; Seaman, 2008). Positivism assumes an objective reality that can be discovered by an objective observer, while constructivism considers reality to be co-created within social interactions. Constructivist grounded theory focuses on interpretative understanding and situated knowledge in its historical, social and situational context (Heath & Cowley, 2004).

Thus, Charmaz (2000, 2006) proposes a constructivist approach to grounded theory that recognises the interactive nature of both data collection and analysis, and repudiates positivism. She claims that a constructivist grounded theory approach assumes that people

create and maintain meaningful worlds through social interactions. Constructivist grounded theory emphasises the study of experiences from the standpoint of those who live it. In constructivist grounded theory, Charmaz (2000) contends "[d]ata do not provide a window on reality. Rather, the discovered reality arises from the interactive process and its temporal, cultural, and structural contexts" (p. 24). Although Charmaz (2006) provides ways of gathering rich data, she is more interested with "the views, values, beliefs feelings, assumptions, and ideologies of individuals than on the methods of research" (Creswell, 2013, p. 87).

Charmaz (2006) contends that complex terms or jargons, diagrams, conceptual maps and systematic approaches as those proposed by Strauss and Corbin (1990) and Corbin and Strauss (2008), are distractions from grounded theory and an attempt to gain power through their use. Instead, she proposes the use of active codes. Seaman (2008) posits that Charmaz's move "repositions grounded theory as a flexible approach and not a strict methodology" (p. 3). Similarly, Mills et al. (2006, p. 4) argue that constructivist grounded theory is "more reflective of the context in which participants are situated … [It] includes relating participants' stories to the worlds in which the participants live" (p. 4). With the move towards constructivism, Charmaz (2006, p. 511) concludes that grounded theory methods can now support "varied fundamental assumptions, data gathering approaches, analytic emphasis and theoretical levels" (p. 511).

Constructivist grounded theory acknowledges that pre-existing theories and professional knowledge inform our research, while our backgrounds and experiences provide the mental capacity to respond to and receive the messages contained in the data (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). This approach should acknowledge multiple human realities, the researcher's role in the creation of 'data' and the researcher's inherent impact on emergent coding and writing through their interpretations of data shapes (Charmaz, 2000). The researcher therefore

proposes "suggestive, incomplete and indeterminate" theory that is "open to refinement" (Charmaz, 2000, p. 524). Conversely, the positivist approaches by the original authors of grounded theory argue for "provisionally true, testable, and ultimately verifiable 'theory' and prediction" (Charmaz, 2000, p. 524).

Charmaz and Bryant (2010) summarise constructivist grounded theory as an approach that adopts grounded theory strategies without the positivist epistemological underpinnings of the original statement. Instead, constructivist grounded theory:

- is founded on a relativist epistemology,

- views the method as interactive as well as comparative and inductive,

- takes into account the multiple and shifting standpoints of the researcher and the researched,

- builds on the method's pragmatist heritage, and

- emphasises reflexivity. (p. 406)

Constructivist grounded theory has two levels of coding:

Initial coding which moves the researcher toward later decisions in defining core categories. Through line by line coding, researchers look for processes in the data. Words are used as codes to describe people's actions and what is happening in the settings. By using gerunds in coding, short codes, precise and analytic, researchers are able to stick to the data and detect relationships between codes and see the larger processes as they unfold.

Focused coding entails using the most frequent and/or significant initial codes to sort and synthesise data. In other words, data is examined further through selected codes thereby verifying those codes (Heath & Cowley, 2004). It "requires decisions about which initial codes make the most analytic sense to categorise your data incisively and completely" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 57) . During this stage constant comparison is especially important

because it helps in the creation of categories that are analytical in nature and in theory development.

Critical challenges to grounded theory. Despite its wide use in different fields such as nursing, psychology, sociology, management and education, grounded theory approaches have been criticised both internally by its founders as well as externally. Internal criticism has been presented above showing the differences in the three main strands of grounded theory. Pratt (2012) argues that Charmaz and Bryant (2010) acknowledge that the very term grounded theory creates confusion. It refers to the result of a research process, that is a theory grounded in its context, but also to the method used to do research – the latter being the more commonplace sense in which the term is widely used. Within methodology there are differences on how to enter the field of study, whether to or not to review literature and how to collect and code data. These differences are particularly problematic to novice researchers who may not have a clear research aim or plan of action.

Charmaz (2000) points out that prospects of completing a grounded theory analysis have been said to be alienating and turned to literary forms and that qualitative research reports are not as straightforward as their authors represent them to be. These critics challenge the way participants' experiences are interpreted, represented and voiced by the researcher using grounded theory.

Pratt (2012) takes issue with the position of grounded theory whose main aim is not to verify but to generate theory. Although, "not on the grounds that it is logically impossible to achieve this, but because the method is not intended to go so far" (p. 6). He poses "Yet of what value is it then?" (p. 6) According to Pratt (2012), in its current form, all the methods of grounded theory offer are procedures for inventing ideas – generating theory that is related to some topic currently under observation. What makes theory of value is not the method used

to generate it, but a subsequent stage, rejected by nearly all the advocates of grounded theory, of testing these theories. To him what is most important is not grounded theory but a tested theory (p. 7). Proponents of systematic grounded theory argue, however, that verification is achieved throughout the research process through constant comparison until saturation is attained.

Kinnunen and Simon (2012) summarise the challenges of grounded theory as: there is no one standardised way of doing data analysis ''the right way'' (p. 214). There are several challenges such as:

- Choosing/developing the approach that suits the research question.

- The researcher enduring uncertainty during the data analysis.

- The researcher being conscious or unconscious of his/her preconceptions throughout the research process.

- Data analysis taking a long time.

- Adequate reporting of data analysis takes space that may not be available in a given journal's page limits. (Kinnunen & Simon, 2012, p. 214)

Strengths of grounded theory. The converse however is that the many approaches of grounded theory can all produce what can be construed as valid results.

Despite its criticism, grounded theory continues to be used in different fields. According to Bryant and Charmaz (2010), grounded theory "… is currently the most widely used and popular qualitative research method across a wide range of disciplines and subject areas" (p. 1). They further argue that its extensive use in 'specific practice professions' has led to significant advances in those fields and that it is clearly a "good thing" (Bryant & Charmaz, 2010, p. 1). Charmaz (2006) had earlier argued that by developing grounded

theory, Glaser and Strauss (1967) were providing "a persuasive intellectual rationale for conducting qualitative research that permitted and encouraged novices to pursue it" (p. 253). They provided systematic ways of analysing data with clear and specific procedures and research strategies.

The richness of grounded theory method has been associated with its founders' different backgrounds. This background makes the method appropriate to the study of "any behaviour that has an interactional element to it" (Goulding, 2005, p. 296). Particularly for education, Heath and Cowley (2004) argue that grounded theory provides researchers with an approach that complements different forms of qualitative data collection that will advance their work. They especially single out constructivist grounded theory, which they claim is more flexible and widely adoptable than the earlier versions.

General Tenets of Grounded Theory
Despite the divergence and diversification attributed to the different backgrounds of the founders of grounded theory (Moghaddam, 2006) and to methodological concerns (Heath & Cowley, 2004), the co-founders and subsequent proponents of grounded theory tend to agree on the main elements of the methodology despite their differing views on how to carry them out. These main elements include: identifying an area of study; theoretical sampling to guide data collection; theoretical sensitivity (which entails postponing one's ideas until they emerge from the data); capture of data detail through the development of codes and categories including the coding process; memoing; constant comparisons to relate categories throughout the process of data collection and on-going analysis; and theory development to better understand the area of study (Heath & Cowley, 2004). In the final part of this section, the integrated nature of the research process is discussed.

Identifying an area of study. All theorists agree that the area of research undertaken should be substantive and meaningful. Beyond this there is no consensus. Whether to do or

not to do a literature review is contested between the original and the more recent grounded theorists (Mills, et al., 2008).

For fear of forcing data or filtering what is observed in the field through preconceived ideas, Glaser (1992, p. 31) argues that "there is a need not to review any of the literature in the substantive area under study" (p. 31). Mills and others (2006) consider Glaser's (1998) position to be equivocal especially in his later writings, sometimes leaning more towards that of Strauss and Corbin (1998), who argue for the importance of literature in raising one's sensitivity to what is happening in the field. Strauss and Corbin (1998, p. 45) consider integrating literature as another voice in the process of theory development, which adds to the researchers' theoretical reconstruction. They point out that literature is able to provide examples of similar phenomena that can "stimulate our thinking about properties and dimensions that we can then use to examine the data…." (p. 45) and that the 'nontechnical' literature, such as reports and internal correspondence, can help in understanding the context where participants' experiences are enacted.

Purposive/theoretical sampling. One of the appeals of grounded theory in that "it allows for a wide range of data, the most common of which are in-depth interviews, observations, and memos, which describe situations, record events, note feelings and keep track of ideas" (Goulding, 2005, p. 297). Purposive and theoretical sampling entail purposively selecting those participants with the ability to develop the emerging themes (Charmaz, 2000, 2006; Glaser, 1978).

Barbour (2001) considers purposive and theoretical sampling as synonymous – selecting participants who have the highest potential to provide the needed information. Although Jeon (2004) appreciates that the two terms have been used interchangeably, he contends that they are two subtly different but important processes. Purposive sampling

focuses the researcher on one or more specifically defined groups that she/he seeks to investigate (Silverman, 2010). These groups possess the most information on the issue under study (Barbour, 2001; Guarte & Barrios, 2006). The understanding and experience of the researcher helps define the basis for selection (Guarte & Barrios, 2006).

Theoretical sampling is a process of subsequently specifically selecting individuals who can contribute to the building of emerging codes and categories to guide further data gathering (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). According to O'Reilly and Marx (2012), it is a means to gather data in a consistent way on the basis of earlier data and researcher's critical thinking. It is guided by the emerging categories and hypothesis, grounding the developing theory in data gathered by the researcher. It guides key components of the research process, namely the interview questions, follow-up interviews, and consultation with experts in the study. Thus, the theoretical sampling component is central in a constant comparative method of data collection and analysis. Its focus is on increasing explanatory power and our understanding of the phenomenon (O'Reilly & Parker, 2012)

Theoretical sampling is used to "elaborate the meaning of categories, discover variation within them, and define gaps among categories and how to fill them" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 107). Gaps mean that the present categories do not account for all experiences (Charmaz, 2006) and they need to be addressed. What can be meaningfully theoretically sampled is diverse; it could "involve studying documents, conducting observations, or participating in new social world as well as interviewing or re-interviewing with a focus on theoretical categories" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 107).

Theoretical sensitivity. Theoretical sensitivity is a term that refers to having an insight, being tuned to or being able to pick up on relevant issues, events and happenings displayed in the data. This means being able to present the views of the participants and

taking the role of the 'other' through immersion in data (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Glaser, 1978; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). According to O'Reilly and Parker (2012), theoretical sensitivity of a researcher is demonstrated by a deep theoretical understanding of the field and through active professional experience.

For Glaser and Holton (2004) theoretical sensitivity involves the researcher entering the area of study with minimal predetermined ideas or prior hypotheses. In adopting this posture, the researcher remains sensitive to the data by being able to record events and detect happenings without pre-existing biases. Two characteristics are important: the researcher's consciousness of their obligation to maintain analytic distance, tolerate emerging multiple perspectives of the participants, and maintaining openness; and the researcher developing theoretical insights into the area of study and having the ability to interpret these insights (Glaser, 2004).

Charmaz (2006) defines reflexivity as "the researchers scrutiny of his or her research experience, decisions, and interpretations in ways that bring the researcher into the process and allow the reader to assess how and to what extent the researchers interests, positions, and assumptions influenced inquiry" (p. 188). Reflexivity therefore involves critical self-scrutiny by the researcher on who they are and how this influences how he/she conducts research, relates to the participants and how he/she represents participants voices.

All agree that the researcher should remain close to the data, being aware that his/her pre-existing knowledge and experiences influence the way he/she looks at the data. The more the researcher is aware of the subjectivity involved in data analysis, the more likely one is able to see how he/she is influencing interpretations.

Coding data. Glaser (1992) defines coding as "conceptualizing data by constant comparison of incident with incident, and incident with concept" (p. 38). Coding is the

critical link between data collection and developing an emergent theory to explain these data. It is through coding that the researcher defines the events of the data and begins to grapple with their meaning (Charmaz, 2000, 2006). According to Charmaz (2006) coding means attaching "labels to segments of data that depict what each segment is about. Coding distils data, sorts them, and gives us a handle for making comparisons with other segments of data" (p. 3).

Glaser and Holton (2004) intimate that as a general rule in coding, the researcher poses questions to the data. For them the most general question is: "What is this a study of?" Other essential questions include: "What category does this incident indicate?" "What is actually happening in the data?" and "What is the main concern being faced by the participants?" (p. 9). These questions provoke researchers to be theoretically sensitive and to be intensive in the process of collecting and coding data.

Memoing. Memo writing is considered a critical, transitional step between data collection and writing. Memo writing is a continuous process that begins when first coding data and continues to the very end, through reading memos or literature, sorting, analysing and writing (Glaser, 1978). This writing captures one's thoughts, reveals questions and guides data collection and analysis, making comparisons and links between elements of the data and theorising the area of study (Charmaz, 2006; Glaser, 1978, 1992). Charmaz (2006) explains that "when you write memos, you stop and analyse your ideas about the codes in any – and every – way that occurs to you during the moment" (p.72). Memos can be of in any language, formal or informal and can range in length from a sentence, a paragraph, or through to a couple of pages.

Charmaz (2006) differentiates between early and advanced memos. She posits that systematic memoing can help raise focused codes to abstract categories by helping the

researcher to define categories, explicate their properties, specify conditions, describe consequences and reveal relationships within the data.

Constant comparative method and on-going analysis. This involves comparing and contrasting data first with itself, then with evolving original data, and finally against extant theoretical and conceptual claims, to facilitate the emergence of knowledge (Boychuk & Morgan, 2004; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Heath & Cowley, 2004; Walker & Myrick, 2006). This means that collecting and analysing data in grounded theory is not linear but both are simultaneous. Creswell (2013, p. 86) describes it as a "'zigzag' process: out to the field to gather information, into the office to analyse the data, back to the field to gather more information, into the office, and so forth" (p. 86). Pratt (2012, p. 2) explains that this "iterative and constantly back-and-forth process" continues until 'theoretical saturation' of categories is achieved, so that sample size is determined by this rather than by demographic representativeness" (p. 2).

Constant comparative analysis, according to Glaser and Strauss (1967, p. 1), "provides us with relevant predictions, explanations, interpretations and applications" (p. 1). Creswell (2013) describes constant comparison as the process of taking information from data collection and comparing it to emerging categories. Constant comparative analysis continues throughout the research process, and like theoretical sampling, concludes "when your data is 'saturated'. Categories are saturated "when gathering fresh data no longer sparks new theoretical insights" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 113). She provides a summary of what constant comparison involves:

Generating codes facilitated making comparisons, a major technique in grounded theory. The constant comparative method of grounded theory means (a) comparing different people (such as their views, situations, actions, accounts, and experiences),

(b) comparing data from the same individuals with themselves at different points in time, (c) comparing incident with incident, (d) comparing data with category, and (e) comparing a category with other categories (Charmaz, 2006, p. 259).

Theoretical saturation. To Charmaz (2006), saturation is the point at which no more new information is generated from sampling of more participants. According to Goulding (2002), successful, robust theory generation is dependent on completeness of data categories, or "category saturation". Category saturation occurs when "subsequent data incidents that are examined provide no new information, either in terms of refining the category or of its properties, or of its relationship to other categories". (Locke, 2001, p. 53)

According to Strauss and Corbin (1998), category saturation is important to verification in grounded theory. Goulding (2002) explicates this:

Grounded theory has a built in mandate to strive towards verification through the process of category saturation. This involves staying in the field until no further evidence emerges. Verification is done throughout the course of the research project, rather than assuming that verification is only possible through follow-up quantitative data (p. 44).

In other words, theoretical saturation means that categories are well accounted for, the variability between them are explained and the relationship between them are tested and validated and thus a theory can emerge (Green & Thorogood, 2004). O'Reilley and Parker (2012) argue that this view of theoretical saturation is in line with the underpinning epistemological position and goals of grounded theory, which are to develop an explanatory theory of the social processes that are studied in the environments in which they have taken place (Glaser and Strauss, 1967).

Theory development/emergence. Grounded theory's main intent is to develop a substantive theory about a phenomenon (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Glaser and Strauss (1967) define theory development as the construction of core category. The core category pulls together all the concepts in order to offer an explanation of the phenomenon under study. According to Strauss and Corbin (1990, 1998), theory develops through open coding to building of core category to describing the nature of the phenomenon being explored. In theory development, theoretical categories are eventually subsumed into a core category that "pulls together all the strands in order to offer an explanation of the behaviour under study" (Goulding, 2002, p. 88). Glaser and Strauss (1967) believe that the theory emerges through the gradual abstraction of data as stated: "Clearly, a grounded theory that is faithful to the everyday realities of the substantive area is one that has been carefully induce from data. Strauss and Corbin (1990) use axial coding and a conditional matrix or conditional/consequential matrix (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). These matrices are systematised visual representations of the conditions influencing the central phenomenon, thereby allowing theoretical sensitivity in showing the interrelation of conditions, action/interaction and consequences.

Charmaz (2000, p. 515) states that "coding starts the chain of theory development" (p. 515). Grounded theory is generated through creating theoretical categories from data and then analysing the relationships between them. The theory construction involves both the participants as well as the researcher and therefore the theory that emerges is usually "suggestive, incomplete and indeterminate" (Charmaz, 2000, p. 524) rather than theories that can claim objective status (Hildenbrand, 2010, p. 557). Constructivist grounded theory calls for "an obdurate, yet ever-changing world but recognises diverse local worlds and multiple realities, and addresses how people's actions affect their local and larger social worlds" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 132)

Integrated Research Process

Despite the different positions of grounded theory as presented above, the general tenets of

the method including: openness in entering the field of study, theoretical sampling,

theoretical sensitivity, constant comparison and on-going analysis, coding, memoing and

theoretical saturation, provides an integrated process of doing research. Glaser (1992, p. 21)

asserts:

> The underlying principle of grounded theory which leads to a researchable problem
>
> with high yield and relevance is that the research problem and its delimitation are
>
> discovered or emergent as the open coding begins on the first interviews and
>
> observations. They soon become quite clear and structured as coding, collection and
>
> analyzing begin and core variables emerge and saturation starts to occur. …getting
>
> started in grounded research and analyzing is as much a part of the methodological
>
> process as are the ensuing phases of the research (p. 21).

O'Reilly and Marx (2012, p. 248) argues that although grounded theory is comprised

of different analytical tenets, "it is the collective iterative cycling of these tenets that creates a

holistic methodology for theory building" (p. 248).

Evaluating Grounded Theory

The three main proponents of grounded theory suggest different, though related, criteria for

evaluating grounded theory to establish credibility and trustworthiness of the study. Glaser

(1978) suggests fit, work, relevance and modifiability, while Strauss and Corbin (1990)

propose fit, understanding, generality and control. Charmaz (2006, pp. 182-183) whose

approach has been used for this study suggests four criteria: credibility, originality, resonance

and usefulness. She attributes specific questions to each of the criteria as shown in Table 3.1

Specific Tenets of Constructivist Grounded Theory Research Design
The main tenets of constructivist grounded theory are that it:

- aims at gaining a deep understanding of views, values, beliefs, feelings, assumptions

  and ideologies of individuals by collecting rich data. Gathering rich data is considered

  to be the first step in making the generated theory credible.

- emphasises multiple realities and complexities of particular worlds, views, and

  actions.

- has flexible guidelines.

- depends on the interactions between the researcher and the participants, with

  researcher's past knowledge and experiences being important in data collection,

  analysis and interpretation.

- engages the researcher in self-reflection throughout the study. (Creswell, 2013)

Table 3.1 Criteria for evaluating grounded theory research (Charmaz 2006).

Criteria	Questions
Credibility	- Have you reached intimate familiarity with the setting or topic? - Do your data sufficiently support your claims? - Have you made systematic comparisons between categories? - Is there a strong logical argument linking data, argument and analysis?
Originality	- Are your categories fresh? - Do you offer new insights - What is the social and theoretical significance of your work? - How does it challenge current ideals and concepts?
Resonance	- Do the categories portray the fullness of the studied experience? - Do the findings make sense to those people central to the phenomenon? - Do the findings offer those people deeper insights about their lives and worlds?
Usefulness	- How can your analysis be applied in everyday settings? - Does it suggest any generic processes? - Can the analysis spark further research? - How does it contribute to knowledge?

Rationale for Using Constructivist Grounded Theory in this Study

Understanding parents' views of what they value for their children in the early years requires generation of rich data and an approach that recognises multiplicity of such views. Constructivist grounded theory provides the means to an understanding the field, with an appreciation of the complexity of the phenomenon being studied, interacting with the data and eventually developing a basis for change (Charmaz, 2006; Moghaddam, 2006; Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

A constructivist grounded theory approach allows for an understanding of the dynamics of parents' interactions with ECEC services as well as the processes involved in choice. Lee and Walsh (2004) argue that valid and meaningful evaluation of quality in early childhood programmes should be based on in-depth understanding of dynamic processes and diverse stakeholders' perspectives on programme quality. Such evaluation, they argue, should challenge and expand dominant perspectives on early childhood programmes' quality, which at the moment appear to be exclusively those of professionals and researchers. The later works of Strauss (1987) and Strauss and Corbin (1990, 1998) underscore the importance of "a multiplicity of perspectives...". Such an approach produces a richer theory that mirrors participants' contexts.

The research design underpinning the work of this thesis is informed by a constructivist grounded theory framework proposed by Charmaz (2000, 2003a, 2003b, 2006). In line with constructivist grounded theory, the study "assumes the relativism of multiple social realities, recognizes the mutual creation of knowledge by the viewer and the viewed, and aims toward interpretive understanding of subjects' meaning" (Charmaz, 2000, p. 510). Therefore, the explanations provided in this study are necessarily "suggestive, incomplete and indeterminate" (Charmaz, 2000, p. 524).

From this perspective, professional, tertiary educated parents' different perceptions are sought, both of what they want for their children attending private-for-profit ECEC services in urban Nairobi and of their experiences. This is with a view to understanding the social dynamics of the context in which they are constructed (Flick, 2006, 2009). This study seeks to gain a holistic understanding of the subjectivity and relativity in the values that such expectations constitute (Dahlberg, Moss, & Pence, 1999; Pence & Goelman, 1987; Pence & Moss, 1994).

Researcher as a Co-constructor of Meaning
The constructivist approach to grounded theory emphasises the role of the researcher in the creation of the categories, concepts and theoretical framework for theory development (Charmaz, 2006). Strauss and Corbin (1998) acknowledge the interplay between the researcher and the actors studied. Charmaz (2000, 2006) challenges the positivist hegemony that conventional knowledge is based upon objective, uncritical observation of the world. The story that the researcher tells is co-constructed by both the researcher and the participant.

According to Mills et al. (2006, 2008), in seeking to attain a deeper meaning of the data, constructivist grounded theory assumes that data are produced through the interaction between the researcher and the participants. Therefore the researcher is a co-producer of meaning (Charmaz, 2000, 2006). Instead of the traditional hierarchical relationship with participants, or the notion of an objective researcher observing an objective reality (B Glaser & Strauss, 1967) the researcher in constructivist grounded theory places her/himself at an equal position by being more reflexive and proactively planning for time together with the participants (Colbourne & Sque, 2004; Mills, et al., 2006).

All qualitative research is reflexive in nature (Cutcliffe, 2003). Reay (1996, pp. 262-263) defines reflexivity as "critically examining one's effect as a researcher on the research process" (pp. 262–263). Grounded theory literature emphasises the need for reflexivity to

ensure that "taken for granted'" and "underlying assumptions'" are questioned (Leonard & McAdam, 2001, p. 184). Reflexivity therefore involves critical self-scrutiny by the researcher on who they are and how this influences how they conduct research, relates to the participants and represent participants' voices.

Grounded theorists acknowledge that researchers bring with them underlying assumptions about knowledge in general and more specifically their area of study (Charmaz, 2006; Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Glaser, 1978; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Mills, et al., 2006; Strauss, 1987; Strauss & Corbin, 1990, 1998). These assumptions, backgrounds and experiences influence the researcher's interpretations (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). As the researcher engages in an interpretive work, unravelling the multiple voices and the complex realities of the participants, he/she is faced with a challenge of ridding him/herself of preconceptions to allow such realities to emerge from data during analysis.

By engaging in reflexivity, the researcher enhances the trustworthiness, credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Anderson & Arsenault, 1998) of the findings by being open about his/her values, beliefs, knowledge and biases (Cutcliffe, 2003). Cutcliffe (2003) and Hall and Callery (2001) argue that reflexivity and rationality must be considered to improve the rigour in grounded theory.

Although reflexivity is key in qualitative research in general, and more specifically in grounded theory, it is contested whether it is possible or even necessary. Cutcliffe (2003, p. 144) posits that we can only know the self in part. Although he acknowledges the different methods that have been used in ensuring trustworthiness and credibility of the findings, such as keeping reflexive journals, self-disclosure, triangulation, and use of multiple researchers, he argues that these methods can only "be regarded as "incomplete" or "partial" processes. Achieving complete knowledge of self is unrealistic and, possibly, unattainable" (p. 144). He

supports Glaser (1998, p. 143), who argues for "hard intellectual work and allowing one's tacit knowledge, creativity, and intuition to interact with the data" (p. 143). Cutcliffe (2003, p. 114) maintains that "even the most complete and far-reaching reflexive account would not be able to account for the magic, for my creativity, for my tacit knowledge, and for the effect all of these have on the data analysis or for the full effect of the research on me" (p. 114).

Chapter Summary
In this chapter I have provided an overview of the grounded theory approach. Through it, I have looked at the evolvement of grounded theory from its founders highlighting the main tenets. Despite the disagreements on how to carry out research, the main proponents of grounded theory agree on the main tenets, namely selection of the study, theoretical sampling; simultaneous data collection and analysis through coding and constant comparison; and the development of a substantive theory explaining the phenomenon.

The discussion provides a framework for the methodological decisions made in the research, particularly in relation to the research framework, data collection strategies, instruments and data coding framework, potential researcher bias in this study and guidelines for evaluating the quality of this research thesis.

The next chapter of this thesis presents the methodological approaches used to collect and analyse data based on the constructivist grounded theory conceptual framework presented in this chapter.

Chapter 4 Methodology

Introduction

Using constructivist grounded theory, this study explores the experiences of tertiary educated

parents living in urban Nairobi in relation to their sending their children to private-for-profit

ECEC services. The following research questions guided this study (see Chapter 1):

- What are the parents' aspirations for their children within private-for-profit ECEC

  services?

- What are the parents' experiences in finding and choosing private-for-profit ECEC

  services that meet their aspirations for their children?

- How are parents' aspirations and their choices impacted on by the prevailing practices

  of the system of education and social discourses?

The Research Design Map

This qualitative research study adopted constructivist grounded theory (for rationale, see

Chapter 3). The research design and implementation used in this study are shown in Figure

4.1. This map is provided as a guide for this chapter. Within the context of the research site

(urban Nairobi); the research design entailed four interrelated phases: identifying the

substantive area for investigation; gathering data; data analysis; and synthesising the data.

The section on data gathering is subdivided into reflections on my entry to the field,

purposive and theoretical sampling, study sample size, parent participants, interviewing

format, tape recording of interviews, note taking and transcribing interviews. The section on

data analysis is subdivided into memo writing, coding introduction, using QSR Nvivo

computer software, open coding and focused coding. The chapter finishes with a discussion

on ethical issues.

Figure 4.1: Research Design
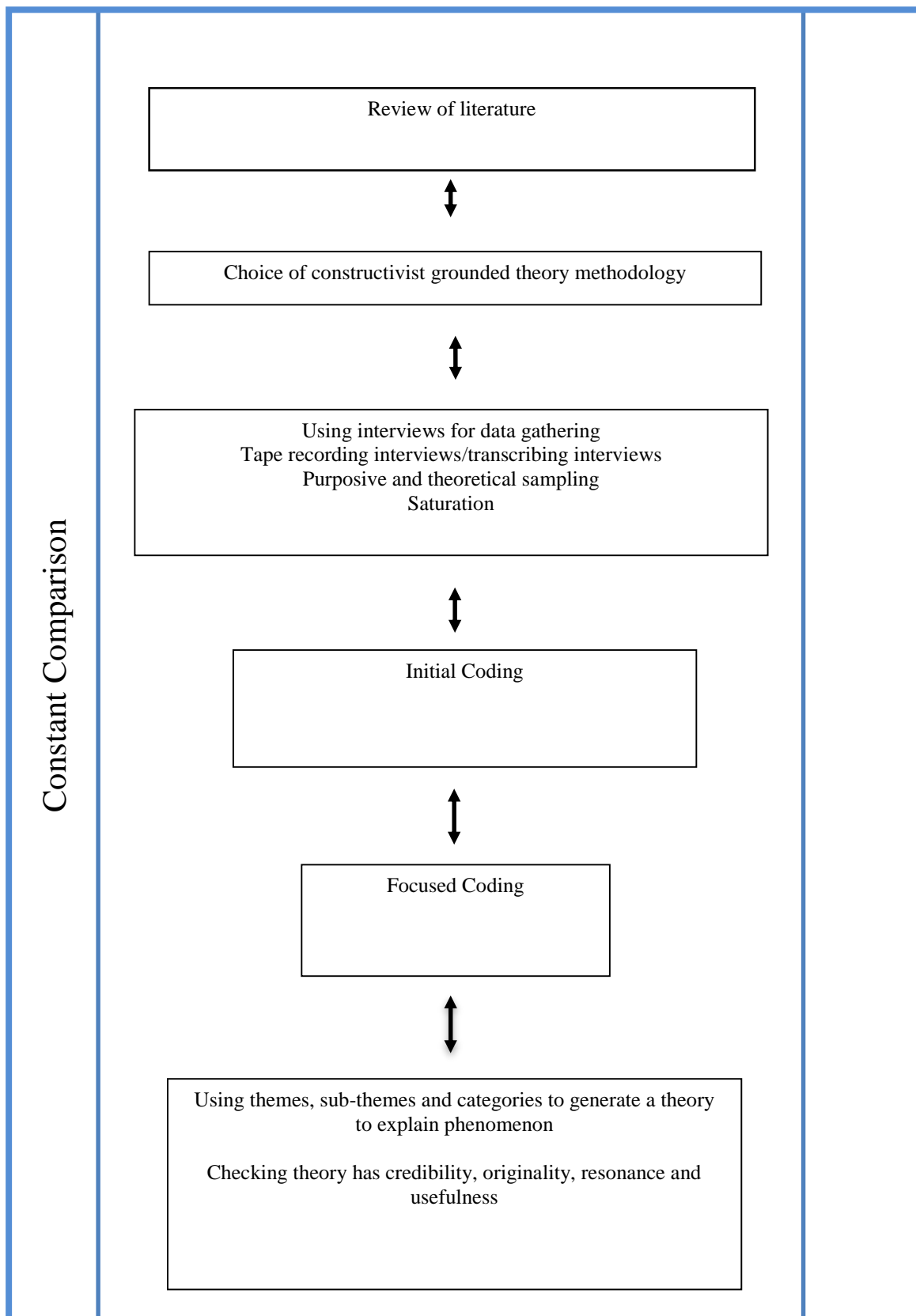
Although the different steps in the research design, as shown in Figure 4.1, might seem to indicate a linear process this was not in fact so. The double ended arrows connecting different steps in the phases are indicative of the interrelatedness of the phases and steps involved in the whole research process. The arrows also indicate movements back and forth between data, as data were constantly compared to build the emerging codes, categories and themes.

A "grounded theory approach is not linear but concurrent, iterative and integrative, with data collection, analysis and conceptual theorizing occurring in parallel and from the outset of the research process" (McGhee, Marland, & Atkinson, 2007, p. 335).

Constant comparison and memo writing overlapped in the two phases of data gathering and analyses. Constant comparison was aimed at ensuring that the emergent theory is a rich theoretical explanation of the social phenomenon under investigation (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Research site. The site of this research study was urban Nairobi, the capital city of Kenya. In particular, it focused on parents who are tertiary educated with children who are either in or have recently been in private-for-profit ECEC services. Compared with the rest of the country, there are a significant number of tertiary educated people living in urban Nairobi (see Chapter 1). It was therefore felt that the site provided maximum opportunity to recruit tertiary educated parents with different views and experiences with ECEC service provision to help explore the phenomenon under study.

Identifying a substantive area for research. In grounded theory, the researcher begins by identifying a substantive area for research (Glaser, 1992; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Ideally, according to Glaser (1992), the researcher should immediately move into the field, allowing the research problem and questions to emerge and become clearer as one starts to

collect data (Glaser, 1992). The research design for this study, however, was aligned more closely with the position of Charmaz (2000, 2006) who considers data as a construction between the researcher and the participants. In any case, to comply with James Cook University requirements, the research problem and questions were developed before proceeding to the field. In my case, entry into the field (through my being an educator and a parent of preschool age children) preceded even the intention to become a researcher within it.

An intensive literature review refined the focus of the study (see Chapter 2). It also informed the choice of constructivist grounded theory as an appropriate research design (see Chapter 3). The literature review was helpful in identifying gaps in what has and has not been researched in this area of study (McGhee, et al., 2007). The review of literature raised awareness that although the discourses of partnership are riddled with the rhetoric of involving parents at policy and service levels in the provision of ECEC services, there is not so much involvement in practice. This is despite consensus that partnership enhances both the school and the home environment in meeting children's and families' needs. The political and social context of parental ECEC choice was addressed particularly with reference to the ramifications of the neo-liberal agenda that permeates Kenyan education service provision today. It may be expected that in a diverse society such as Kenya, different parents have different aspirations about the ECEC services and are affected differently by the context already highlighted. Little is known about these aspirations, parents' choices and how the prevailing context impacts on their experiences. The lack of evidence necessitates the current grounded theory study to explore and give voice to parents' aspirations, choices and experiences of ECEC services.

The identified knowledge gap situates the current study as building on what has already been done on high quality ECEC globally and more specifically in Kenya where

education service provision is currently permeated with a neo-liberal agenda. Aware of the tensions and problems of the literature review within grounded theory methodology, I approached the field without a rigid set of ideas.

In line with grounded theory logic, the literature review prior to undertaking the field research was intensive but not exhaustive. The main task was to be at all times open to parents' experiences. Consultation, constant comparison, close and repeated checking of data for emerging themes and issues during data collection and the use of open-ended semi-structured interviews was intended to ensure that the research study was guided by what was emerging from the field, rather than from preconceived ideas from the literature review. The option remained open for a supplementary literature review post-analysis if required.

Data gathering. In this section I begin with reflections on my entry to the field congruent with my being an insider researcher (see Chapter 3). There then follows a description of the data gathering phase, informed by the tenets of the constructivist grounded theory research design (see Chapter 3). Purposive and theoretical sampling was used to select parents to be included in this study. Selection was made on the basis of parents' potential to contribute to the emerging categories. Gathering of data involved semi-structured in-depth interviews and note taking. All interviews were recorded and transcribed.

Reflections on my entry to the field. As an insider researcher, it was important to make connections with parents' experiences in my writing – so that it "demonstrates the value [I] place on the [parent] as contributors to the reconstruction of the final grounded theory model" (Mills, et al., 2006, p. 12) – but at the same time recognises that my experiences, training and education may shape the way I gather, view, understand or interpret the data. The task of being able to represent participants' voices is both inviting and daunting.

I had a long standing personal interest in the study stemming from my being a parent and early childhood educator from Nairobi. My personal, as well as professional, experiences and knowledge of the area under study were especially important as they enhanced my capacity for theoretical sensitivity and reflexivity (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, 1998).

I found my professional experience as a curriculum developer, a trainer of trainers in early childhood education and as a teacher trainer germane in conceptualising the problem of study, and gathering and analysing data. In gathering data, I had a deeper understanding of the field of study as opposed to if the field was new to me (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). My personal experience in the substantive area of study meant that it was easy during sampling to identify parents with the necessary experiences to participate in the study. I was also able to identify with the parents as they narrated their experiences in an attempt to provide high quality ECEC for their children and could form mental pictures of the preschools that parents were describing. In gathering data, such experiences helped in knowing what questions to ask, reflecting on what I was seeing in the data and making hunches about the data. Personal and professional experiences also helped me in having insight and the ability to give meaning to the data. At times I reflected on my own experiences, comparing them with those of the parents in order to identify my biases. Being able to acknowledge these experiences confirmed for me the appropriateness of using constructivist grounded theory.

As a researcher I appreciated my potential for influencing the interpretations of the data, based on my personal and professional experiences and training background. It was therefore important to make my assumptions explicit. Researchers with similar experiences to those of the participants are advised to write field notes on themselves as other data to constantly compare with the other data (Glaser, 2002). I began by writing my story and experiences in looking for a preschool and the actual choice of preschools for my two children (Captured in the Scenario Haraka Begins Schoool-Chapter one). Through this write-

109

up I was able to clarify what I valued for my children in the early years and the factors I considered in making a choice; and assess these against the scholarly knowledge that I have gained over the years in working in the early childhood sector. In making my assumptions and ideas explicit, I subjected myself to the interview questions before proceeding to the field. A colleague at the University interviewed me, using the same list of questions that were posed to the parents. The interview was audio recorded like all the other interviews.

I transcribed my own interview and analysed it like all the other data. From a grounded theory point of view, a researcher's impact on data is just one more variable to consider whenever it emerges as relevant. Taking notes on oneself prevents the researcher from "forcing the read on the data as if it comes from the respondent" (Glaser, 2002 pp. 34). However, for such data to be included, they must earn their relevance, like the categories and properties. Constant comparisons were done with the other interviews to bring up my impact or interpretation in order to constantly correct it if necessary. After consultation with my supervisors, it was agreed that my voice was too strong. For that reason, my personal data were removed and were not included in the later analysis and eventual writing. However, through this exercise I made my opinions and perspectives explicit, hence accounting for myself in the research and becoming more aware of forcing data (Andrews, Lyne, & Riley, 1996).

Purposive and theoretical sampling. Unlike other qualitative methodologies, grounded theory sampling begins as a "common-sense" process of talking to those informants who are most likely to provide information (Glaser, 1978, 1992, 2001; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1997, 1998). To gain a detailed understanding of parents' perceptions of quality, it was essential to talk to parents in their own settings and to allow them to tell their stories as freely as possible (Creswell, 2007). In February 2009, I travelled to Nairobi, Kenya, to embark on data gathering.

Both purposive and theoretical sampling approaches were adopted for the current study. At the initial stages, purposive sampling was employed to select the first parents who participated in the study. However, as patterns began to emerge, theoretical sampling was used to develop the emerging categories and themes. At later stages, further theoretical sampling was used to "elaborate the meaning of categories, discover variation within them, and define gaps among categories and how to fill them" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 107). For example, I had more than one interview with some of the participants to clarify different issues and sometimes to follow up on an emerging theme.

Study sample size. To gain approval from the James Cook University Human Research Ethics Committee for the study to proceed, I was required to explicitly state the study sample size beforehand. This presented a problem according to the tenets of grounded theory where the study sample size is not predetermined but emergent, depending on the data accrued from purposive and theoretical sampling. As I had no choice but to give a number, I made the target study sample size 12 parents. However, the study sample size increased from 12 to 23 as the research progressed, which was the point at which saturation was reached.

Parent participants. The selection of parents included in this study was based on three criteria, chosen to increase the chances of clear emergence of data that would facilitate the generation of categories and themes (Creswell, 2007). To be included in this study, parents had to:

- Have a child/children, or have had a child/children within five years of the study, attending a private-for-profit ECEC service
- Have a minimum education level of a first university degree and be living in urban Nairobi

- Have a monthly income of over 25,000 Kenya shillings (at the time of the study, one Australian dollar was equivalent to approximately 50 Kenya Shillings). Parents were asked to confirm verbally if their household monthly income was within the range of 25,000 Kshs to 120,000 Kshs. Given that these parents were professionals, with the majority being in employment, this range was realistic although some admitted that their household income was much higher than the given range.

Initially I had hoped to use administrators of private-for-profit ECEC services to help select parents to participate in this study. Using the principles of purposive sampling, I approached five 'preschools' (preschool in the Kenyan sense) in middle-income neighbourhoods well known to me. The five preschools I visited were all private-for-profit. I spoke to the school administrators about my research, requested their assistance with soliciting parents willing to participate in the study, and left them an information package explaining the nature of the study and the rights and privileges of participants (Appendices A, B & C).

While not unreceptive, in each instance administrators, who I later learnt doubled as owners of the preschools, explained that parents were very busy and it would be hard to reach them. They were willing to keep the information packages but were non-committal. Out of the five preschools visited, only two responded. One of these volunteered the preschool parents' representative, who declined to participate in the research study because of her busy schedule. The other preschool agreed to distribute the information package to the parents. The administrator organised a meeting where I could meet with the parents during parents/teacher day. Although five of these parents met the selection criteria and were willing to participate; only two had the time to be interviewed.

A more proactive method was subsequently chosen, to purposively sampling parents through networking. This involved selecting parents from my neighbourhood and social networks (friends and colleagues) and by snowballing – asking contacted parents to put me in contact with their social networks. This strategy proved more successful.

Constructivist grounded theory aims at exploring the views, values, beliefs, feelings, assumptions and ideologies of individuals understanding of a social phenomenon. These social processes must be shared and experienced by the individuals who participate in the study (Cutcliffe, 2000). Thus, it was important to sample parents with the most experience in the topic of interest to gain deeper and better understanding of the area of study (Cutcliffe, 2000; Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson, & Spiers, 2008). With methodological concerns in mind, only parents who had direct, relevant experience with preschools were included in this study. To ensure currency and relevance of the interview data generated, only parents who had selected and had at least one child attend preschool at the time or within five years of the study were included. Such parents were believed to have the necessary knowledge and experiences to contribute to the topic of study. Including parents who did not have children at preschool a time of the study was a way of triangulating the data. It is possible that parents who had children at preschool may want to defend their choices of preschool. However, parents whose children had already completed preschool are less likely to feel the need to defend their decisions. They were therefore more likely to be more objective in retrospect about their choices and experiences. Conversely, as is noted later in this section, parents were willing to freely share about their experiences even those that were not so good. The nature of the interviews was conversational and at no one point were parents put in a situation where they felt the need to justify or defend their choices (whether they matched or did not match their ideals).

For a detailed description of the parent participants see Table 4.1. Pseudonyms have been given to all to protect confidentiality.

Table 4.1: Parents sampled for the research study

Parent	Mother/Father	Level of education	Profession	No of children at preschool at the time of the study	No of children who have been at preschool > 5 years prior to the study
Naliaka	Mother	M. Phil	Lecturer	0	2
Nyaore	Mother	B. Ed	High school teacher	2	-
Chebet	Mother	B. A	Student PG*	0	2
Mutiso	Father	M. BA	Management (Lecturer)	0	2
Wakesho	Mother	B. Ed	High school teacher	2	-
Ushindi	Mother	B. Ed	High school teacher	1	1
Namachanja	Father	B. A	Communication	1	2
Tumaini	Mother	Student PG*	Human resource	1	2
Wanjiku	Mother	M. A	Psychologist/ Curriculum developer	1	2
Serende	Father	M. Sc	Information Technology	1	-
Ndindi	Mother	B. Ed	High School teacher	2	-
Wambui	Mother	M. Ed	High School teacher	1	2
Maritim	Father	M. A	Student Counsellor	1	2
Okwalo	Father	PhD	Lecturer	2	2
Ndege	Father	Masters	Computer Science	2	-
Naisiaye	Mother	B. A	Administration	0	2
Kanini	Mother	B. A	High school teacher	1	1
Akoth	Mother	M.Sc	Information management	2	2
Manyasi	Mother	B. A	Sociologist	1	1
Mwasambwa	Father	M. Phil	Curriculum developer	1	-
Waititu	Mother	M. Div	Theologian	2	-
Mbogo	Father	B. A	Administration	1	1
Kyalo	Father	B. Ed	High school teacher	2	-

*PG = postgraduate studies

Through initially purposive sampling and later theoretical sampling, 23 parents were selected. The 23 parents constituted 19 families. Out of those 19 families, seven families had two children at private-for-profit preschool and nine families had one child. The remaining three families did not have a child at preschool at the time of the current research study, but each family had had two children go through preschool less than five years prior to the current study. Fourteen of the parents interviewed were mothers while nine were fathers. Four couples participated in the study. Out of these four, two were interviewed together while for the other two, the husband and the wife were interviewed separately.

All the parents had a first degree as the minimum level of education i.e. all were tertiary educated (Table 4.1). One of the parents was a PhD holder, ten held a masters degree; two were pursuing postgraduate (PG) studies, while ten had only a bachelor degree. Parents were drawn from different professions. Seven of the parents interviewed were high school teachers, three were university lecturers, five were in information technology, two in administration, two were curriculum developers, one each in communication and human resources, a theologian and a sociologist. All resided in urban Nairobi.

Interviewing format. The interview constitutes the "site of knowledge construction". This means that "an interview reflects what interviewers and participants bring to the interview, impressions during it, and the relationship constructed through it" (Charmaz, 2003, p. 27). In this study, the language used in the interviews was English. English is the main instructional language in Kenya. Most of the middle class families would more often use English as the medium of communication in their homes and among their contemporaries. Therefore parents used English throughout their conversations and just used the occasional Kiswahili words. It is common in normal conversations for people to use both languages especially when they cannot use their vernacular. Kiswahili being the national language is

understood by most Kenyans. Interviews were transcribed verbatim but for the benefit of the reader the particular words or phrases are literally translated into English.

Semi-structured in-depth interviews were used as the main tool for data collection in this study. In-depth 'semi-structured' interviews fit grounded theory methods in that they are "open ended yet directed, shaped yet emergent, and paced yet unlimited" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 28)-see Appendix D for list of research questions. In-depth interviews afford the interviewer flexibility to direct and control the construction of data (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). They provide opportunities for "exploration of an aspect of life which participants have substantial experience, often combined with considerable insight" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 29). The design of the interview format was informed through engaging with academic literature, my personal and professional experiences and consultation with university staff.

Interviews were conducted in a conversational nature, thereby allowing for exchange of knowledge and understanding to "reveal depth, feelings and reflexive thought" (Mills, et al., 2006, p. 9). Informality is common in the Kenyan context, where orality is the culturally preferred mode of information exchange. The conversational nature made it possible to "risk expressing partly formed ideas, to ask naïve questions, to bring emotion to the fore, and to challenge one another's ideas" (Black & Halliwell, 2000, pp. 104–105). Through such conversations it was possible to develop open, honest relationships with parents in a relaxed atmosphere (Black & Halliwell, 2000; Bown & Sumsion, 2007). It was especially important to allow flexibility and reflexivity in order to give room for parents to develop their stories in the way they deemed fit. It was then possible to explore parents' subjective experiences and the meanings that they attach to these experiences. This process made evident how "the combination of flexibility and control inherent in in-depth interviewing techniques fit grounded theory strategies for increasing the analytic incisiveness of the resultant analysis" (Charmaz, 2003, p. 29) .

Interviews were scheduled at the parents' preferred time and locations. Interviews were long, 60 –120 minutes. It was therefore important to schedule them at a time and place where parents were not hurried by other activities. Some parents preferred to be interviewed in their homes, others in offices and one in a restaurant. Going to interviewees' houses meant I had to fit in with their family programmes, which meant using more time and coping with interruptions from family members and activities. Interruptions were also experienced where interviews were carried out in parents' offices. Sometimes, I had to wait for parents to attend to incoming calls or clients.

At the commencement of every interview, parents were referred to the information sheet (see Appendix B) and the aim and purpose of the research study were repeated to the parents, explaining what was required of them. Parents were reminded of their right not to answer any of the questions if they did not wish to and to withdraw at any point of the interview if they needed to. All the parents were eager to talk about their experiences and none withdrew from the research study. Most parents seemed to care very little about formal procedures such as signing consent forms or reading letters and information packs (see Appendixes C and B respectively). However, all the parents did sign the consent forms and I have records of these. Interviews were framed in such a way that although relating directly to the parents' experiences they did not provide leads to the emerging data (Glaser, 1992). Interviews began with a standard lead prompt, asking each parent: '*If you were given a chance to come up with an ideal preschool, what are the most important things you would put in place?'* (See Appendix D for a list of research questions). The question was deliberately broad and open, asking parents to reflect on what they considered important in the early years. The hypothetical nature of the question was intended to allow parents to discuss their hypothesised preschool without being limited by their experiences.

How the interview proceeded depended on the responses that parents had given to the first question. Some were required to expound on the responses given, to clarify or give explanations as why each of the components named was important to a particular parent. A second prompt question required parents to compare what they had described as an ideal preschool with the preschools where their children were attending or had attended: '*How does the ideal preschool you have just described match with the preschool your child attended/ is attending*'. A third prompt question asked parents to describe their experiences in choosing a preschool for their child/children and their experiences with the preschools: '*How did you go about looking for a preschool for your child/ren?*'

Issues about parents' perceived role in the learning of their children in the early years, their relationships with the teachers, both ideal and real, emerged to be important and were pursued with the parents (See Appendices H and I). Unstructured interview questions filled in gaps in data or looked for specific bits of data to develop the emerging themes (Charmaz, 2006). Since the analysis was to involve coding of parents' responses, attempts were made to continually clarify the meanings of the answers with respect to the emerging categories (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Many of the questions in the interview were probing, often repeating significant words from parents' answers to the direct questions about their experiences. There was an emphasis on eliciting parents' own definitions of terms, situations and events to tap into parents' assumptions, implicit meanings and tacit rules (Charmaz, 2006).

It was important in this study to adopt a reciprocal relationship with parents to be true to the principles of constructivist grounded theory. To achieve such reciprocity, I adopted different ways to break down any power imbalance with the interviewed parents. Interviews were scheduled at a time and location of the parent's choice. A relatively flexible approach was used in the interviews that were more often than not conversational. Although as a

researcher I had control over data collection, emerging issues were used to guide the direction of the conversations. Also, sharing my own understanding of the key issues, personal details and answering questions asked during the interviews meant that I did not appear to be interrogating parents. Where parents treated me as an expert, I neutralised this by identifying my personal opinions and asking parents of their thoughts about such opinions. In effect I interacted with the parents to "create data and the ensuing analysis". (Charmaz, 2000, p. 523)

Another way I foregrounded reflexivity was through asking parents to explain meanings of phrases that were taken for granted. Parents were encouraged to explain their meanings and use of certain terms through the use of probing questions. Cho and Trent (2006) support researchers looking for taken for granted meanings in order to both deconstruct and reconstruct meanings with the participants. Further, the open-ended perspective in constructivism and belief in multiple realities among a group of people "adheres with the notion of data triangulation" (Golafshani, 2003, p. 604). Triangulation is defined as "a validity procedure where researchers search for congruence among multiple and different sources of information to form themes or categories in a study" (Creswell and Miller, 2000 cited by Silverman, 2009, p. 277). The result was intended rich dynamic data constructed within "cultural, and structural contexts" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 524).

Tape recording of interviews. Tape recording was an important feature of this research study. Parents' consent (see Appendix C) was requested to tape-record the interviews before commencement. It was important to tape-record all the interviews because it freed me to give my full attention to the discussions. The goal was to make the interviews more conversational and less of a question and answer session (Charmaz, 2006). Although aware of Glaser's (2001) and Glaser and Holton's (2004) argument against recording interviews in that it leads to amassing large amounts of data, I found it gave me the freedom

to concentrate on listening and noting areas that needed further probing or clarification on issues raised by the parents in line with the emerging themes.

Note taking. Detailed field notes were taken during data gathering. Although Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) discourage taking extensive notes during interviews because it may interrupt the free flow of conversation. However, I found it both necessary and helpful to take these detailed notes as a backup in case the audio machine malfunctioned. The purpose of note taking was mainly to clarify issues that needed a follow up with parents but I also made brief records of key ideas to be used as triggers for memory (Martin & Turner, 1986).

Transcribing interviews. I felt it was important, though time consuming, for me to transcribe all the interviews. Transcribing was done verbatim on each entire interview. I agree with Corbin and Strauss (2008) who argue that transcription should not be given to hired professional transcribers or research assistants, but should be done by those who have a stake in the research. By transcribing my own data, I became more familiar with the data and so it was easier later on, at the analysis stage, to locate data as needed. It was also possible to identify gaps in the data to determine whether further clarifications or further comparisons with other data were needed. Charmaz (2006) states that transcribed tape-recorded interviews make it easy to see when your questions do not work or where data has been forced.

During the transcription process the data came alive and became very real to me. It was possible to recall details of the interviews and in some cases parents' expressions as they related their feelings. This confirmed Kvale and Brinkmann's (2009, p. 180) claim that "interviewers who transcribe their own interviews will learn a lot about their interviewing style; to some extent they will have the social and emotional aspects of the interview situation present or reawakened during transcription, [see Appendix F] and will already have started

the analysis of the meaning of what was said" (p. 180). All the transcribed interviews were tightly compared with the audio records to ensure that they matched.

All data were stored on a computer. Care was taken to protect the confidentiality of the interviewees by making them non-identifiable in the data. Attempts were also made to ensure that loyalty was maintained to the interviewees' oral statements by transcribing verbatim.

Data analysis. Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) consider transcribing in itself an initial analytic process. This is where the mental comparisons of data, clarifying and thinking through categories start. Strauss and Corbin (1998, p. 1) describe data analysis as "the interplay between the researchers and data. It is both science and art" (p. 1).

Data were organised and coded through the two phases proposed by Charmaz (2003, 2006) with the help of QSR Nvivo computer software (Appendices H and F respectively). From the ongoing open coding process integrated with memo writing (see Appendix G for examples of memos), categories and later themes emerged. These categories, themes and memos were reworked with the data in focused coding and informed further theoretical sampling. When no more new codes, categories or themes were being elucidated from ongoing coding and memo writing, the analysis was saturated.

Memo writing. Glaser (1978, p. 83) defines memos as "the theorizing write-up of ideas about codes and their relationships as they strike the analyst while coding. Memos lead naturally to abstraction and ideation" (p. 83).

I found writing of memos helpful in capturing ideas that came to mind during the coding as well as being sensitive to my own biases and capturing such discrepancies with the data. Memos were also helpful in refining and keeping track of ideas that developed during constant comparison of incidents to incidents or concepts to concepts in the evolving theory.

In memos, ideas in naming concepts were developed and related to each other. This can help identify new areas of collecting data for further initial coding as well as for later theoretical sampling (Charmaz, 2000, 2006). Memo writing started from the time of transcription and was ongoing during the coding processes.

Coding introduction. Coding is core to a grounded theory approach to doing research. Coding in this context is defined as the process through which data are conceptualised through the generation of codes, categories and themes (Charmaz, 2000, 2006; Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Glaser, 1978, 1992; Strauss & Corbin, 1990, 1998). During coding data are broken down, conceptualised and put back together in new ways. Systematic coding of interview transcription is important in order to give a deeper understanding of the data (Charmaz, 2006).

Constructivist grounded theory has two phases of coding. The first is open coding (see Appendix H), which entails separating (fracturing) data into codes. Coding can be word-by-word, line-by-line or by segment of data (Charmaz, 2000, 2006). This study employed line-by-line coding. Line-by-line coding is especially helpful with detailed data about fundamental empirical problems and processes. Line-by-line coding prompts one to remain open to the data and to see hints in it. It enables one to do in-depth interviewing of data to gain a close look on what participants say and struggle with. The codes and categories used at this stage are provisional, in that they change later and allow one to remain open to the incoming data so that they guide further development of codes and categories (Charmaz, 2006).

The second phase is focused coding (see Appendix I), which uses the most frequent initial codes to sort, integrate and organise data. Charmaz (2000, 2006), like Strauss and Corbin (1990, 1998), proposes asking questions of the data. Focused coding checks one's prior assumptions and ideas about the topic of study. Through constant comparison, data are

compared with data to develop more focused codes; the codes are further compared with data to refine them. Ultimately categories and themes emerge.

   Using QSR Nvivo computer software. In this study, data analysis was supported by the use of QSR Nvivo computer software as an aid to organising, locating and coding text from the interview transcripts. Transcribed text documents were imported from spreadsheets into QSR Nvivo and read, line-by-line, during the process of initial coding.

   Corbin and Strauss (2008) recommend that the evolving analysis of data should determine how the researcher will use the computer, rather than the computer determining the analysis. To fit within the analysis framework for this research, the programme was adapted. Instead of using nodes and tree nodes, these were adapted to refer to codes/categories/themes and different levels of sub-codes/categories/themes. The adapted QSR Nvivo software proved to be extremely useful when organising the data under different codes and sub-codes, later to be merged to form categories and subcategories, themes and sub-themes.

   Data were coded (free nodes in QSR Nvivo) and sub-coded (tree nodes in QSR Nvivo). The initial stages of coding data went up to the third level sub-codes (See Figure 4.2). Units of data whose interconnections and relationships with other codes could not be established straightaway were coded separately to be developed later. The QSR Nvivo computer program as an analytic tool assisted me in keeping track of my codes as the codes continued to build up in numbers, especially within open coding (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

   Coding through QSR Nvivo computer software made it easy to retrieve and organise data. This saved time and freed my mind to think through the data rather than searching for where the data was located. The computer did the retrieval and layout work while I did the thinking. The use of QSR Nvivo was especially useful for constant comparison of data because I could move with ease from one section of data to the other or from one parent to

another. It was also easier to write and manage memos as it was possible to link specific texts from the interviews with specific memos or link with similar ideas from more than one parent. The software records the time and date tasks were carried out, making it possible to retrace the analytic steps. This helped ensure analyses were consistent and the findings more reliable. The use of QSR Nvivo made it easier and possible for me to access codes, to return to the raw data and to use examples for quotes (Chapters five and six), to retrieve memos, create diagrams, correct mistakes and find gaps in the logic.

Initial coding. Open coding data is the first phase, where data are compared with data so that a pattern of similar incidents can be given a conceptual name. Strauss and Corbin (1998, p. 74) define open coding as:

> …the analytic process by which concepts are identified and developed in terms of their properties and dimensions. The basic analytic procedures by which this is accomplished are: the asking of questions about the data; and the making of comparisons for similarities and differences between each incident, event and other instance of phenomena. Similar events and incidents are labelled and grouped (p. 74).

The transcripts of the semi-structured, in-depth interviews with parents were initially coded using line-by-line coding as proposed by Charmaz (2000, 2006). While the unit of analysis is line-by-line, this is not rigid. Depending on context, it can also be sentence-by-sentence, phrase-by-phrase or sometimes even small segments of data that are named under different codes (Charmaz, 2000, 2006). Line-by-line coding moves one towards fulfilling two criteria for grounded theory – fit and relevance. Fit is the sense that codes and categories are developed from the parents' experiences, and relevance in that it "offers an incisive analytic framework" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 54) for interpreting and making associations within data.

Each data unit was coded under as many codes or sub-codes as were relevant. Codes and their sub-codes began to emerge by relating and comparing data and asking data questions: 'What is the data a study of?' 'What does the data suggest?' 'Which code might these statements indicate?' (See Table 4.2). In this table, sources represented the number of parents that contributed to a particular code and references represented the number of times that parents talked about the issue.

I named different units of data under codes and sub-codes and compared them with previously coded data to determine their interconnections. I used both 'in vivo' coding (using parents' actual language as a code name) and my own words to describe the emerging codes. In vivo codes have been italicised for easier identification. Although Charmaz (2006) recommends coding data swiftly and spontaneously, this was not always possible.

The initial coding generated many codes. A list of codes generated during open coding, including the number of source contained within each, is shown in Table 4.3. These codes' interrelationships and interconnections during open coding can be seen schematically in Figure 4.2

Table 4.2: Initial coding

Code	Sub-codes	Second level sub-codes	Text	Source
Good Practice	Learning processes	Child participates in the learning *More time for play*	… involve them in a lot of play, a lot of singing and all that in terms of learning there is not more of the board and direct teaching (Ushindi)	**12**
		Giving child individual attention Child learning at own *pace* Method of teaching	There are some very good things ... The method of teaching is very individual oriented, they give individual attention to the children. In fact they deal with you according to your pace. They move with you according to your pace (Akoth).	**12**
		Caters for child's development	…that balances in my opinion three things. … the cognitive, intellectual …the social … the spiritual. (Mwasambwa)	**11**
		Learning that is fun *Less stressful*	...making learning fun, less stressful, less work, less demands on the child (Wambui).	**8** **6**
		Free environment *Kids are kids* *Less work* (home and school) *Let the child play*	A free environment where kids are actually kids at that age. It's not so much academics at that level... (Naisiaye) I would have very little to do with academics. It will just be play. Play, play, play. ... mainly to be a lot of play. (Kanini)	**6** **19**
	Teacher	Qualifications and *training* Professionalism	Teachers... have to be trained and trained to a high level. ... real teaching and applying of teaching skills must come. ...if you don't have good trained teachers the preschool is useless (Waititu).	**9**
	Involving parents	Parent/teacher relationships	... management can show interest by perhaps by inviting more of parents input ... allow more contribution from the parents or even allow parents to have a particular project (Nyaore).	**8**
	Facilities	*Homely*	...the more of a home environment we can make kids feel the better (Okwalo)	**4**

Table 4.3: Initial Coding showing initial codes

Code	Source
Good Practice: Teachers	12
Good Practice: *Teachers/qualifications*	6
Good Practice: Teachers/Characteristics	22
Good Practice: Teachers/Remuneration	5
Good Practice: Teachers/Professionalism	10
Good Practice: Parents involvement	8
Good: Transiting from home to school	4
Good Practice: *Facilities*	4
Good Practice: *Facilities*/*Homely*	10
Good Practice: Facilities/Interesting	16
Good Practice: *Security*	3
Good Practice: Learning processes*/Children participate in their learning*	16
Good Practice: Learning processes/Actual learning environment	14
Good Practice: Learning processes/*Child is given individual attention*	14
Good Practice: Learning processes/*Caters for the development of the child*	12
Good Practice: Learning processes/*Child learns exploring the environment*	10
Good Practice: Learning processes/*Making learning fun*	14
Good Practice: Learning processes/*Child is valued*	10
Good Practice: Learning processes/What is taught/*Let the child play*	19
Good Practice: Learning processes/What is taught/*Social skills*	21
Good Practice: Learning processes/What is taught/*Less work* (home and school)	6
Good Practice: Learning processes/*Integrated learning*	5
Good Practice: Learning processes/Teacher: child ratio	23
Good Practice: Learning processes/Learning that is relational	23
Good Practice: Learning processes/What is taught/*Introduce the child to the beauty of learning*	
Good Practice: Learning processes/What is taught/Emergent curriculum	19
Good Practice: Teacher/parent relationships/*Cordial*	4
Bad Practice: Learning processes/*Too much work*	18
Bad Practice: Learning processes/*Emphasis on reading and writing*	19
Bad Practice: Learning processes/Academic pressure	18
Bad Practice: Learning processes/Rote learning	17
Bad Practice: Learning processes/Teacher lacking skills/*Lack of professionalism*	22
Bad Practice: Learning environment/*Hostile environment*/Intolerance of failure	6
Bad Practice: Minimal parent involvement	6
Bad Practice: Academic pressure dynamics/*Pressure on the school from parents*	1
Bad Practice: Academic pressure dynamics/Social pressure on the child to perform	9
Bad Practice: Academic pressure dynamics/*Competition among schools*	7
Bad Practice: Academic pressure dynamics/*Unavailability of 'good' schools*	5
Bad Practice: Academic pressure dynamics/Progress in learning equals a score	5
Bad Practice: Academic pressure dynamics/Preparing for Standard One interview 'Bad Practice:	4
Bad Practice: Impediments to quality: *System of education*	3
Choice of a preschool: Sources of information/*Other parents*	18
Choice of a preschool: Sources of information/ *Media*	21
Choice of a preschool: Sources of information/ Preschool visits	5
Choice of a preschool: Factors/ Proximity	23
Choice of a preschool: Factors/Teachers/Qualifications	16
Choice of a preschool: Factors/Teachers/*Characteristics*	6
Choice of a preschool: Factors/*Cost*	14
Choice of a preschool: Factors/ Parents/*School values*	20
Choice of a preschool: Factors/*Facilities*	11
Choice of a preschool: Factors/Class size	11
Choice of a preschool: Factors/National ranking/Academic performance	11
Choice of a preschool: Factors/What is taught	8
Choice of a preschool: Factors/*Transport*	6
Choice of a preschool: Factors/*Safety*	5
Choice of a preschool: Factors/*Feeding programme*	3

Choice of a preschool: Factors/*Availability*	2
Importance of preschool: Prepare the child for formal learning	2
Importance of preschool: *Child living and learning social skills*	17
Importance of preschool: *Cater for the child's development*	10
Importance of preschool: Opportunities for social interactions	6
	11

Figure 4.2: Codes' interconnections and relationships during open coding

The above figure captures the different codes and sub-codes that emerged during open coding. At the initial stage of coding, data was coded under two broad codes: 'Good' practice and 'Bad' practice as used by the parents. Later these were changed into conceptual codes: 'Ideal' and 'Real'. For example under the 'Good practice', 'Teachers; 'Learning environment'; 'Facilities'; and 'Security and Safety' were all codes that offered explanations of what parents meant by 'Good practice'. Sub-codes provided explanations for the codes or in Glaser's (1992) words identified variables that represented the codes. For example *'Learning that was fun'* is a sub-code of 'Learning processes' that captured parents description of a 'Good practice' as one where children had fun. Where no relationships were established this early, the unit of data was coded as a code on its own without the sub-code. Later these codes were subsumed under other more general codes.

Codes created at this level were provisional, comparative and grounded in data. Charmaz (2006) argues that codes should be provisional because the researcher should remain open to other analytic possibilities and create codes that best fit the data one has. Codes are also provisional in the sense that the researcher may reword them to improve the fit. Part of the fit is the degree to which they capture and condense meanings and actions. In the process of coding, data were constantly compared with provisional codes being noted and subsequently compared with other transcripts to ensure consistency.

Focused coding. Codes and sub-codes were combined or subsumed to form even broader categories and subcategories in the focused coding phase. Each unit of analysis was assigned to as many categories as possible. The method of assigning a unit to as many categories as possible is known as "open categorizing (Rennie, Phillips, & Quartaro, 1988, p. 143)." Rennie et al. (1988) continue that "open categorizing permits the researcher to preserve subtle nuances of the data and supplies the groundwork for the development of rich theory" (p. 143). In turn, categories and subcategories were combined or subsumed to form themes or sub-themes (Charmaz, 2006).

Focused coding means "using the most significant and/or frequent earlier codes to sift through large amounts of data" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 57). The aim is to judge the adequacy of those codes. Through focused coding one reveals the congruence, or incongruence, of the emerging theoretical framework and the empirical reality which the codes seek to explain. Examination of the initial coding revealed that the codes tended to align with what was in the literature, suggesting interference from knowledge of the literature. Balancing between drawing on prior knowledge and keeping an open mind to new concepts as they emerge from data required conscious effort (Goulding, 2005; McGhee, et al., 2007). It was therefore

important to re-examine the data and ensure that the themes emerged from actual data. Consultations with my supervisors helped me be more open and to allow codes to emerge from the data.

More importantly, memo writing during data collection and analysis was crucial to ensure that meanings were derived from the data. Coleman and O'Connor (2007) point out that memo writing could be statements, hypotheses or questions. In the early stages of coding, data help in fleshing out the emerging theories, at the later stages, memos act as building blocks to the final report. As Mills et al., (2006, p. 12) point out "[i]n constructivist grounded theory, the simultaneous processes of data generation and analysis means that reflective memo writing constitutes the worded world, a world that is constantly rewritten to reflect participants' stories and our own histories"(p. 12). The strength of constructivist grounded theory is that the researcher is actively involved in the data, therefore one acts upon data rather than passively reading it. Through such actions, new threads for analysis become evident (Charmaz, 2006). Questions were posed to data as proposed by Charmaz (2006, p. 47): "What is the data a study of? What does the data suggest? From whose point of view?" (p. 47).

The aim of focused coding is to classify the codes generated through open coding into broader conceptual categories. During the process of data collection and open coding, it was apparent that certain categories or themes were identifiable. By comparing codes with codes and codes with data, codes and sub-codes were merged to form categories and subcategories. As the focused coding cycle progressed, gaps were identified and new categories were created. Eventually themes and sub-themes emerged as the codes were worked and reworked in the light of the new data from theoretical sampling.

Saturation. Corbin and Strauss (2008, p. 90) argue, "as a researcher codes data, the conceptual names that are placed on categories do not necessarily point to whether a category denotes a condition, inter/action, emotional response, or consequence. …The analyst is not coding for conditions or consequences per se, but rather uses the tool to obtain an understanding of the circumstances that surround events and therefore enrich the analysis" (p. 90).

Data relating to parents' ideals and experiences of the preschools their children were attending, or had attended, required intense analysis to bring out the embedded interrelationships. Consequent on the nature of the questions asked, '*The Ideal: Choice of Play*' was an overarching theme that emerged with '*Let the Child be*' as one major theme (see Table 4.4). This major theme was chosen because it was representative of what parents valued for their children in the early years. More questions were posed to the data (e.g. Let the child be what?) in an attempt to identify the main sub-themes and the interrelationships between them. Four main sub-themes emerged – '*Let the Child be a Child, 'Let the Child be Free'*, '*Let the Child be Playful'*, and '*Let the Child be Purposeful'*.

During focused coding, some codes that were generated during open coding gained new meanings, some were subsumed. Table 4.4 illustrates how these themes, sub-themes and categories were generated. Sources represent the number of parents who contributed to the particular code.

Table 4.4: Focused Coding: 'The Ideal: Choice of Play'– Let the child be

Theme	Sub-theme	Codes and sub-codes combined from open coding	Sources
Let the child be	*Let the Child be a Child*	Ideal: Learning process/Teacher: child ratios	23
		Ideal: Learning process/*Enough time for play*	19
		Ideal: Learning process/*Let the child play*	19
		Ideal: Learning process/*Social skills*	21
		Ideal: Learning process/*Child is given individual attention*	14
		Ideal: Learning process/*Caters for the development of the child*	12
		Ideal: Learning process/*Child learns to explore the environment*	10
		Ideal: Learning process/*Less work*	6
	Let the Child be Free	Ideal: Learning process/*Enough time for play*	19
		Ideal: Learning process/Exploratory learning	9
		Ideal: Learning process/*Child is valued*	6
		Ideal: Learning process/*Child participates in own learning*	2
	Let the Child be Playful	Ideal: Learning process/*Learning through play*	15
		Ideal: Learning process/*Learning as fun*	8
	Let the Child be Purposeful	Ideal Importance of preschool: *Child living and learning social skills*	17
		Ideal: Learning process/Interpersonal relationships	16
		Ideal: What to learn/Emergent curriculum	12
		Ideal: What to learn/*Learning social skills*	10
		Ideal: Learning process/Learning through the environment	2

Another major theme that emerged was '*Teacher and Parents as Co-responsible'*, which had two sub-themes: *'Teacher as Responsible'* and '*Parent as Co-responsible'*. The first sub-theme, '*Teacher as Responsible'*, had three categories: '*Teacher as a Playmate', 'Planning and Implementing Play-based Learning'* and '*Acting Professionally'*. The second sub-theme, '*Parent as Co-responsible'*, had four categories: '*Supporting the Child', 'Walking alongside the Teacher', 'Keeping your Ears on the Ground',* and *'Parent as a Co-Teacher'*.

Table 4.5 illustrates how these themes, sub-themes and categories were generated. Sources represent the number of parents who contributed to the particular code.

Table 4.5: Focused Coding: The Ideal: Choice of Play– Teacher and Parent as Co-responsible

Overarching Theme	Major Theme	Sub-theme	Categories	Codes and sub-codes combined from open coding	Sources
The Ideal: Choice of Play	Teacher and Parent as Co-responsible	Teacher as Responsible	*Teacher as a Playmate*	Ideal: Learning process/Learning that is relational	23
				Ideal: Learning process/*Teacher providing for child development*	17
				Ideal: Learning environment/*Providing a safe place for the children*	15
				Ideal: Learning environment/*Facilities/Homely*	12
			Planning and Implementing Learning	Ideal: Learning process/The role of the teacher in learning/*Introduce the child to the beauty of learning*	19
				Ideal: Learning process/*Individual attention*	17
				Ideal: Importance of preschool: *Laying a foundation for formal* learning Ideal: Learning process/The role of the teacher in learning	17
					4
			Acting Professionally	Ideal: Learning process/*Teacher providing for child development*	17
				Ideal: Learning process/Teachers characteristics	14
				Ideal: Learning process/*Professionalism*	10
				Ideal: Learning process/Teachers qualifications	6
		Parent as Co-responsible	Supporting the Child	Ideal: Parents perceived role: Supporting the child	12
				Ideal: Parents perceived role: *Providing material support*	3
			Walking alongside the Teacher	Ideal: Parents perceived role: Reinforcing what the child is learning	10
				Ideal: Parents perceived role: Providing material support	3
			Keeping your Ears on the Ground	Ideal: Parents perceived role: Evaluating learning and monitoring learning	8
			Parent as a Co-Teacher	Ideal: Parents perceived role: *Key player*	5
				Ideal: Parents perceived role: *Co-teacher*	4

Also consequent on the tenor of the questions, '*The Real*: *Play of Choice'* was the other overarching theme that emerged during this study. '*The Real*: *Play of Choice'* related to parents' actual experiences in making private-for-profit ECEC choices as well as their interactions with the preschools their children attended.

The Real: Play of Choice had major themes. These were '*Finding a Preschool'*, which encapsulates the process of looking for a preschool, and '*The Context of Preschool Choice',* which addresses the individual and systemic factors that emerged as significant mediators of parents' ECEC choices. '*Finding a Preschool*' had four sub-themes: *'Meeting Parents' Expectations', 'Hearsay' 'Visiting Preschools'* and *'Wading through Choices' (*see Table 4.6). *'The Context of Preschool Choice'* was conceptualised into four sub-themes: *'Desire for Success', 'Competition', 'Affordability'* and *'Proximity'* (see Table 4.7).

Table 4.6: Focused Coding: The Real: Play of Choice

Overarching Theme	Major Theme	Sub-theme	Codes and sub-codes combined from open coding	Sou
The Real: Play of Choice	Finding a Preschool	Meeting Parents' Expectations	Real: Bad practice/Academic pressure dynamics: *pressure on the school from parents*	15
			Real: Bad practice/Social mobility	5
			Real: Bad practice/Academic pressure dynamics/Lack of good schools	4
			Real: Bad practice/Academic pressure dynamics/Progress in schools equals a score	4
		Hearsay	Preschool choice/Sources of information/O*ther parents*	21
			Real: Bad practice/Academic pressure dynamics/Social pressure on the child to perform	7
			Real: Choice/Sources of information/*Media*	5
		Visiting preschool	Real: Choice/Sources of information/ *Preschool visits*	23
		Wading Through Choices	Choice of a preschool: Sources of information/*Other parents*	18
			Choice of a preschool: Sources of information/ *Media*	21
			Choice of a preschool: Sources of information/ Preschool visits	5
			Choice of a preschool: Factors/ Proximity	23
			Choice of a preschool: Factors/Teachers/Qualifications	16
			Choice of a preschool: Factors/Teachers/*Characteristics*	6
			Choice of a preschool: Factors/*Cost*	14
			Choice of a preschool: Factors/ Parents/*School values*	20
			Choice of a preschool: Factors/*Facilities*	11
			Choice of a preschool: Factors/Class size	11
			Choice of a preschool: Factors/National ranking/Academic performance	11

The Context of	Desire for	Real: Bad practice/Academic pressure dynamics: *Pressure on the school from parents*	
Preschool	Success	Real: Bad practice/Social mobility	
Choice		Real: Bad practice/Academic pressure dynamics/*Lack of good schools*	
		Real: Bad practice/Academic pressure dynamics/Progress in schools equals a score	
	Competition	Real: Bad practice/Academic pressure dynamics/*Preparing for Standard One interview*	23
		Real: Bad practice/Learning Process/Rote learning	22
		Real: Bad practice/Impediments to quality/Minimal parents' involvement	19
		Real: Bad practice/Learning Process/*Too much work*	19
		Real: Bad practice/ Impediments to quality/*System of education*	19
		Real: Bad practice/Learning Process/*Emphasis on literacy and numeracy*	18
		Real: Bad practice/Academic pressure dynamics/Pressure on the child from school	17
		Real: Bad practice/Academic pressure dynamics/Pressure on schools from parents	14
		Real: Bad practice/Impediments to quality/Learning processes/Teacher lacking skills/*Lack of professionalism*	8
		Real: Bad practice/Learning Process/ *Hostile environment*/ Intolerance of failure	6
		Real: Bad practice/ Impediments to quality/*System of education*	6
	Affordability	Real: Choice: Factors/*Cost*	20
		Real: Choice: Factors/*School transport*	5
		Real: Bad Practice: Academic pressure dynamics/*Unavailability of 'good' schools*	5
	Proximity	Real: Choice: Factors/Proximity	16
		Real: Choice: Factors/*School transport*	5
		Real: Good Practice/Choice: Factors/ Transition from home to school	4
		Real: Choice: Factors/*Safety*	3
		Real: Good Practice/Choice: Factors/ *Security*	3

All categories, sub-themes and themes were not discrete but were necessarily overlapping, interrelated and interconnected.

Synthesis. The themes and sub-themes that emerged during data analysis were synthesised to generate the multiple perspectives that were voiced by the tertiary educated parents living in urban Nairobi interviewed for this study in relation to ECEC service provision in the private-for-profit sector. Chapter 5 explores the overarching theme of '*The Ideal*' and Chapter 6 the overarching theme of '*The Real*'.

Ethical Issues

Ethical issues inevitably arise during the complexities of researching lives and placing private accounts in the public arena. Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) caution a researcher to think through ethical issues and dilemmas that might arise during an interview.

The following measures were taken to ensure that the research study was ethical:

- Approval from the James Cook University Human Research Ethics Committee was sought and granted before embarking on data collection (Approval number H3196, Appendix J). Also a license to carry out research was sought and granted by the Kenyan Government, where data was collected (see Appendix K).

- To maintain confidentiality, which was promised to the parents who participated in this research study, all parents and their institutions have been given pseudonyms. No real names have been disclosed or recorded. Interview scripts were de-identified by the time they were being transcribed, coded and securely stored. Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) assert that care should be taken to protect the participant's privacy. They observe that confidentiality can create dilemma. On one hand "anonymity can protect the parents and is thus an ethical demand, but on the other hand it can reserve an alibi for the researchers potentially allowing to interpret the parents' statements without being gainsaid" (p. 17). Also Parker (2005 cited by Kvale & Brinkmann,

2009) posits that anonymity can protect the parents, but it can also deny them, "the very voice in the research that might originally have been claimed as its aim" (p. 17). However, the use of grounded theory meant that the research study remained close to the data.

- All parents in this research study were recruited either through a referral or were identified because of their ability to contribute to the emerging themes. All parents were telephoned and requested to participate in the research study at a time and place that was convenient for them. Upon acceptance, each parent was provided with an information sheet and two copies of the consent form. The information sheet explained to the participant the overall purpose of the research study, the main features of the design and benefits hoped to be achieved through the research study. No risks were foreseen to the participant from the interview process and so risks were not included in the information sheet. Voluntary participation of the parents was sought by requesting all the parents to sign the consent form prior to commencement of the interview. Parents were informed that they were free to withdraw from the interview at any time or did not have to answer any question they chose not to.

- Parents were also assured of confidentiality and that the data would only be used for the purpose of a PhD degree, publications and presentations in conferences. Parents were informed that they could access the transcriptions and analysis of their interviews.

Evaluating the study
In Chapter three, I presented Charmaz's (2006) criteria for evaluating grounded theory research studies. The four criteria were: credibility, originality, resonance and usefulness. As regards 'Credibility', the research process for this study has been rigorous, detailed and thorough. Throughout the presentation of the research findings, specific concepts and categories have been proposed and defined. Support for these has been provided in a

141

consistent fashion, using both codes and parents' comments. Connections between categories have been identified based upon logical argumentation and presentation of concepts and their relationships. Moreover, the information provided in Appendixes D, E, F, G, and H adds further transparency to the research process. Additionally, the breadth and depth of the research findings reveal an in-depth engagement with parents and an intimate familiarity with the phenomenon being explored.

In terms of 'Originality', this is one of the few studies internationally to engage in depth with parents, and is among the first in the Kenyan context to explore parents' perceptions of high quality ECEC programmes. It is also original in the use of grounded theory conceptual framework. Many of the categories, concepts and arguments presented in the study – such as '*Let the Child be a Child'*, '*Let the Child be Free*' and '*Let the Child be Purposeful*' are novel and innovative, and offer a new perspectives of high quality ECEC. Furthermore, the findings challenge the dominant view that parents are not knowledgeable about components of high quality ECEC programmes. Indeed, by arguing that parents' choices of preschools are a function of their individual as well as the systemic context, the study has highlighted the importance of the 'context' within which quality ECEC is conceptualised.

Regarding 'Resonance', the diversity of categories presented and explored in the findings indicates a solid and broad understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. Furthermore, the findings are presented and discussed in a format which not only foregrounds parents' voices but also makes them accessible to parents who are central to the phenomenon under study.

Finally, as far as 'Usefulness' is concerned, not only is there potential for the findings to be practically applied to policy and in designing programmes that meet children's needs in

Kenya, they also make a valuable contribution to knowledge within the broader field of quality ECEC.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter I have looked at the methodology used in the sampling, parents who participated in the current study, and how data was collected and analysed using constructivist grounded theory conceptual framework as presented in Chapter 3. Although constructivist grounded theory affords a degree of flexibility in so far as it offers tools to use rather than recipes to follow, the researcher is faced with ambiguities at various points throughout the research process. Pratt (2012) argues that because of the differences in approach of the three main versions of grounded theory as presented in Chapter 3, it is imperative that researchers identify the version that they decide to use. Such a choice has major implications for planning, managing and executing the entire study. At each stage in this study, the decisions taken have been explained and justified by reference to existing literature. Despite the difficulties associated with this methodology and the limitations, I believe the process has generated rich findings, which are presented in the following chapters.

Chapter Five: Research Findings 1: The Ideal: Choice of Play

Introduction

This chapter is organised to reflect this thematic interaction of ideals and aspirations as represented in the interview data. It starts with an overview of the central constructs: child, parent, teacher, home and school. References to *'Let the Child be'* were so frequent in parents' descriptions of their 'ideal preschool' that this theme was further categorised into four sub-themes that reflect the actual and potential authority of parents and teachers in achieving the ideal: *'Let the Child be a Child'; 'Let the Child be Free'; 'Let the Child be Playful'*; and *'Let the Child be Purposeful'*.

Another major theme that emerged was *'Teacher and Parents as Co-responsible'* which had two subthemes: *'Teacher as Responsible'* and *'Parent as Co-responsible'*. *'Teacher as Responsible'* had three categories: *'Teacher as a Playmate', 'Planning and Implementing Play-based Learning'* and *'Acting Professionally'*. *'Parent as Co-responsible'* had four categories: *'Supporting the Child', 'Walking alongside the Teacher'. 'Keeping your Ears on the Ground',* and *'Parent as a Co-Teacher'*. I discuss at length how the data suggests that the teacher, as professional, and the parent, as co-responsible, can act to bring to fruition parents' ideals of early childhood education and care. Uncoded data is reported either as conversations constructed from interview transcripts or individual quotations.

Three Players, Two Playgrounds

Three players, two playgrounds is one of the codes that was constructed from the data. The three players are the 'child', the 'parent' and the 'teacher'. The two playgrounds are 'home' and 'school'. These constructs are central to this thesis and they permeate every category and theme. I start by foregrounding parents' notions of home and school.

The home. Parents indicate that 'The Home', being a familiar environment, is important in supporting the child in growth, development and learning and also in the smooth transition to preschool. Parents most frequently talked about 'The Home' being an 'ideal' environment for a child. The home was considered to be relaxed and friendly, affording children time and resources for play. Some parents wished they could keep their children at home longer as illustrated by the following interview extract.

> Nyaore: *I felt I wanted them at home ... as long as possible ... they were really enjoying being at home. May be because of the environment... They had a lot of space where they could play and do whatever. It was very safe so there was no pressure that these children must go to school. Then they had a grandmother who was with them and she used to be with them every day. ... they would take long walks and talk. They would come back have lunch and then after that sleep. So I never felt like there was any rush.*

> Kanini: *Ideally speaking if I had an appropriate person at home it would be good for them to stay at home. ... I would have let them stay at home until they were around five years old.*

The school. All the parents sampled considered attending preschool to be a critical stage in a child's life. Although they expressed a desire for the child to remain home as long as possible, they acknowledged the potential value of preschool in providing important growth and learning opportunities that are hard to replicate in the home. These opportunities were, expressly, interactions with children of the same age group, as well as enhancing a child's overall development and readiness for formal learning in a rich social environment where children learn social skills. The following excerpts from interview transcripts of three mothers demonstrate these expectations of an ideal preschool experience:

Nyaore: *I think you cannot quite replicate school at home ... I am looking at it from the social angle ... the school is not just a building it is more ... you are bringing children together.*

Wanjiku: *Children realise that there are other people in society ... Children learn social skills, how to relate with others, and basic communication.*

Akoth: *Also it prepares them for the social life in the primary school. They learn to socialise with other children, so they will not be intimidated when they go to primary school.*

Preschool is also considered important in introducing the child to the structure of a formal school. Through the social environment created, the child learns about school programmes, rules and taking responsibility (discussed in detail under '*Let the Child be Purposeful*'). In response to the question "Do you think preschool is important, Akoth stated:

It prepares them for school. They are aware of a school structure ... of rules ... of a teacher. So it kind of prepares them with the very basics of education, simple counting, simple maths, and simple writing their names…

Descriptions of the ideal preschool were clearly shaped by parents' knowledge of, and concern for, their children's success within the Kenyan educational system. Literacy and numeracy learning emerged as important within this aspect of the ideal preschool experience. Most parents argued that the structure of the Kenyan educational system, especially in Nairobi, requires a child to be well prepared in literacy and numeracy skills. English, the language of education in Kenya, is not usually a child's first language. It then becomes important for children to be introduced to the English language and to be able to communicate in it by the time they join primary school. Other parents agreed with Okoth that preschool was important for the child's future learning as well as their development as

illustrated by the following extracts from interviews.

> Naliaka: *With the current structure of schools ... and the demands made by schools in Nairobi, I think there is very little choice as to whether to take your child to preschool or not. Primary schools have built in what they expect is done at preschool. ... it would be disadvantageous not to take a child to a preschool.*

> Wanjiku: *Very important. ... [it] gives the child the foundation that they need before they join the primary or preparatory education. ... They learn basic literacy and numeracy ...* Ushindi: *Yes it is. ... things like hand-writing, language. You would always remember what your first teacher taught you, ... Children will definitely emulate it, how they read, how they talk ... they learn a lot of things.*

The Child

All the parents perceived the preschool child as needing support and freedom to develop and learn. '*Let the Child be*' was a recurrent theme in their descriptions of an ideal preschool. One of its sub-themes was '*Let the Child be a Child*'.

Let the Child be a Child. This theme is characterised by an underlying desire for their children to be free, expressed as both freedom to, and freedom from. On the one hand, all parents wanted children to be free to play, socialise and explore and on the other hand, to be free from the demands of a competitive and formal academic curriculum. At the same time, they acknowledged that the child's preschool experience needed to be purposeful and that play was the meeting place of freedom and purpose, availing support and opportunities for the child to learn and develop. Being purposeful was conceptualised as gaining autonomy in learning as well as in life both underpinned by a desire for the child to be free to be a child.

The following conversations are constructed from excerpts of the interview transcripts that foreground parents' wishes that the child be free to be a child. Teachers and parents determine what happens at school and at home respectively, whether children have the freedom to be children, to be playful, and to be purposeful.

Researcher: *What do you mean by the phrase 'Let the Child be a Child?'*

Wambui: *Allow the child to be a child. What I have in mind is give that child enough time to play, ... enough time to explore. They just play with each other, learn how to relate and acquire social skills.*

Naisiaye: *Let kids be kids ... not so much of a lot of work such that at nursery somebody is having homework, no, no. A free environment where kids are actually kids at that age ... It is a place to find out who this child is.*

Wanjiku: *... give that child enough time to play, ... enough time to explore. That is what I mean by letting a child be a child. Children do most of their things through play, through interacting with others freely, and that way you also help them develop.*

Ndindi: *Let a child be a child ... It feels like they have been denied the chance to be children ... to grow as children and play.*

Wambui: *Allowing children to grow as children ... to go through the real stages of development.*

The parents' repeated use of the phrase '*Let the Child be a Child'* implies a concern that children were being coerced to fit into adult structures and expectations within which children were "being denied a chance to be a child". Four categories emerged from this sub-theme: unstructured time, interpersonal relationships, play and exploration. Implicit is the parents' awareness of the purposeful yet carefree, experimental nature of childhood and the

significance of relationships with others considered important in the intellectual, emotional, physical and social development of the child. These four categories also emerged as being interrelated and interconnected to the other major themes of '*Let the Child be a Child*', '*Let the Child be Free*', '*Let the Child be Playful*' and '*Let the Child be Purposeful*'.

Let the Child be Free. Codes under this theme stressed parents' desire that the child be afforded time and space to control, learn and develop at their own pace. Most parents believed that the child did not need to be forced to learn. They felt ideally childhood is a carefree time, when children are free to experiment and explore their environment without fear of failure or reprimand from the adults. Several parents wanted children to be accorded time and space to direct their learning activities. They conveyed a strong sense of the desire to '*Let the Child be Free*', to have more control of what and how they learnt. As Ndindi suggested:

> *Let them know they can just run around and nobody expects them to do homework by running around. That is what I mean by children being children. Let them do what they would want to do as children not what we have to structure for them to do.*

Ndindi's remarks resonate with other parents' definitions of '*Let the Child be a Child*' as a 'happy-go-lucky' kind of life that a child should have in the early years. Ndindi, like other parents, contrasted this with the current trend in the majority of preschools requiring children to do homework, cover predetermined content and sit for exams within the established formal structure of preschool.

So '*Let the Child be Free*' was seen as freeing the child from these adult demands. Such demands and control were circumscribed in the content that children were supposed to master, the routine and rigour demanded by the system that acted to fulfil adult's wishes. This

notion of '*Let the Child be Free*' as freedom from the demands of adults within the confines of a competitive academic curriculum are summed up by Naliaka:

> *I would want less of homework and less of teachers drilling the kids ... in the early years of the child exposure to school. There would be more activities that involve the child in the learning process. More things to do and fewer things to remember or abstract concepts that the child would have to struggle with like learning through games. I want it to be more fun and more games and other interesting things for the child.*

Most parents considered making the child fit within the adult-structured curriculum and learning environments inappropriate for the young child. Okwalo thought that "*The idea of controlling too much is not good.*"

Some parents argued that such adult-controlled environments stifle children's natural curiosity and creativity. While unstructured time is considered vital for the development and learning of the child as illustrated by Namachanja.

> "*We should leave the child some time for their own creativity as they interact with other children and they naturally explore their surroundings*".

Moreover, Manyasi considered adult-controlled learning confusing for the young child as he stated:

> *This is a person who does not know why all this. 'Why I am waking up so early, why am I being forced to sit, why am I not just being free to do what I want to? Why would I not be a child?' I think at that level, they need to be children.*

Implicit was a feeling that restrictive environments and making demands on children denied them opportunities to develop as children and that the child was being hurried to

mature. Wambui and Nyaore supported the view that letting the child be free was essential for their development:

Some parents also wanted children to be availed with a free environment where they can follow their interests, try out things, interact and express themselves. Such an environment would be responsive to the individual child's needs, providing opportunities for him/her to identify potentials and talents and to *"nurture* [them] *from the early stage"* (Okwalo). Ideally, as Nyaore suggested, each child would be treated as an individual and given opportunities to develop and learn at his/her own pace:

Further, these parents appreciated the great potential that the natural environment affords children in their overall learning and development. Several parents wanted teachers to provide time for children to interact with the natural environment instead of being confined in the classrooms. The following excerpts, illustrate most parents call for more time for exploring the environment and incidental learning where the curriculum emerges from children's experiences and interactions:

Nyaore: *I would want children to be engaged at different levels physically to interact with the environment ... with nature not somewhere closed in or in a building but somewhere open.*

Wambui: *Give that child enough time to explore.*

Mwasambwa: *Learning that involves exploring the environment.*

Kanini: *... them exploring the world around them.*

Let the Child be Playful. '*Let the Child be Playful*' emerged because, according to all parents, a child's ability to learn is especially expressed through free play, where they can choose what and how much of their environment they explore. All the parents most

151

frequently talked about giving children time, space and resources for play. Parents considered play crucial to their child's development and learning. In describing their ideal preschool, all parents agreed that play was an important component of children's development and learning as demonstrated by the following interview extracts.

Ndindi: *Play, play …, playing, playing and playing … the chance to grow as children and play.*

Kanini: *It will just be play, play, play, play. … more games.*

Ndindi: *I would want the children to play a lot.*

Serende: *I would expect that it has a lot of play things.*

Nyaore: … a*dd more of the play things … I would have them play. … increase the time for play …*

Wanjiku: *Allow the child to play, provide free play and provide a variety of environments in which the child can play, as a priority giving the children more time to play.*

Parents' desire that the child be given time and space for play promotes their view that children need and are able to learn on their own, as seen in the sub-theme '*Let the Child be Free*'. Most parents argued that learning is easier and more adaptable to the child when it is integrated with play. On being asked why play was important in their description of their ideal preschools, the following parents stated:

Manyasi: *Play adds up to the total learning process of a child.*

Akoth*: Children like to play and most of the time that is their life.. If you can especially incorporate that in learning then you just make learning easy and something they easily adapt to. ... because they just like to play.*

Serende: *I know with the young children most of their learning is through doing and through play.*

Wambui: *Children learn especially through play ... give that child enough time to play.*

All parent participants were aware of the importance of play in a child's life, including developing a child's creativity, language, communication, problem solving and social skills. Further, play was considered important in the overall development and motivation of the child in learning as stated by Mbogo and Nyaore respectively.

Play is important because without play the child is bored, without play you are bored. ... actually it's a part of life. It is part of the things that are necessary for the growth of a whole being.

At that age play is so crucial to children. It helps them in their development in so many ways. ... socially, intellectually, even emotionally. When they are playing and they lose a game they learn how to cope with failure and things like that. Then I think playing children are happy children let them play.

Parents' conceptions of the benefits of play in the early years also emerged in the next sub-theme '*Let the Child be Purposeful*', which in my analysis of parents' descriptions of '*The Ideal: Choice of Play*' emerged as the bridge between freedom and play.

Let the Child be Purposeful. This sub-theme is the cumulative effect of the child's freedom. It is the end product of '*Let the Child be Free*' and '*Let the Child be Playful*'. With

the support and understanding of responsible adults, play acts as a bridge between freedom and purpose. Explaining why play is important in early childhood, Mwasambwa said:

> *Our ability to get other people's points of view and process that and give them our view … comes out naturally when kids are playing. So they are learning but the most important thing is that they are learning how to learn. … Learning is about your ability to learn. So at that age we should concentrate more on that kind of environment where they are learning how to learn.*

Most of the parents considered free play especially important in availing opportunities for the child to become an independent learner. Of course, in the context of conversations about schooling, a primary focus is learning. Mwasambwa's comment above was particularly pertinent. As if to allay concerns that giving children freedom will give rise to anarchy, he went on to say:

> *Because as they are playing they have to listen to one another, come up with their own rules … you have to do things this way. They start to explore the environment. May be they find ants … they go there and start finding out … They are stung by the ants so they discover that these ants, we know they can sting … So they are learning but the most important thing is that they are learning how to learn.*

It is through free play that children learn to learn, become creative, make and obey rules and are able to make decisions. In an ideal ECEC service, instead of being dictated to and restricted by the adults, children would be afforded opportunities to plan their own learning. Furthermore, according to Namachanja and Okwalo, free play affords opportunities for children's creativities and discoveries.

> Namachanja: *I think letting the child loose creates opportunities for innovations and creativity. When they are left out to go and play with other kids it is also a time to be*

able to develop in a different way by experiencing. [The teacher should] integrate

learning with fun and make it as natural as possible. We should leave the child some

little time for their own creativity as they interact with other children, and naturally

explore their surroundings.

Okwalo: *Kids [should] be given tasks … give them room to play around with those*

tasks and see how well they are doing.

This category was labelled '*Let the Child be Purposeful*' because when the child

engages in exploring the environment, the child decides what he wants to explore, changes

activity if bored or if the environment is no longer stimulating and thereby gains knowledge

which guides his/her own learning.

Linked to free play and also seen to help the child to be purposeful are the social

interactions that play avails. Parents considered such interactions important in the overall

development – cognitive, emotional, physical and social of the child.

Mwasambwa: *Socialisation will play a very significant role in terms of their inquiry*

because as they interact with other kids, number one they are learning a lot from each

other and that is a very important thing in intellectual development.

Some parents also considered social interactions important in preparing the child for

the wider community. Children develop social skills such as associating, communicating and

asserting themselves. In response to the question of why it was important to enrol their

children into preschool at the time that they did, most parents said it was because they wanted

their children to develop social skills. The following interview extract illustrate important

social skills that parents hoped that their children would develop by attending preschool.

155

Nyaore: *In school there are many children so the social environment created is quite different from the one at home which means even the activities they do ... within that educational environment will be enhanced...*

Kanini: [It] *develops their social skills ... motor skills, interaction skills ... speaking skills*

Mwasambwa: *I would prefer that the child spends more time socialising with other children.*

Wakesho*: I want them to learn social skills, how to be independent, and life skills. You want your child to have good morals.*

Naisiaye: *… an environment where their character is moulded.*

These parents felt that an ideal preschool would nurture child assertiveness, self-knowledge, and responsible ways of expressing her/his emotions, moral values and character. As Ndege pointed out, through such interactions, children develop autonomy and establish their own value systems.

> *A programme that adds value ... not only in terms of head knowledge, but emotional, social connectivity and ability to express themselves. It has a value that takes you beyond just head knowledge, it anchors your life.*

Ndege's view conveys an appreciation for a holistic approach to learning and for education contextualised by democratic ideals. Preschool as a foundational anchor for life, forming a child's value systems, self-assertiveness, self-expression and attitudes, allows them to be in a position to decide what they want to do and vice versa. Okwalo explains this further:

> *I think the early age is a very critical time to what happens to kids in later years including their attitude to school. So early years should be the time to shape the kids*

156

attitudes towards education and develop other skills whether they are things they do

with their hands or whatever skills that may be necessary.

The tone and structure of parents' claims when asked to describe an ideal preschool makes it apparent that the ideal is something that is constructed, something for which 'we' can and must take responsibility. The parents claim for instance that, *"We have to structure; we should leave the child some time* (Okwalo); "W*e should concentrate more on that kind of environment where they are learning how to learn"* (Tumaini); *"We must look for a programme that balances" (*Mwasmbwa*)".* So who is this 'we'? An analysis of the interviews with parents made it apparent that the 'we' are parents and teachers and 'we' are co-responsible – another emergent theme of '*The Ideal'*.

Teacher-Parent Relationship
Implicit throughout the above discussion of '*Let the Child be*' is the sense that children's environment, the opportunities for freedom and play are dependent on the adults responsible.

The opportunities are dependent on the parent, teacher and teacher-parent relationship. Mwasambwa emphasised that teacher-parent relationships should be reciprocal, with the teacher and the parent playing specific but complementary roles.

> *I think that the relationship should be mutual. ...On one hand, parents need to respect teachers and the fact that they are the professionals and that is their field. As much as I am an educationist… I am not a preschool teacher. .. I have to give that teacher the space and the respect to do what they need to do. ...the teacher too has to accept the fact that this is my child. ….Being my child, I have the ultimate responsibility of ensuring that my child is given the right kind of education. If I have a question, a comment or an observation they should be open enough to listen….*

157

In this section I look at the role of the teacher as well as that of the parent in realising '*The Ideal*'. On one hand, each party must be willing to give space to the other to play their roles effectively. On the other, they must be willing to play complementary roles to maximise benefits for the child in the two environments: home and school. This section opens with a conversation constructed of excerpts from interviews that demonstrate these views.

Researcher: *How would you describe an ideal teacher-parent relationship?*

Chebet: *The two of them should work as a team. There should be team work between teachers and parents and of course the child who is the centre of all …*

Mutiso: *The parent and the teachers should behave like parents. So the relationship should not be teacher-parent but it should be like that of two parents. We are raising these children it is only that I do it at home and you do it in school. At the same time the teacher has the responsibility to start teaching them. But they should be like the second parents.*

Okwalo: *They should both be committed to assisting the child. It's good that there is rapport between the parent and the teacher.*

Wambui: *It should be in such a way that what is happening in school, the parent is aware. Preschools should not be a place of dumping our children. It should be a place of continuation of learning from home. And from preschool when they come home it is also a place of continuation. So they should work hand in hand.*

From the above conversations, all parent participants perceived strong teacher-parent relationship as an important component of ECEC. Such a relationship would entail sharing information, working as a team, and allowing both the teacher and parent to each play his/her complementary roles as discussed later in this section. Parents identified different reasons

why it is imperative to have close relationships with teachers including sharing information so that the child learns the right things, creating space so that each plays her/his complementary roles, and developing rapport so that each provides the needed care for the child as exemplified by the following interview excerpts:

> Serende: *A cordial relationship because both of you are the child's parents. ... They play your role when you are not there. … This is a kid who is learning, and he can easily learn the wrong things. So if you have a good relationship with the teacher, you can exchange notes to ensure the child learns the right things.*

> Okwalo: *... because the kid may not be necessarily able to tell you what happened.*

> Wakesho: *Teachers should be like friends so that they get to know about the child even outside the school.*

> Mutiso: *... because the two of them are moulding these children.*

While Waititu supported cordial teacher-parent relationships, she acknowledged the associated challenges if they are not well managed. She was adamant that teacher-parent relationships work within mutual respect and the ethos of partnership:

> *Close yet far or rather close yet distant ... and respect for each other. As a parent I should know who the teacher to my child is and the teacher needs to know the mother. I think that is how far it should go. It should not be too close that eventually may be the teacher will be biased about your child. Maintain professionalism.*

All the parent participants valued childhood and considered their relationship with teachers an important aspect of ensuring quality care and education. They appeared ready to be invited into a relationship of co-responsibility. Such relationships are important in facilitating both parents' and teachers' abilities to meet the needs of children.

159

One such need is to help the child to smoothly transit from home to school. Joining school for the first time is a daunting experience for the child and can at times be very stressful. Therefore, the child needs the support of both the teacher and the parent to feel safe in a new environment. Namachanja articulated the need for both the teacher and the parent to support the child by stating: *As children begin school they are more attached to home than to school, so even that transition needs to be managed well ... the presence of the parent is important.* Asked why such support was important, he explained:

> *You are taking the child from a home environment to a school environment and you need to transit them well. They need to feel secure that you are there as a parent and the teacher is also able to receive them well.*

Further, a strong teacher-parent relationship was considered important in creating congruence between home and the school. Home/school congruence emerged as especially critical in firstly, augmenting the ability of both environments to meet children's needs, and secondly, providing the necessary support for children under five years of age who need the security of connection between home and school. Nyaore argued that the relationship is particularly important *"because these children are still so small, they still need that connection between the home and the preschool which the parent can provide."*

All parent participants considered themselves knowledgeable about their children and were willing to share this information with the teacher. Sharing information about the child in both environments can help teachers and parents respond appropriately to the child. Some parents (Naisiaye, Kanini and Chebet) said that if teachers have more information about the child, they can relate more meaningfully and in a more specific way to the child's needs. Similarly, Maritim argued:

I want to have a teacher who will not just give me the file and then tells me she did okay. I want to have a teacher whom I can ask 'What do you think about my daughter? What do you think we can do to help my daughter?' That kind of a thing. I would like a teacher who will be free enough to tell me your child has this problem that I need to address. ... It would be good if I could sit in class and see what is going on without the teacher necessarily feeling intimidated.

As highlighted by Maritim in the comments above, parents wanted to know what is happening with their children at preschool. Such knowledge, parents argued, would help them understand their children better and respond appropriately. Ndege asserted that it would be possible to identify any weaknesses in the child at an earlier stage and therefore provide the necessary interventions. Similarly, Naisiaye wanted a relationship where she could share information about her child's experiences at home with the teacher.

Additionally, parents wanted teachers to be honest when giving feedback so that they could provide the necessary support for their children. The comments of one parent, Ndege, is perhaps more compelling about the need for parents to know how their children were doing at preschool.

Of absolute openness [referring to teacher-parent relationship]. *Tell me when my kid is doing well. Tell me when my kid is not doing well don't sugar coat it. The challenge we have is that many teachers would want parents to only know the good side of their children and not the negative side because they don't want the parents to think that the teacher is segregating their kid. I don't think that is really helping. It helps the parent to know how to treat his kid. So I look forward to that open honest openness between the teacher and the parent.*

Underpinning parents' desire for strong teacher-parent relationship was the understanding that both the teacher and parent needed to take the initiative to cultivate and maintain it. For some parents, they felt that the teacher held more responsibility in inviting them and creating both space and opportunities for interactions to develop meaningful relationships. However, for other parents, developing such relationships was a shared responsibility between teachers and parents. In the following section I examine different ways parents identified to build teacher-parent co-responsibility.

Enhancing teacher-parent co-responsibility.
The conversation between the researcher and one of the parents is an apt way to start to discuss ways of strengthening teacher parent relationship.

Tumaini: Teacher-*parent-teacher's interaction needs to be enhanced.*

Researcher: *Whose responsibility do you think it is to enhance such interactions?*

Tumaini: *I think the school does have a responsibility. The teachers because they are professionals and more forward looking than other professionals should lead the way on how to best encourage these interactions.*

Some parents talked about bureaucracies in schools that hinder them from initiating and developing close relationships with the teachers. For that reason, parents like Tumaini considered teachers to be better placed by their position and training to initiate these relationships. These parents argued that teachers could enhance teacher-parent relationships through increased forums for interactions, such as one-on-one meetings with the parent, group meetings and unstructured forums like social events. Such social events included open days, prize giving days and sports days when children, teachers and parents could interact freely. A teacher's responsibility in creating strong relationships with parents is also supported by Maritim as he speculates lack of time and school policies as challenges.

Likewise, other parents like Ushindi and Ndege seemed aware of power issues and restrictive administrative structures referred to by Maritim, which could impede meaningful interactions between teachers and parents:

> Ushindi: … *have an open day whereby the parents just come and mingle with the children, other parents and the teachers. Or the parents and the teachers alone whereby the parents are able to air out their views, problems or challenges and vice versa and discuss them. That would be very helpful.*

> Ndege: *... more open forums between parents and teachers. ... more forums for sports and such like things.*

Other parents emphasised the mutual responsibility between teachers and parents in enhancing strong relationships. They acknowledged that while schools have a responsibility to provide opportunities for interactions, the success of such forums depended on both the teachers' and the parents' willingness to make them meaningful. Tumaini pointed out that a two-way communication with genuine sharing of information becomes a critical point in creating meaningfulness.

> *It is important to consistently have a channel through which as a parent you can raise your voice. You can give your ideas.*

Agreeing on the importance of having open communication to promote the teacher-parent relationship, Wanjiku argued:

> *It is two ways, on one hand, teachers opening up communication lines by encouraging parents to communicate their concerns either through the diaries or go to school in person, and on the other, parents being open to teachers. Because a teacher may want to interact freely with parents but sometimes the parents are so*

aloof or they show that teachers really do not have to keep on disturbing them per se. *If both parties are open to communication that would help.*

The foregoing suggests that parent participants consider teacher-parent relationships essential in strengthening both the home and school potential in meeting a child's developmental and learning needs. Realising positive strong teacher-parent relationship depends on both teachers' and parents' initiatives and willingness to work together.

Further analyses of data revealed that parent participants perceived the teacher and themselves as playing specific but complementary roles. The sub-theme '*The Role of the Teacher: Teacher as Responsible*' captures parents' ideals of how the teacher could use the school environment to create opportunities and provide support for the child. Three interrelated categories emerged under '*The Role of the Teacher: Teacher as Responsible*'. These were: '*Teacher as a Playmate*', '*Planning and Implementing Play-based Learning*' and '*Acting Professionally*'.

The other sub-theme of '*Teachers and Parent as Co-Responsible*' was '*The Role of the Parent*'. This captures that parent participants considered themselves to be co-responsible in actualising their ideal. Four interrelated categories emerged under this sub-theme. Parent as Co-responsible: '*Supporting the Child*', '*Walking alongside the Teacher*', '*Keeping your Ears on the Ground*', and '*Parent as a Co-Teacher*'.

Teacher as responsible.
The parent should hold the teacher accountable because much of the day when we are working the teacher interacts with the child more yet know that the child's life and educational future lays on the teacher's co-operation and willingness to bring it to be (Manyasi).

Manyasi's comments are a good starting point for discussing the role of the teacher in realising '*The Ideal*'. Children spend a significant amount of their time at preschool and therefore the teacher has the greatest influence on their learning and development. However, for that time to be meaningful, the teacher must be willing to provide the necessary opportunities and support for children's development and learning.

Three major roles emerged indicating the key responsibility of the teacher in realising '*The Ideal*': forming relationships, preparing for formal learning and providing professional advice. All the parents interviewed considered forming relationships with children an important component of early childhood education and care. All data relating to teacher-child relationships were categorised as '*Teacher as a Playmate*'.

All relevant data pertaining to preparing for formal learning were categorised as '*Planning and Implementing Play-based Learning*'.

Parents wanted teachers to be willing to share their knowledge and skills thereby improving the former's abilities in dealing with their children. Tied to the teachers' expertise, parents acknowledged teachers' training, characteristics and remuneration as critical in being able to carry out the three roles effectively. All data relating to teacher training and parents' expectations that teachers would use their expertise for informing them on child development and learning were categorised as '*Acting Professionally*'. Each of these themes is discussed below.

Teacher as a Playmate.
It is the capacity of the teachers to make kids their friends. So I think the kids go to school because they like the teachers. They like the things that teachers do with them. It's not the same thing going to a person who will tell you go there, sit there, and do that and that kind of a thing. It's like a playmate if you like (Okwalo).

The category name '*Teacher as a Playmate*' is borrowed from Okwalo. Here I highlight the centrality of play in a child's early life, already discussed under '*Let the Child be Playful*'. Okwalo's remarks, which resonate with other parents, underpin the importance of the teacher entering into the child's world of play, not to give instructions but to become learners with them.

Parents in the current study were aware of the importance of rich interactive settings in providing the atmosphere and support for the child to feel safe to form relationships. These relationships help children develop the emotional security needed to engage in learning. Chebet was of the view that teachers should create a learning environment similar to that at home.

> *Staff that reflects the home environment…The teachers must be able to provide that. The teacher should really be like mothers because first you are taking the child not because the major need is education but first of all you want him to get used to school and to the teachers. Such an orientation would be able to at least help parents plus their children to settle down.*

Some parents acknowledged the investment in terms of time that forming such relationship requires, particularly in an environment with an emphasis on academic performance. Therefore, as Chebet pointed out, training of the teachers is crucial to be able to balance between the academic demands and the emotional needs of children:

> *A special course would be needed for the personnel in schools to have a touch with the children so that it is not a serious business of just studies. There is a bonding or a kind of friendship that can be formed so that when they go to class there is that trust that is already built.*

Aware of the demanding curriculum and the pressure on the teacher to cover the set syllabus, Naisiaye considered forming relationships with children sufficiently critical to warrant a teacher assistant specifically to deal with the emotional health of children, underscoring the importance of high adult: children ratios:

Apart from having a class teacher there could be an assistant teacher who is concerned about the child's welfare. This person talks with the child to know what the child has been through, what is happening at home outside the classroom. The teacher in the classroom will teach you academics but this other teacher is for your child's welfare ... sometimes the kids are not able to express themselves or they have no one to tell what they have undergone. ... so kids have somebody to interact with closely.

Some of the parents associated close relationships between teachers and children, children and teachers, and children and children with high staff to children ratios or small classes. Parent participants desired that by having close teacher-child relationships and vice versa their children would receive individualised attention as illustrated by Wakesho and Wanjiku:

Wakesho: *You want to have sufficient personnel before you even know how they teach. Do they have enough teachers and help staff to care for the children enrolled in their school?*

Wanjiku: *I expect the teacher would give more personalised attention to each child. I don't expect a teacher to handle too many students where too many I am talking of when a class goes beyond 15–20 students that's a class I would expect to have one teacher and a teacher assistant.*

Having small classes, some parents argued, would mean that the teacher are able to enter into the child's world, identify and provide opportunities for the development of individual talents and abilities. Naliaka pointed out that such learning environments would provide for differentiated learning levels according to individual children's learning abilities and pace. "*It would be a school that is interested in the child as an individual. A school where children are able to explore themselves, identify their potential, and are led to grow in their pace.*"

Some parents associated a teacher's ability to form strong relationships with children with personal characteristics, others with training and others still with both personal characteristics and training (teacher's training is discussed in details under '*Acting Professionally*'). These personal characteristics, as highlighted by Manyasi and Mbogo, include being "*caring and loving*" and the "*ability to handle children*". Tumaini added that it would help if teachers are friendly, so that it is easier for both children and parents to relate to them. Chebet, a mother with a child who struggled to settle in school and Maritim associated good training with a teacher's ability to help children to bond and form relationships. They asserted that teachers with the necessary training made it easier for children to develop trust in them, and for the parents to be confident that they could entrust their children to such teachers.

Those parents who associated the ability of teachers to form relationships with children with training, also reported that training in child development also improved a teacher's awareness of the characteristics and needs of children. With increased knowledge, the teacher is able to plan and organise the learning environment to support the development and learning of the child. Nyaore, for example, argued:

It begins with well qualified teachers. Qualified teachers because I think it is very important that teachers understand children. Training in early childhood education and child development plays a big role in knowing how to handle children.

Maritim added that training in child development would also help teachers to be sensitive to the cultural settings and backgrounds of individual children and therefore provide the necessary support for diversity:

I would like to see a programme whose teachers have been trained to specifically address those needs as per the social cultural environment that the children are in. So that they are sensitive to those needs, and are able to address children's needs effectively. So critical things would be getting to understand the developmental needs of the kids and train teachers who would be sensitive to those needs so that they can setup a good foundation for the children to move over to primary school.

Additionally, these parents considered the professional development of teachers important in equipping them with the necessary skills to create rich environments for children. Talking about what she would do if she were to provide an 'ideal' preschool, Wakesho stated:

"I would provide teachers with exchange programmes where they would visit other schools to learn what others are doing".

Manyasi supported the need for teachers' professional and personal development by wanting the teacher to be well informed through seeking out recent research on teaching.

Planning and implementing play-based learning. Parent participants indicated that they wanted the teacher to plan, organise and implement learning in ways that met their ideal of '*Let the Child be*'. This included planning holistic and developmentally appropriate

learning experiences, providing adequate space, sufficient and appropriate learning materials for children that were 'homelike', interesting and attractive, and structuring learning experiences in such a way that children enjoyed learning.

Holistic approach to learning. Parents in the current study, considered a child's growth and learning to be holistic. They therefore expected that in an ideal preschool the teacher would provide learning that supported the child to develop cognitively, physically, socially, emotionally and spiritually. Based on their training and experience, teachers would allocate sufficient time and use an integrated approach in catering for the all-round development of the child. Mwasambwa, in the conversation with the researcher cited below, emphasised the role of the teacher in creating an environment that provides for holistic learning.

> Mwasambwa: *The teacher is the one who is supposed to take the child through all those dimensions. The child does not know that at this point I am focusing on intellectual growth, at this point I am focusing on socialisation. We must look for a programme that balances, in my opinion, three things. They must balance the cognitive, intellectual and social development. The child must socialise with other kids and there must be some element of spiritual growth.*
>
> **Researcher**: *What do you think the teacher should do to provide for such a holistic development?*
>
> Mwasambwa: *... the teacher will need to prepare a very good programme. Therefore, a teacher needs to be trained so that they are conscious of these three issues that we are focusing on, allocate sufficient time and perhaps use an integrated approach. ... while the child is socialising with other kids, they are socialising through play. As they play what are they playing about? We should bring in some values ... some*

intellectual challenges that will build the child. So it's more of a very integrated

programme.

Further, parent participants desired that teachers would avail opportunities for the child to be reflective of their abilities and opinions thereby being 'Purposeful'. Children would also acquire the necessary social and communication skills to relate with others. Opportunities for reflective thinking were specifically important because parents viewed early childhood as a critical stage when children formed their value systems and set the foundation for future learning. As Mwasambwa pointed out *"at that age it is still quite early and that's when they start forming their value systems and all that. ... so those three there must be some intellectual growth, socialisation and spiritual development."*

Parent participants reported that co-curricular activities provided ideal opportunities for the teacher to identify children's potential and for them to explore and develop these potentials. Such co-curricular activities could be sports, such as swimming and basketball. Okwalo added that there is a need to treat children as children and to provide a free environment where their talents would be identified and nurtured. *"An ideal one will be where it allows kids to have their talents develop, an environment where kids develop in all aspects without harassment"*.

Creating learning space. All parents considered the role of the teacher crucial in providing an appropriate and creative space to support the '*Let the Child be*' theme. Implicit in parents' desire for adequate space for learning is the awareness that the way the teacher organises and uses space determines whether learning will be flexible or rigid, interactive or close, or at individual, small group or whole class level. Adequate physical space would provide children with opportunities to explore, discover and play freely (Nyaore, Kanini and Mwasambwa), a variety of learning activities in which they can engage (Nyaore and Kanini)

171

and opportunities to interact with the learning resources, peers and adults in school as well as others in the community (Mwasambwa, Tumaini, Mbogo and Ndege). Particularly, Nyaore's comments capture the need to have sufficient space, facilities and resources to support children's learning.

> "*I would want the school to have enough space. ... have as many facilities as possible for children to engage at different levels, physically, cognitively, and to interact with the environment. Facilities that will challenge them intellectually...*"

Different parents highlighted specific activities that teachers could utilise given enough space as illustrated in the following excerpts:

> Kanini: *A big playing ground outside, swings, plenty of sand, plenty of things for children to do, ... a garden, maybe keep some rabbits, or pets where children can really get dirty.*

> Akoth: *More space so that children can go outside and play by themselves.*

> Nyaore: *Space because children are growing, they have energy they need enough space to move about and the more they are able to interact with their environment the better. Whether that environment is the other children or the physical facilities or whatever they are all important for their overall development. Everything they see and touch and interact with all their senses will affect the way they grow...*

As cited above, Nyaore conceptualised the learning environment not only in terms of the physical space but also the social environment provided by other children and adults in the preschool. Such an overall view of the learning environment is important in supporting the all-round development of the child. Another way of providing space would be by using resources in the larger community, through field excursions for children to learn about the

172

environment, and as a way to break the monotony of the classroom as explained by Wakesho. *"I would also want them to have school trips. It should be organised where children can also learn from the environment."*

Adequate and appropriate facilities. Parent participants wanted their children to be provided with adequate and appropriate facilities to enrich the learning environment. They wanted their children to be provided with opportunities to learn through doing. These facilities include both physical structures such as swimming pools and playgrounds, as well as learning resources such as toys, models and games. These parents pointed out that providing such materials need not be too expensive, because teachers could use locally available raw material to make them. In the following conversation between with the researcher, Wanjiku explained why she considered adequate and appropriate play materials important at preschool.

Wanjiku: *The other thing I would consider is the play materials. Does the school have enough play materials? And are these play materials appropriate for their age and are they also friendly for them to use?*

Researcher: *Why do you think these materials are important?*

Wanjiku: *Because I know with the young children they require those materials for learning. Most of their learning is through doing and through play. Then the field they are playing in, how safe is it? Is it free from logs or things that can injure them? And even the other play materials if it is swings do they have broken parts that could injure the child?*

Parents in the current study pointed out that the learning materials should be age appropriate because children are young and can easily be injured. Appropriate materials also meant that they would match children's preferences, interests and abilities so that children

could make safe and useful choices and engage in appropriate activities. Resonating with other most parents views on the need for adequate play materials, Mbogo argued: *"An ideal preschool would involve having the best facilities which can occupy kids, know what a kid would need, so they should be those facilities that a child would need to play."*

The desire for the facilities at preschool to be functionally appropriate for children is indicative of the need for the centre to be designed in a way that supported the child in being '*Purposeful'*. Being purposeful means that children can perform simple tasks independently while at the same time gaining self-help skills to direct and control their learning. Further, it means that children can experiment with what they are learning in different contexts to explore and understand the world around them. Preschool should be designed having the children in mind in a way that encourages and supports them to be independent as explained by Wanjiku. *I would consider how secure and friendly the facilities are for children. Something as simple as toilet for example, are they low enough for young children to reach? Or the taps or sinks ... do they need to hold each other up to wash their hands?*

Moreover, as Mbogo and Wanjiku argued in the excerpts below, facilities being appropriate also means that they would have the necessary safety measures in place to protect children from straying away from school unnoticed, intruders or serious injuries.

Mbogo: *It will also have safety gadgets and when I am talking about safety gadgets it's like the general set up of the buildings, the environment and all that.*

Wanjiku: *…a school that takes into consideration the security of the children. How secure are children while they are in that environment? ... When children come in there "is it a place where children would easily walk in and out or somebody can walk in and out and may be do anything to a child or abduct a child?"*

Facilities that are home-like. Some of the parents said that school facilities and the environment should be home-like. Home-like facilities were considered comfortable, emotionally supportive, friendly, safe and clean. Furthermore, the home-like environment was considered ideal in that it was flexible, affording the child the necessary freedom to be a child, playful and purposeful. Asked how teachers could provide the homelike flexibility that parents wanted for their children, Okwalo and Chebet had the following to say.

> Okwalo: *... if we are unable to detach ourselves from that idea of creating an informal environment, may be this home-like environment helps, in certain aspects because even teachers don't feel restricted, they don't feel they have to follow a particular system where there are bells this time and that time, in a formal school environment it's very difficult.*

> Chebet: *It would be one that is really a reflection of the home whereby children feel safe. All the toys they find at home, the games they find at home, of course the personnel that reflect the home environment. They see like they are in the house. They are provided with all the facilities they see at home. ... The most insecure thing that a child feels is when they are somehow isolated from home.*

Underscored in the above comments is parents' desire that the child would feel safe at school. As Chebet suggested, the likeness of the school environment to that of the home would help children with smooth transition to school. Serende added that children would also feel secure to form relationships. *"I would like a conducive environment, more or less like the home environment, these are kids just coming from home and they would want an environment that is comfortable, and friendly."*

Learning environment that is interesting.
Tumaini: *How do you structure the hours that children are in school? How do you ensure that they are actually enjoying being there?*

All parent participants wanted learning environments that were stress-free, attractive and colourful which provided for documentation of children's learning. Expectations for a learning environment where children enjoyed learning were described in earlier sections. Tumaini articulates learning that is interesting in her description of an ideal preschool:

> *An ideal preschool considering that here children go to school between two and a half and three years ... would be to introduce the child to the beauty of learning not to teach. Just to let them enjoy learning something new. So they are just enjoying acquiring knowledge ...*

Highlighting the role of the teacher in making learning enjoyable, Okwalo proposed: "*... making sure that children enjoy school*", while Wakesho emphasised: "*I look how they teach ... do they engage children? Do children want to come to school again?*" Meanwhile, Tumaini offered suggestions on making learning enjoyable, "*So you use a lot of extras, a lot of visuals, and a lot of songs, a lot of other methods. ... So that extra, whether extra curricula whatever it is you use to make learning fun is very important*".

Kyalo and Tumaini, describing the preschools their children were attending as ideal, use them to describe teaching approaches where learning is fun:

> Kyalo: *The methodologies that are used in the teaching and assessing children are also advanced.*

> **Researcher**: *What do you mean by their methodologies in teaching and assessing are advanced?*

> Kyalo: *The school had a lot of playing facilities. The kids have a lot of things. ... a piano ... balls ... play fields ... where this child can learn. At every learning level there are some activities. ... the first two years it's not so much actual learning ...*

There are a lot of activities and hands on like dancing, they are assessed on their dancing skills, joining, music, and writing ... the teachers are able to note when kids have problems.

Tumaini: *I remember in the first school there was a concert and all the drama around the concert it was a Muzungu (white man) school it was very nice. It was very interesting. They didn't read of course because they couldn't read and that was not needed. Here kids are going to feed rabbits so you don't really need to read. So that academic aspect ... ABC, 123 and 1+1... that drilling was not there yet children learnt.*

These parents described an exciting environment as being spacious, airy, decorated with attractive colours and children's work in form of pictures, paintings and wall hangings. Such environments were also friendly comfortable, clean, beautiful and inviting to children to want to come to school as captured by the following descriptions by parents.

Wanjiku: *The general lay-out of the classroom should be attractive to the child. ... a lot of pictures on the wall with different colours and shapes ... which would motivate the child to remain in that classroom.*

Manyasi: *… there are those maps and drawings ... walls that are decorated. ... for a child to learn the environment should be both interesting and comfortable. Also the desks and the rooms those are also important.*

Kanini: *I would have beautifully decorated walls, bright colours, where they can display their work whatever work they do.*

Ushindi: *The environment should also be friendly in terms of the way the classrooms look in colour, comfort, and cleanliness whereby they can leave their shoes and can*

sit in the classroom in whichever way.

Underpinning parents' desires that the learning environments be attractive and interesting is the importance of well-planned facilities to enhance the early experiences of the child. They underscore the critical role that the teacher plays in providing and planning a learning environment that supports children as they grow physically, cognitively, socially, emotionally and spiritually. The teacher is portrayed as being responsible in using what he/she knows about child development and learning to create learning experiences in a safe, nurturing and productive environment that would meet parents' ideals.

Acting Professionally. The category named '*Acting Professionally*' is borrowed from Waititu's description of her expectation of an ideal preschool. Professionalism is used here to depict teachers' levels of training and qualifications, the way they acted towards and related with children and in their willingness and ability to provide expert opinion on matters relating to child development in general and learning in particular. In describing their ideal preschool, some parents indicated that teachers' training and qualifications are important considerations as demonstrated in the following interview excerpts:

Chebet: *I also believe in a preschool there should be trained personnel.*

Wanjiku: *The qualifications of the teachers who are teaching there. Are they qualified to teach at preschool level?*

Wakesho: *You want to make sure they have specially trained personnel for the children.*

Training in early childhood education or child development parents contended, would equip teachers with knowledge and skills to understand and manage children. The knowledge

and skills gained were critical in the teacher being able to plan and organise the learning space that was sensitive and responsive to individual children's needs.

> **Researcher**: *In your description of an ideal preschool, you indicated that teachers' training and qualifications would be a major consideration. Why are these important to you?*
>
> Nyaore: *Training in child education and child development plays a big role in knowing how to handle children. Qualified teachers ... because these are children and they are being moulded. It is a foundation that is being laid, it is so important that the teachers understand children.*

Parents considered qualified teachers better equipped to work with and mould young children. Teachers with diploma training or higher were considered to have the necessary theoretical frameworks to understand and apply different approaches to teaching children. Furthermore, as Waititu argued, they would be able to demonstrate the kind of professionalism that teaching at preschool level calls for in dealing with both children and parents. Waititu considered teachers training to diploma as an appropriate level to teaching preschool. However, she pointed out that a degree would be preferable because teachers with lower training would struggle to understand the theoretical basis for teaching young children:

> *At least to a teacher training at diploma level ... where possible at a degree level. ... The challenge of degree holders going to preschools is more about the pay. So if the school was able to pay well I think the degree person level is the best. But based on the circumstances I think a diploma will be good.*

On being quizzed about why it was necessary for teachers to be trained at higher levels, Waititu said:

179

I believe people who manage to the degree level, or even diploma level would be able to conceptualise the methods they have been given. They will be able to apply them very well in the field. They will understand those children very well. But somebody with just basic training say certificate level ... they don't have all the details that are needed of a teacher. But secondly, the depths of child development ... those theories that are really relevant. ... a number of them do not have that deep understanding, they have just gone for four months training. So they do not handle children with professionalism as it is required and they may end up actually not giving the best quality of education. So I think the training of teachers to high levels is important.

Similar views are expressed by Mwasambwa on the importance of higher training for preschool teachers. Supporting the need for teachers to be able to provide expert opinion when needed by parents, Mwasambwa proposed that playing that role effectively and having the confidence to share their knowledge requires that teachers be highly trained:

Their level of education is also important because naturally here in Kenya preschool teachers will not be those who are highly educated. If they were, you would now exchange at that level and maybe they would understand where you are coming from, but at this point there is still that kind of a gap and as much as you try, at the end of the day they will feel that you [parent] are up there and they [teachers] are down here.

Part of the expert opinion that parents wished teachers would provide was about how to improve their relationships with their children (Tumaini, Maritim, Wanjiku and Wambui). As stated earlier, exchange of information and ideas between the teachers' and parents' was seen to increase the potential of both the home and the preschool in meeting the child's needs. Some parents like Wambui and Wanjiku wished that preschools would provide parent

180

education. They considered such forums as avenues for parents' own personal development in knowledge and skills, as they get to understand the educational approaches used by preschools. With increased understanding and skills, parents would build on school experiences to facilitate the child's early development and learning.

> Wanjiku: *Parents' education would be very critical. It helps parents to know how children learn. Sometimes, we force our children to move faster than their development. So if parents are enlightened … then they will appreciate when teachers say children must go home and rest for the holidays. Children must take their PE (physical education) lessons and Art lessons seriously. As is the practice, a parent will stop looking for that school which does not teach PE or Art, or engage children in any co-curricular activities substituting them with academics.*

Parents as Co-responsible.
Ndege: *So the role of parent is critical, it is crucial … When they know that mummy and daddy are interested in my work they open up. In schools there are challenges, they may not necessarily be the best children in school. If they cannot confide in the parent about their weaknesses at school they may be intimidated because somebody is doing a little bit better than them and the teacher may not concentrate on them. The parent becomes a fall-back position for the kid. Such fall-back is necessary for mental and emotional health, for the natural growth and for their faith.*

Ndege's remarks are an apt introduction to a discussion on how parents perceive their role in realising '*The Ideal*' preschool. In unpacking the theme '*Let the Child be*' it was evident that parents considered themselves to be co-responsible in actualising their ideal. Data relating to how parents conceptualised their role resulted in the emergent sub-theme '*Parent as Co-responsible*'. Four interrelated categories emerged under this sub-theme:

'*Supporting the Child*', '*Walking alongside the Teacher*', '*Keeping your Ears on the Ground*' and '*Parent as a Co-Teacher*'.

'*Parent as Co-responsible*' refers to parents' perceived shared and mutual responsibility in providing quality early childhood education and care. Specifically, it incorporates references to parents' perceived role in realising '*The Ideal*'. All the parents interviewed were aware that the freedom they wanted for their children is confined to, and contingent on, relations of power and authority beyond the control of the child, and often, within the contexts of schooling, beyond them. They were therefore willing and desiring that they be invited by the teachers as partners in creating meaningful experiences for their children. Parents in the current study were of the view that they were knowledgeable about their children and would therefore help to strategise together with the teacher on the best way to meet their needs. Also they were aware that their participation would clarify any misunderstanding that the teacher may have about their children, thereby providing direction for later learning. Namachanja and Nyaore explain the importance of parents playing their role:

> Namachanja: *... showing the teacher that this is my child, we have the same interest, and this is what we want this child to become, so let us work together. If that interaction and support is sustained it will be very beneficial in later years.*

> Nyaore: *Sometimes all it takes is a visit to the school. A friendly visit and you talk with the teacher because sometimes you may understand your child in a way that the teacher may not. Then you talk over it to give proper direction.*

Nyaore's comments underscore the importance of a common understanding of the child by the teacher and the parent. She emphasised the role that the parent should play in redressing some of the views and expectations that teachers may have about children. Such

clarifications, according to Nyaore, create better understanding of the child, thereby enriching a teacher's ability to meet the child's needs.

Supporting the child. Embedded in their plea for '*Let the Child be*' is the feeling that the child at preschool was still young, therefore needing protection and support to develop and learn. Hence it is logical that one of the parents' perceived roles was to provide moral support for their children. Parents judged moral support especially important to shield the child from the trauma of transiting from home to school, support him/her through challenges from demands and control of the formal system of education, and assure the child of their presence even within the school environment.

Parents considered transition from home to school a crucial point in a child's life, which could affect his/her emotional health. As Mwasambwa and Namachanja argued, parents' support of the child is especially important through this process as the child develops rapport with and trust for the teacher.

> Mwasambwa: *At that age the fact that a child has to leave home and go to another place is a traumatising experience. So you must provide that reassurance to them that yeah you are there and any time they are at school if there is any problem you always go and check on them.*

> Namachanja: *Support is very important even at that early age. More importantly it provides assurance that the child is out there interacting with the larger world now and the parents are saying we are right behind you I have got you covered.*

Other challenges cited by parents associated with transiting from home to school include feeling lost in an unfamiliar place, uncertainties and sometimes difficult questions in exploring new experiences. Parental encouragement is also important in guiding children in exploring and gaining new knowledge.

183

Manyasi: *Just to be there, to encourage them to know that you care about what they are going through. … just that presence and moral support. To support the child through the kind of challenges they are facing. Sometimes they may have questions that they don't have answers to. You may sometimes provide answers or sometimes challenge them to find the answers.*

Additionally, parents deemed their role critical in the development of their children's life-long attitudes towards learning.

Nalaika: *I think one of the roles should be an encouragement to the children in the learning process whether it is by my presence in the school when needed, showing them that I have an interest in their schooling. … to encourage the children in the learning process and to stand with them.*

Walking alongside the Teacher. This is taken from Waititu's description of her perceived role in an ideal preschool. It captures parents' perceived complementary role to that of the teacher and links to parents' critical role in helping children develop the right attitudes towards learning. Parents complement the teacher by reinforcing what children are learning at school through normal family activities.

Mwasambwa: *On the other hand there is complementing what is going on in school. So that when the child comes home in the evening, you will ask him what did you study today or you learnt this, did you learn that also?*

Namachanja believed such reinforcement influenced positively the ideas and values that the child forms about learning and school. He argued that by reinforcing what children are learning in school this reassures them that their parents are interested in what they are learning, it is a way of affirming the teacher, hence creating respect, it also makes a statement to the teacher of the mutual responsibility that the two share. Waititu added that it helps the

184

parent identify areas of difficulties that the child may be struggling with, which the teacher at times may not notice:

> *Also walking alongside the teacher, the kid is still in his formative stages and I am assuming that this teacher is having like a class of twenty, by the time he gives each of them individual attention, it's very hard. So for me again is to come in and find out what was learnt, where are you still struggling and I have to check in their homework. How far have you gone? What are you learning and the extra curricula activities? I have to engage him in some of the activities like play and other activities that the formal school may not be providing.*

Another way of '*Supporting the Child'* and '*Walking alongside the Teacher'* is creating a home environment that supports and reinforces what children are learning:

> Naliaka: *One has to be strategic in the home activities, what they buy so that they are all geared towards the learning of the child*

Parents had different views on how the home could support children in what they were learning. For Namachanja, the home environment should be in such a way that children "continue to learn":

> *Theoretically you should have an environment where children are continuing to learn. We should create some opportunities for them to continue learning. They could be looking at a picture book, colouring.... When our kids were younger the fact that we lived in the outskirts of Nairobi there was so much space for them to do other things and to learn. There is a shamba (garden), they can learn, they can play outside without you following them ... we were in an environment that was enabling.*

For Akoth and Nyaore, supporting children entails integrating what they are learning at school with family activities such as holidays, games and day-to-day interactions. For Wakesho, it meant providing a spare space and equipping it with the necessary resources and occasionally having a private tutor to revise and also play with the child.

Supporting the need for providing extra resources as a way of '*Walking alongside the Teacher'*, Maritim talked of looking for extra materials to provide opportunities for the child to practice what they are learning at school:

> *I look around for extra materials ... reading books ... story books, revision books ... anything that would help in the learning process*

Maritim acknowledged that getting involved in their children's learning is also an opportunity to learn together with their children. Such learning would include increasing their own knowledge base so as to guide children in their learning.

Parents also considered helping children with their homework as another way of '*Walking alongside the Teacher*'. They explained that doing homework with their children, gave them opportunities to identify areas that the child may be struggling with in order to give feedback to teachers. On helping with homework:

> Kyalo: *It facilitates the school in teaching my child ... the teacher will teach the necessary stuff ... when the kid comes home if there is any homework ... I should help.*
> Serende: *For one I am supposed to be his helper, encourager, because even as he comes home we work together, we do homework together.*

> Akoth: *The child is sometimes given homework so you have to make sure that the homework is done and have the time to sit with them and help.*

Kyalo: *Like if they come home with homework ... you have to get time, sit with them, help them to do the homework, ensure it has been done well. If they have difficulties you have to alert the teacher because the teacher may not know what difficulties they may be having while doing the assignment.*

Parents said that another way of '*Supporting the Child*' and '*Walking alongside the Teacher*' was in paying allocated fees and providing extra learning materials requested by the preschool (Mbogo , Kyalo and Waititu). Parents' view of their obligatory roles advances the notion that providing high quality early childhood experiences is a shared responsibility between the teacher and them.

Wanjiku*: My role would be to make sure that the child continues getting formal education that is being provided by the school. ... to avail that child and to provide whatever facilities are needed ... Take that child to a formal school ... I should be able to pay school fees and to give children the necessary learning environment that they really need for their learning.*

Keeping your Ears on the Ground. This is borrowed from Nyaore's description of her perceived role in the early learning of her child. Maritim referred to it as *"monitoring and evaluating learning"*. It refers to parents' perceived role of assessing what children were learning and whether they were happy with their experiences at school. Nyaore explained her usage of the concept:

You need to be alert about what is happening in the school to know whether its building your child or it is affecting him negatively. You can't do that unless you are close. Really with your ears on the ground about what is happening in the school.

Similarly, Mbogo stated: *"also I have a role to play in terms of ... formative evaluation of the child and giving response to the teachers."*

187

Waititu: *To establish what the kids have learnt or to correct any errors when the child or at times the teacher gets it wrong. Like when a teacher gives homework that is beyond the student's level of understanding. So it's actually to do some of these corrections that must be done either at the child's level or to actually go and explain to the teacher what I think is going wrong and correct at that level.*

Parents thought it critical to evaluate what children were learning for various reasons; it was necessary to give feedback to the teacher, correct when there were errors, gauge whether the content was appropriate to the child's abilities and cognition, and whether what children were learning matched with the family values. Mwasambwa captured this role by stating:

So you are to make sure that they are learning the right things. You are not telling them that they learnt the wrong things but in case they are telling you something which you are not very comfortable with, you can always walk there, and ask, "What is this that these kids are learning?"

In monitoring what their children were learning, Mbogo urged parents, especially those with relevant backgrounds, not to cower in pointing out to the teacher if they have misgivings about what children were learning:

The parent also has that role to see that the child learns the right things. Especially for somebody like you [referring to the researcher] who has such a background you know others may not know whether the child is learning the right thing or not. So for those who have that kind of a background it is important that they point out to the teachers if they have any concerns over what they are learning.

Although, as indicated earlier, parents valued the social environment provided by the preschool, it was possible for children to learn wrong things from their peers. Kanini points out that it is the parent's role to correct such errors and also give feedback to the school:

I have to be keen on what they are learning so that I will be there to correct bad things they might be picking in school. I have to be very close to my child and then bring it to the attention of the teacher so that in her teaching she factors in things to do with good character.

Upholding the need for democracy in dealing with children, Ndege and Mbogo contended that a parent must assert him/herself through modelling and participating in the child's learning. This skirts on the balance of power issues within the preschool setting between parent and teacher and these are explored in detail in Chapter 6.

Ndege: *A parent's role is very critical and needs to come out more strongly. Kids believe in the person they see as the role model and the teacher to a kid is very important. If the parent is not strong enough if this kid was not taught the right thing, the right values; ... They will believe the teacher and not the parent.*

Researcher: *What do you think the parent should do in such a situation?*

Ndege: *One, I am very keen on the value system of the school because children take teachers like gods. Two, for the parent to score high, on the score card of their own children, they must be involved in what the kid is doing, in the scribbling, ... when you interact with them they feel ownership and they feel they belong.*

Mbogo: *Following up to know that children learn the right things. Although it is sometimes hard, a child will hold on to what the teacher has said so that when you*

tell the child this is not it may be the teacher made a mistake, the child is like but my teacher said.

Ndege's comments above raise the importance of a match between the home and the school environment in laying a foundation for learning. They also emphasise the complementary role played by the two environments and consequently the teacher and the parent in creating rich early development and learning experiences.

Parent as a co-teacher. This captures parents in the current study perceived role, as their children's 'first teacher'. As Mwasambwa and Naliaka explain, parents were considered to be better placed to teach certain things to their children such as basic living skills like wiping one's nose, toilet training and other simple day-to-day life skills, and moral values.

Mwasambwa: T*here are certain things which nobody else can do, you have to be the one to do them*

Naliaka: *In some ways I am a teacher especially at preschool. … I would want to know what they know, what they are doing what they think about what they are doing*

Naisiaye said that it was her responsibility to *"develop character"* in her child, a view that resonated with other parents:

Nyaore: *I think the parent is the first teacher to the child because before the child goes out they will have been with the parent. So the parent teaches the things that are about just daily living like how to wipe your nose, normal simple life skills that are basic.*

As exemplified by Waititu, parents valued childhood and considered it a critical period especially for instilling moral values. Anchoring a child's life was considered an important component in '*Let the Child be Purposeful'*. It is therefore reasonable that parents

190

would consider themselves as co-teachers, serving a critical role in the life of the child in training them in moral values.

> Waititu: *As a parent I have this responsibility to train my child on various aspects of life. ... I am giving him the best values ... the things they learn in their early years ... will keep them for the rest of their life. ... it is very important ... it has to be done.*

Naisiaye shared similar views and was of the opinion that parents should concentrate their energy in developing the character of their children:

> *I am interested in seeing them develop character and all that ... I leave the teaching to the teachers because that is what teachers are doing teaching them academics. So this other bit is almost neglected. ... that's the bit I want to participate in, their welfare. Let the teachers teach school work ... as a parent let me get involved in their other life.*

Chapter Summary

In this chapter I have looked at parents' conceptions of ideal ECEC services. '*Let the Child be*' emerged as a major theme with sub-themes: '*Let the Child be a Child*', '*Let the Child be Free*', '*Let the Child be Playful*' and '*Let the Child be Purposeful*'. The data show that parents valued early childhood years and consider them formative. Underpinning their views about childhood is the carefree life that a child should be afforded both at home and at school. Further analysis of the data revealed that the ideal preschool is co-constructed by teachers and parents, with both having shared responsibility and roles in providing opportunities for the development and learning of the child. Parents sampled in this study acknowledged the key role that a teacher plays in realising the kinds of early childhood experiences they wanted for their children. They were, however, willing to be invited into a partnership with the teachers to enrich the child's experiences both at home and at preschool. Such partnership would be of mutual respect, with each partner playing their specific but complementary roles.

The chapter foregrounds parents' ideals about what they considered important for their children at preschool. This knowledge helps elucidate the hopes parents can have as they negotiate the ECEC market to choose high quality ECEC programmes that meet their child's needs and fit within their ideals. In the next chapter I look at the '*Real*' in which I report parents' accounts of their experiences in the process of choice and the preschools that their children attended.

Chapter Six: Research Findings 2: The Real: The Play of Choice

Introduction

In the previous chapter, I focused on parents' perceptions of '*The Ideal: Choice of Play*'

ECEC service. In this chapter I contrast parents' actual experiences in making private-for-

profit ECEC choices as well as their interactions with the preschools their children attended.

This overarching theme emerged as '*The Real: The Play of Choice*'.

'*The Real: Play of Choice*' had two major-themes: '*Finding a Preschool*', which

encapsulates the process of looking for a preschool, and '*The Context of Preschool Choice*',

which addresses the individual and systemic factors that emerged as significant mediators of

parents' ECEC choices. The first major-theme, '*Finding a Preschool*', had four sub-themes:

'Meeting *Parents Expectations*', '*Hearsay*', 'Visiting Pres*chool*' and '*Wading through*

Preschool Choices'. The major-theme, '*The Context of Preschool Choice*', also had four

subthemes: '*Desire for Success*', '*Competition*', '*Affordability*' and '*Proximity*'.

These major themes and sub-themes are discussed at length in this chapter and are illustrated

with uncoded data (excerpts from interview transcripts) to show how the analysis is closely

tied to the respondents' conversations.

Finding a Preschool

Getting the 'best' preschool (see Chapter Five) was important to parents, underscoring the

importance attached to the search process. Most parents reported having started searching for

a preschool long before their child was born. Some parents said that the availability of

preschools determined where they looked for houses or settled, although their children may

not have been born at the time. The following conversation, constructed from interview

excerpts, provide insight into this process:

Researcher: *When did you start thinking about a preschool?*

Wakesho: *Immediately you learn that you are expecting a baby. So that is the time you start thinking about it. I was three months pregnant ... In fact, when we moved here we had gotten a house at another place but we did not go there because there was no good school.*

Manyasi: *We started thinking early, even as we were moving to the place we are now, that was one of the things that was ringing in our minds.*

Parents cited five other factors that prompted them to look for preschools at the time that they did:

- Assumption based on their personal experiences and traditions that it was the appropriate time to enrol their children to school.

- Not satisfied with the kind of care their children were receiving at home from caregivers.

- Pressure from parental peers that children of a certain age should be in preschool.

- For first-time parents, they were excited and impatient to have their children attending preschool.

- Received the cue from their children because the home environment was felt to be no longer adequately stimulating for the child.

The following conversation illustrates some of these reasons:

Researcher: *When did you decide it was time to enrol your child to preschool?*

Namachanja: *It was about 21/2 years. You somehow know they are ready because they can talk. You can see they are tired of the home environment ... It's no longer challenging for them.*

Nyaore: *I actually didn't want them to go to school at three years. I had wanted them to go to school at four years. ... I succumbed to social pressure. You know like everybody was asking me, "you are not taking your children to school?" Then I am thinking, "No not yet." Then they would kind of mock, "Are you waiting until they are four years?" It got to a point I just thought, "Well in any case they are just going a few steps from the house. It will be just like the normal walking they have been doing, let them go."*

Manyasi: *I think for us as young parents we were just excited ... it was a good feeling to say we also have our daughter in school. She wasn't quite three years ... I would associate it with social pressure – where others have children in school and therefore...*

Once parents decided that it was time to enrol their children into preschool, they sought advice and suggestions from their friends, colleagues at work and neighbours, and considered several options before making their decisions. Finding a preschool was informed by 'Meeting *Parents' Expectations*', '*Hearsay*' 'Visiting *School*' and '*Wading through Choice*'. Parents found themselves confronting a variety of challenges in making their choice. Each of these categories is discussed below:

Meeting parents' expectations. Parents' looked for preschools that were likely to meet their aspirations. These aspirations have been explored in the previous chapter. Parents talked about other components, not stated in '*The Ideal*' that were also important in what they looked for in preschools. These components included proximity to home, staff qualifications and characteristics, fee charges, facilities, congruence between home and school values, class sizes, school rank, curriculum, school transport, security of the child and cleanliness (see Appendix E).

Hearsay.

> Naliaka: *What I found was that people were eager to talk about schools. I would ask parents what they liked or did not like about the school. Somebody will tell you I like this school, because of ABCD I don't like that one because of ABCD…*

The sub-theme '*Hearsay*' encapsulates other parents' opinions in informing the choices that parents made of preschools. Most parents stated that they chose a preschool either because a friend, colleague or neighbour recommended it, or because it had a high reputation in the neighbourhood. Parents who had children in particular preschools acted as the main source of information. In the following conversation, constructed from interview excerpts, parents explain how their search for preschools was informed by their friends, colleagues or neighbours:

> **Researcher**: *How did you get to know about the preschools?*

> Nyaore: *You ask among your friends. Do you know this school? Do you know anyone who has taken his child there? That is what I did. I asked within the neighbourhood … One person would tell me this, another will tell you of that one.*

> Manyasi: *You just ask people informally, where can we take our children? Somebody suggested in the neighbourhood that such and such a school would be a good option.*

'*Hearsay*' was a powerful tool in not only informing parents' searches but their choices of preschools. Parents tended to trust what other parents had to say about a particular school (as they gathered information about attributes of different preschools). Other parents were willing and eager to recommend certain preschools that they knew from experience or through hearsay. Sometimes informants included teachers and other staff, or even owners of the preschools, who happened to be within the parents' networks of friends.

196

Serende: *I asked for information from the teachers and my colleagues who in the past had taken their children in the preschool or currently have their children there.*

Parents not only depended on the verbal recommendations of other parents, but also on the fact that their friends or colleagues enrolled their children in a particular preschool. Even for a parent like Akoth, who reported having known the owner of the preschool her children attended, she also acknowledged having heard a lot about the preschool from other parents:

> *I got information from those parents who had children in those schools. The one which I finally went to, I know the owner but I had also been given a lot of information about the school.*

Likewise, Tumaini explained how her friends informed her decision by pointing out that there was nothing tangible that had attracted her to the preschool her children attended. She considered the school because her friends, who had enrolled their children there, recommended it to her. Her comments suggested that the longer the preschool was in existence, the more likely other people knew about the quality of its services:

> *My friends had children there … There was nothing too outstanding about the school. But my friends had told me they were very happy about their way of teaching. It was an old school … the kindergarten was excellent. It has been there since 1977 so it had a tradition in the way they did things.*

Visiting preschool. The other source of information was parents' actual visits to preschools. Parents visited preschools to verify the information they had gathered from their social networks.

> **Researcher**: *How did you finally decide on what preschool to enrol your child?*

Waititu: *The second stage was I now physically went to the school to see.*

Kyalo: *I literally walked into each of those schools, examining the facilities, talking to the headmistress and seeing what they offer. They had to show me the kind of things they do with the children, I could also see the reports of the other kids.*

Parents visited with preschools either to ascertain or gather information, depending on whether they had already talked to other parents or not. During visits, parents observed preschool facilities, and talked to teachers, head teachers or owners. Some preschools had elaborate orientation programs for parents, which involved a guided tour through the preschool and answered parents' questions. Others left it to parents to ask questions if they wished.

Wanjiku: *Yes I visited the schools. I got to know what they are offering. I went to their classrooms ... I went to the bathrooms, saw the size of their toilet basins, their wash hand basins, looked at the cleanliness of these places. ... I checked out the kitchen, and spent time there just to have a general feel of the school.*

Naisiaye: *I actually went to so many schools. I had to do a practical search. ... I visited like ten schools or more to just go see, talk to the people in both the administration and the teachers, ask the questions, and at least have a feel of what and who they are.*

Ndege: *I visited a hundred and one schools. I don't know which school I didn't go to. I went to some of the best schools in the city.*

Okwalo: *We saw what they were doing and talked to the teachers ... They told us what and how they teach ... That made us think that it would be a good place to put our kids...*

As is evident from the conversation above, parents visited and compared different preschools, weighing their potential in realising their ideal. Parents seemed to 'trust their guts' more about how they felt while at the preschool.

> Mwasambwa: *I just hanged around the school long enough to observe what was going on.*

Most parents trusted themselves to be the best judges of the suitability of the environment and so did not take their children with them during school visits. Parents said there were difficulties in validating some attributes of preschool, such as pedagogy and curriculum. They therefore tended to trust '*Hearsay*' more or had a 'wait and see' attitude when they made their preschool choices.

Wading through preschool choice. Parents cited different challenges during their search for preschools including mistrust in preschools as sources of information about their services, lack of readily available information about preschools and conflicting information from informants. Parents were doubtful whether preschool owners and staff were objective about the quality of their services or whether preschools would meet their expectations. However, familiarity with the owners of the preschools seemed to augment their trust in such services. For example, although Mwasambwa is one of the parents who had expressed doubts about preschool staff giving accurate information about their services: *"I would observe to see whether what they are telling me is the truth. A lot of them, what they tell you and what they do are two different things"*, he seemed confident of the preschool where he enrolled his child because the owner happened to be an old time friend:

> *Fortunately I bumped into this person whom we grew up together and she told me that she had started a school. ... I checked around and I was impressed by what they were doing.*

Parents reported that sometimes schools did not readily avail information about their services until prompted to do so. It was harder, especially with new preschools, to find other parents who had had an experience, good or bad, there.

Researcher: *Did the preschools provide you with such information?*

Ushindi: *No you would have to ask, they [preschools] will not explain to you. Yet, sometime you may not get a chance with parents who had their children in those schools. It is not easy. Like this one was a relatively new school.*

Kyalo: *I didn't know of any particular school. I didn't find anybody who had a kid in the school my kids are in.*

Another challenge was conflicting views about a preschool from informants. Although other parents were an invaluable source of information about particular preschools, it was possible for parents to receive conflicting information from different parents:

Waititu: *I talked to parents who already had kids in the two preschools in the estate. Those whose children were in the first one (that is where my child is) said that the school is very good. I had talked to another parent whose child is in a different school and she talked highly of the other school …*

Wambui: *I asked my neighbours and friends about the school… I didn't visit ... I just went by the recommendations of the others.*

Embedded in Waititu's remarks above, which resonate with other parents, is the view that different parents had different expectations for preschools, and they used these to label a school either 'good' or 'bad'. It was therefore not surprising that different parents could give conflicting information about the same preschool. Highlighted by Wambui's experience is the view that despite the seemingly unquestioning trust in '*Hearsay*', there were disappointments

when the recommended preschool did not meet parents' expectations. Most parents reported that the preschools their children attended did not match their ideals. In narrating their experiences with the actual preschools, these parents said that they had to compromise their ideals for the 'realities on the ground'. As Akoth stated, choosing a preschool was a "*balancing act between the ideal and the reality*". The realities on the ground mediated parents' choices.

The Context of Preschool Choice
As parents negotiate the context of preschool choice, they face dilemmas at different points balancing their 'ideals' with the 'realities'. Parents made compromises that at times entailed sacrificing their children's immediate needs for a perceived future good. Data were analysed to establish the enabling and inhibiting factors to parents' choices. Further analysis revealed the components of these factors, their relationships and how they impacted on parents' choices. In this section I present data on '*The Context of Preschool Choice*' under four main categories – '*Desire for Success*', '*Competition*', '*Affordability*' and '*Proximity*'.

Desire for success.
Manyasi: *Somehow, the Kenyan system of education makes the issue of exam performance inevitable. The drive is inherent in the system of education in Kenya. ... The society has been structured to honour success in national exams and that is the criteria for admission to secondary schools and universities. Again, job opportunities are also for those who succeed academically. So somehow that seems to be the drive hence most people are pressured to ensure that their children pass exams.*

Manyasi's comments are an apt way to start the discussion on the sub-theme '*Desire for Success*'. They highlight the context underscoring key factors that mediate parents' choices of preschools for their children. Among these are a highly exam driven education system, a competitive job market and society's view of success. These factors fuel

competition among schools and individuals. Faced with an educational and social system that they feel helpless to change, parents adopt different strategies to advantage their children. In analysing data, these strategies were coded under three categories: '*Positioning the child for academic success*', '*Positioning the child for future success*', and '*Society's definition of success*'. Each category is discussed below.

Positioning the child for academic success. Data suggested that parents felt an overriding responsibility to try to achieve for their children a competitive social advantage, although at times doing so conflicted with the ideal of '*Letting the Child be a Child*'. Notably in the compromises that parents made, there is a feeling that they were acting in the best interest of the child. Some parents thought of preschool in relation to the primary schools their children were to join, with a hope that they would eventually join a national secondary school highly regarded as guaranteeing progression onto university. Anxious about their children's future academic and career success, parents used different means to determine preschools that were predictive of high achievement (a deviation from '*The Ideal*'). One strategy involved comparing a school's performance in the Kenya Certificate of Primary Education (KCPE) examination. (The KCPE is a national exam conducted at the end of the eight years of primary education. At the beginning of each year, each individual school's results are published in the local media. Until recently there was a tendency by the Kenya National Examination Council to rank schools in order of performance, using the mean score of each school. Names of the first hundred schools appeared in local newspapers. The government have now banned the practice of ranking schools because of head teachers forcing weak children to repeat classes, or to register for the exam at different centres so that they did not lower the school's mean score).

On being asked how they chose the preschools their children attended, this group of parents indicated that they considered the performance of the preschool against other schools:

Naliaka: *We looked especially the national exams results for schools. We did a lot of things, my husband ardently reads. He prints the results when they are released. He is very keen on details, he reads about every good school that did well in Standard 8. ... Most kindergartens in Kenya will also be part of a primary school, so we looked. At that point we were looking at big schools that have kindergartens that we would want our children to attend. ... then decide if that is the school we would want them to go to primary then automatically we would then look at the preschool.*

Naisiaye: A*t the end of the year when the results are out you know initially they used to publish the performance of the top 100 schools so you could know. So that was also another guiding factor"* [referring to their choice]. *…You want to take your child to a school that is performing well ... Where did they feature ... if they are not there you don't even think about it"*

Manyasi: *... an excellent school ... it has over the years been producing performers at the national level in the KCPE. ... It was one of the performing schools nationally and so for us that is what motivated us.*

Concerned about their children's future academic performance, parents withdrew their children from preschools that did not seem conscious of the need to set the perceived pace for future success. Wakesho demonstrates the dilemma parents find themselves in as she was compelled to move her child from a preschool she considered ideal – more child-centred in its approach to teaching and learning – to one that drills children to pass exams:

Why I don't like the school is like in the lower primary they do a good job they prepare the children well but there is this issue of parents withdrawing their children ... because their class 8 performance is not always good. I also wouldn't want my child not to perform well. They have good foundation but I think they are not drilling,

they teach. The children learn progressively but now for Kenyan exams children have to cram. They are not very good in drilling children ... and when it comes to the final marks, they don't perform well. So you don't want to keep your child there up to class 8.

Researcher: *Is that so even when you know that they are meeting the needs of your child at that level?*

Wakesho: *But you see ... I also want you know what happens if a child does not go to a good secondary school, the possibility of them passing to go to a university is very low. Performance is determined by the secondary school they go to. ... but you see now if he goes to a poorer high school the possibility of him getting that B – is very low.*

Researcher: *Aren't the teachers in the secondary schools all graduates?*

Wakesho: *The teachers are the same graduates, it doesn't matter.... In Kenya exams are about drilling ... that is the system. I know better as an educationist but the system does not support that kind of view. I want my child to get an A to be able to do medicine. At least even if they get above B. Nowadays if they don't get admitted into the regular system you can pay for them in the parallel one. In the parallel programme they can do whatever they want to do to get a better job.*

(The parallel system referred to by Wakesho is a degree/self-sponsored programme in the Kenyan public universities, introduced first in 1998 at the University of Nairobi (UON), that opens up higher education opportunities to Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education graduates. Previously, if one did not obtain the cut-off points for joining the public universities, there were very few options left. One of the options was for a candidate to pursue education at the private universities, while the other option was to go abroad for

further studies. Such options were only for those parents who could afford it. This programme has been replicated in all the public and private universities in Kenya.)

In keeping with the views and experiences of most of the parents, Naisiaye and Maritim talked about the importance of the 'right' preschool in setting pathways for children's future academic and life success.

Researcher: *How is it that you consider preschool against Standard 8 exam performance? How are they related?*

Naisiaye: *It's not like I am thinking about moving. I want once I am settled I am settled. ... I am also looking in the long term. So as much as its kindergarten, and it has nothing to do with the Standard 8 exams, I am thinking once I find a good school I want progression and continuity without interruption.*

Maritim shares similar views explaining why he used academic performance to decide on the school where he enrolled his daughter: "*Because I want my daughter to perform well ... to get to a good high school to be able to score marks for university admission. It starts at preschool*".

Wanjiku who had worked as a curriculum developer with the national curriculum centre for over ten years and is one of the parents opposed to using the KCPE results to determine a 'good' preschool alleged that this was a common practice among parents:

Except for this year when the Ministry of Education scrapped off the ranking of schools after the Standard 8 national exams, most parents would judge a good school as, did it appear among the top 10 or the top 20 at the national ranking? If school A in the national exam was among the top 10, the following year most parents looking for class one positions would want to take their children to that school. Not knowing

whether that would be the position eight years down the line when their child will be in class 8.

In her comments, Wanjiku confirms the idea that parents are strategic in the way they choose preschools, as a way of ensuring future academic success. She stated that parents' desire to secure their children's academic future was fuelled by the limited places in the 'good' schools as one progressed to higher levels of education: *"This is also dictated by the limited positions especially as children transit from one stage to another. ... the positions become less and less".*

Another strategy involved looking at those preschools that performed well in the Standard One entry interviews (especially those ones not attached to a primary school). Although in '*The Ideal*' all parents desired more play and play-based learning, most of them in reality considered a school's academic performance as a criterion for choosing a preschool. Wambui noted that one of the reasons why they chose the preschool their children were attending was *"...because of its fame. The children there are able to speak in English and everybody was saying this is a good school because of the performance".* Maritim, who is husband to Wambui, when interviewed separately corroborated her assertions about the preschool their children attended:

> Maritim: *People have compared their performance like when a kid comes from another preschool they would say that this preschool is superior in how they handle kids and the level at which kids perform.*

Wakesho, who consistently said that she wanted a school that promised her child's academic progression to eventually become a doctor, confirmed the use of mastery of literacy, numeracy and writing skills as indicators of a 'good' school. These skills were considered foundational for academic progression, in contrast to those cited in the ideal for

school readiness such as communication, social skills such as assertiveness and desire to learn:

> *A good school is where children get good foundation. My son has very good English and you know like my brother gets amazed every day when he comes here that he speaks good English. His writing is good ... even if you put him with other children in other schools at the same level he is better. And you see he is not even number one in their class. He is average ... they are doing a good job.*

In contrast, Okwalo argued that enrolling a child into a 'good' preschool was not in itself a guarantee of success. Although he acknowledged that there are some highly sought after schools, he argued that the notion of limited spaces in the 'good' schools was a marketing strategy used to make parents enrol their children earlier than they normally would, to ensure a place. In the following conversation, Okwalo explains how schools pressure parents to enrol their children at an earlier age.

> **Researcher**: *You stated that you enrolled your children to school at four and a half years of age? Were you worried that you will miss out space in the "good schools?"*
>
> Okwalo: *Actually that is the problem. Because if you wait for too long you will find all the places have been taken. So people book for places sometimes even before children are born. ... that was a big issue to think about. But I think also what schools do they use 'psychology'. They give you the impression that if you wait you will never get these schools. But when you come later on these schools are also money making institutions they will still enrol your kid. But they make you take your kid very early because you are thinking "hey I will have a bit of a problem".*

For some parents, the preschool they chose was seen to determine the primary school and to some extent the high school the child joined later in life. Preschool was therefore

considered as setting pathways for the child's success later in life. In the following section, I look at how parents perceived preschool as strategic in the careers they wanted their children to pursue later on in life.

Positioning the child for future success. Preschool was looked at in relation to the advantage it gives the child in an otherwise crowded education system and job market. In this context, some preschools are sought after and others are avoided, relative to the advantage they accord to the individual child. The data suggest that the choices parents make are associated with, and in preparation for, different, long-term life trajectories.

Parents see the drive for high academic achievement as a legacy of the colonial system. 'Making it' academically was seen as a sure way to a better life. Ndindi pointed out: *"After colonialism I think the only thing that would make one get a job and look like someone in the society was education".* Additionally, Naliaka, in support of Ndindi's views, highlighted the intergenerational emphasis on academic excellence in securing a good life, giving herself as an example of the beneficiaries of academic excellence. Asked why she considered academic excellence in her choice of a preschool, Naliaka explained:

> *Our parents taught us that education was the greatest value and heritage that you*
> *could give to your child especially in Africa. Coming from that thinking ... we were*
> *told every day "this is the only thing you can get from me, I am struggling and*
> *sacrificing to get you to go to school. It is your only chance for upward social*
> *mobility and anything good in life." So we believed it and so education becomes very*
> *important for us to offer to our children. We think education is important ... we think*
> *about it and give it our time, our resources and our best effort.*

Parents attached high value to the academic success of their children, as suggested above. They were willing to make sacrifices and commit their resources, time and energy to

give the 'best' education for their children. Choosing a preschool that was highly regarded was one way of setting the child up for future success. Naliaka's comments above highlight the obligatory responsibility parents carried. She states: *"We wouldn't want to fail ... our parents tried their best to get us where we are by educating us. It would be a shame if we did not try to do the same for our children"*. Against this backdrop, believing to be acting in the best interest of their children, parents were keen to choose preschools that were ranked highly in terms of academic performance, although in so doing they often compromised their own ideals.

Although a minority, some parents' choices were driven more by their desire for holistic development of the child, irrespective of whether the preschools they chose were rated highly or not in terms of academic achievement. For example, Kyalo did not consider it obligatory to choose the 'best' preschool to fit in with society's definition of success. Believing in the ideals expressed by most parents, he considered the main role of preschool is that of providing opportunities for the child to socialise and to learn basic skills in readiness for formal learning. Kyalo told of how he experienced pressure, both from his family members and from society, to comply with the current contextual demands:

> *Currently, I am fighting with my sisters-in-law because they are trying to influence my wife ... I am telling them no. ... My kid does not need to become a doctor. ... or an engineer. ... there is a way he can live a good life without being any of those. ... My children are not necessarily in school to pass. They don't have to. They can do their best but I am not looking for A grades from them. No! I would like them to be very competent but...*
>
> **Researcher**: *What makes you different given that most parents would like their children to have an A and they will probably be more interested whether the school is*

able to give an A or not. What informs your decision?

Kyalo: *Being in the field of academics, I know better. I know people demand grades, but I am not demanding grades. ... What I would really want to see is, are they improving? Are they understanding what they are taught? Not necessarily them becoming number one. No, I would encourage them to do well but not to the extent of coercing them. I know the society, what they are looking for are grades, but you can be an average student and still make it in life. I have that experience.*

Researcher: *What to you is most important for your child at that age?*

Kyalo: *It is not the grade per se ... It's the whole person, an all rounded person ... He can reason ... think, value people. ... When I analyse from an academic perspective, and what I have seen in the society not all people who get As end up doing well in life. An A does not qualify you to be successful in life. ... It's not an A it's the whole person.*

As demonstrated by the conversation above, parents experience pressure from family members and the larger society to conform to societal expectations. Conformity, at times, goes against parents' ideal preschools. For example, academic performance did not carry a high value in parents' descriptions of '*The Ideal'*, nevertheless, it emerged as a major element for most parents in looking for, and the eventual choice of, preschools. Moreover, in either refusing to succumb to the pressure or vice versa, there was constant balancing of ideals with realities.

   Society's definition of success. Data suggest that one of the precipitating factors for parents to want their children to excel academically was to fit in with society's expectations. Parents implied that society judges children as 'valuable' or 'good' depending on whether they perform well academically. A parent wanting his/her child to fit into the social structure

strives to meet these expectations, as Wambui explained: "*The society believes that a good child is the one who is passing exams ... If you don't perform in school you are useless*". Similarly, Naisiaye stated: "*… if you don't excel academically then people write you off.*"

However, not all the parents felt this way. Namachanja confirmed these assertions but argued against the system by stating that preschools' main role should not be seen as that of securing a future for academic and life successes, rather it should be laying a foundation for lifelong learning:

> *... are you laying a foundation for a lifelong learner or ... failure is unheard of because you will be beaten or pinched ... Early childhood education should lay a foundation for learning ... making a mistake is also learning. We give room for below the line performance.*

Mwasambwa, one of the parents who chose a preschool for his child because of its integrated approach to learning, when asked whether he was worried that his children might be left out by others, remarked:

> *The advantage I have is that I am in the education field. I know that at that stage you would actually be engaging in a very counterproductive procedure if you try to emphasise too much of the intellectual development ... especially the kinds of programmes you would find in most of these preschools. The kind of cognitive development they are focusing on is clearly misplaced because with time the child will acquire all those concepts that you are trying to teach at that age. ... I am not worried at all because I know that they are actually learning more. They are benefitting more from that kind of a programme.*

Similarly, Okwalo questioned the validity of gauging a good school on Standard 8 national exams performance. Naisiaye agreed and confirmed other people's opinions as

strong influences in labelling both the child and the school as being 'good' or 'bad', 'useful' or 'useless', based on academic excellence. Instead, she argued for a more balanced approach to academic excellence:

> *It is not just academics that mean everything to a child. Maybe a child may be talented academically ... another one may not. Does that mean the child is useless? They have many other gifts. I believe in academic excellence but I also want a well-rounded person. ... let them sing let ... do sports, swim, play piano ... let them do this and that ... finally your child will find her place. That was really important to me.*

So although all parents acknowledged that the drive for success was entrenched in society and therefore inevitable, a few were able to withstand such social pressure. Due to the perceived limited number of 'good' schools and the role of academic excellence in securing future success, schools compete against each other to emerge the 'best', as well as encouraging competition among their students. In the following section, I look at '*Competition*' as one of the contextual factors and how it impacted on parents' decisions on when and where they enrolled their children.

Competition. All parents interviewed talked about competition, both in the preschool market and in classroom levels, as one of the factors that not only hindered their children from experiencing their ideal, but also as a source of dilemma in their choices and experiences. Competition at the market level is precipitated by the market theory discourses evident in the provision of ECEC services. The market approach to the provision of ECEC services considers parents as consumers and encourages competition as a healthy way of ensuring quality. Adopting the market theory strategies, there is evidence of market-based competition where schools compete for parents, or more appropriately, for children. Schools seen to excel in academics attract more parents while those that perform poorly are shunned

or parents withdraw their children. Schools also compete for more 'advantaged' students who are likely to raise the collective test scores.

Underpinning the market approach is the screening of students to ensure that schools only admit students who will contribute to the cumulative score. In this context parents talked about the importance of passing the Standard One Interview. Consequently, testing and monitoring students' progress becomes an important component of teacher's responsibilities and promotes competition among students at the classroom level. Competition, as stated earlier, involves not only children competing with each other but also schools competing with each other to emerge the best. The drive to excel impacts on the kind of experiences individual preschools provide. Four categories emerged from the data: '*Competition among schools*', '*Competition among children*', '*Strategies used by preschools to ensure success*' and '*Effects of competition*'.

Competition among schools. As stated earlier, academic performance is considered an indicator of a 'good' school. Parents reported that preschools are run as enterprises, where efficiency and production of measurable outputs occur. One of these measurable outputs is the number of high performing students produced. Students' progress is monitored closely through continuous testing and ranking.

Asked why they thought preschools emphasised literacy and numeracy, parents talked about preschools being under pressure from other schools to perform well academically:

Mwasambwa: *But you know with our system here there is too much of that intellectual bit. Maybe it is due to pressure. There is too much pressure from other schools, the parents and all that. They want to see their kids reading and writing and all these funny things.*

Kanini: *If I would talk about Kenya right now an average Kenyan preschool is just*

academics. Kids write and write, they are only into marks, and they are into reading

and writing. ... these academies ... they are taking that to be the right thing.

Explicit from the above comments is that individual preschools receive pressure from other schools and parents who use high marks as an indicator of a 'good' school. High academic performance is equated to high scores in reading, arithmetic, written and spoken English. Hearsay, as earlier stated, acted as a powerful influence on the labels given to preschools, especially those that are not attached to primary schools. The following conversation between the researcher and two parents highlight how hearsay encourages both inter- and intra-school competition. Further, it highlights parents' subtle way of putting pressure on preschools to achieve highly:

Researcher: *You have explained that you looked for the best school in the neighbourhood. How did you judge that this was it?*

Maritim: *The school has not had children sit for the national exam at Standard 8 but people have compared their performance with other schools. ... they would say that children from this school were superior in performance.*

Waititu: *... parents said the school is very good. The whole estate knows it produces some of the best kids. ... they just blow up when they go to other schools at primary level. So most of the parents actually come to pre-unit here then they move their children to other schools at primary school level.*

Not unlike other market approaches to education, the above conversation points to the effects of market-based competition. Among these are the changed focus of preschools from the child's needs to passing of exams; narrowing the curriculum to where the teachers teach to the test; preoccupation with improving the test scores and coaching children to be better test takers. Instead of developing the whole person, as parents stated in their *'Ideal'*,

preschools emphasise acquisition of numeracy and literacy skills tested during the Standard One interview. Confirming pressure on preschools to perform well in order to remain marketable, parents reported that they noticed increased pressure on children prior to the Standard One interviews, usually carried out in second term (May to August). Even for preschools that would otherwise have been judged as not emphasising academics, there is heightened emphasis on mastery of reading, writing and arithmetic during second term of pre-unit.

> **Researcher**: *Did you notice any pressure on your children?*
>
> Ushindi: *Kindergarten 1 is quite comfortable and learning is more relaxed and easy, but as you move on to the higher classes the pressure of trying to meet the requirements of joining class one starts to build up.*
>
> Naliaka: *… in the last year I do remember there was more work. There was homework which wasn't fun to do. Like they could do Maths, or English which sometimes was stressful …*

Apart from the increased amount of work they are expected to cover, parents reported that teachers gave extra coaching and drilling and that children were subjected to a lot of testing and ranking to ascertain their preparedness for Standard One interviews.

Competition among children. Parents reported that children are tested and ranked periodically as a way of evaluating their progress. Ranking of children was seen to encourage competition, which parents argued changed the goal of preschool from that of socialising, exploring and experimenting as stated in *'The Ideal'*, to passing exams. Kanini spoke disparagingly of preschools that rank children at preschool: *"They are ranking children number 1 number 20 number 40 at an early age, it is ridiculous"*. Emphasis on passing

215

exams changes preschools' approach to learning activities and its concomitant emphasis on high grades.

> Manyasi: *I think that the problem has gone to the level where you find teachers ranking children even at the preschool level. That tells you their objective, the drive, the purpose is actually success and success is measured by who beats who.*

Tumaini and Ushindi told of their experiences of how, driven by pressure to achieve highly, teachers disregard individual children's needs, abilities and interests. Furthermore, competition among children leads to premature labelling of children. Likewise, parents reported feeling pressured to have their children measure up:

> Tumaini: *She (*referring to her daughter*) had to learn to do maths and she is behind because all the other children in her class can do maths. All the while the teacher is saying how she is behind. "I am thinking behind?"*

Ushindi likewise talked about feeling pressured because of her child who was labelled as lagging behind, having been enrolled in preschool later than her peers. Her experience also highlights the dilemma parents face as they juggle between their ideals and the realities on the ground; in this case societal and school expectations:

> *The young one … is not coping very well. She loves to play … We took her to school at around three years old which was in second term and … it had an effect. She was lagging behind. We were wishing we could let her continue for another term in KG2 (Kindergarten 2) but the problem was that her friends were moving on. So we had to let her move on too.*

Through normative comparisons, preschools identified and discriminated between children with acceptable levels of performance and those below average. The latter were

either retained at a particular level, or assigned to extra coaching. What is important, as demonstrated by Tumaini and Ushindi's experiences with their children, is the apparent tension between school (in this case representing society) and individual expectations (*'The Ideal'*) of their children. Negotiating the preschool market compels parents at times to compromise an individual child's needs to be at the same level with peers. Tumaini moved her child to another preschool, hoping to have a different experience.

> Ushindi: *Now that she is in KG2 we are almost going to second term ... the level the rest of the children are is much higher. If we proceed without some kind of private tuition to at least understand what the others are being taught, she is just in a world of her own. She will be out of place*

> Tumaini: *I thought it was too stressful. ... very stressful... The child had to move after one term. ... she had to leave. ... you could see the child was stressed.*

Succumbing to this pressure, both teachers and parents use different strategies to prepare children for the tests. The following section looks at each of these different strategies.

Strategies used by preschools to ensure success. All parent participants reported that preschools use different strategies to prepare children for tests, particularly the Standard One interviews to gain admission to the 'good' schools. High marks were said to boost the preschool reputation, hoping to attract more parents and keep those that were already there. Four strategies emerged from the data: '*Coaching and drilling'*, *'Teaching higher level curriculum'*, *'Introducing formal learning very early'* and *'Children are coerced to score high marks'*.

Coaching and drilling. Preschools drill children prior to the Standard One interviews to ensure high scores. Drilling for exams includes teaching test items, making children

memorise test materials and periodically testing and grading children to assess their progress. An individual child's progress is interpreted relative to other children's scores.

Wambui: *We have realised that in most schools, teachers are drilling children. They are really bombarding them, teaching them the exams.*

Ushindi: *... they concentrate more on teaching the exams because of the pressure from outside. They have to step up... like if a child is not coping ... they will ... give more attention to that child ... to bring them ... to the same level with others ... at times some are too far behind.*

Waititu: *... drilling, to drill a child at pre-unit class ... doesn't make sense to me. I feel that is what they are doing. ... giving the students work and they have to memorise that very content and that's all they have to know.*

Teaching higher level curriculum. Parents in the current study complained that their children were being taught Standard One curriculum. The practice of teaching Standard One curriculum to preschool children, especially in term two of the last year of preschool, appeared to be common in most preschools. While some parents were unhappy with the practice, Wanjiku's comments suggest that other parents looked for such preschools because they assured them that their children would pass the Standard One interviews.

Wanjiku: *…a number of preschools ... when children are in pre-unit teach primary school curriculum. ... Quite a number of preschools in their advertisement, tell parents "we go beyond what we are supposed to cover".*

However, most parents, although wanting their children to score high marks to be enrolled in 'good' schools, were unhappy with the pressure and stress their children were

subjected to in preparation for these interviews. Even for preschools that were considered 'ideal', parents reported a lot of drilling and heightened pressure prior to the interviews:

> Wanjiku: *I realised in the last year they did a lot of work, some of that work was for Class One. When I inquired from the teachers why they were doing that they told me that it was because the Standard One interviews tested class one work. So the head teacher of this school realised that her children were failing to get entry into the 'good' primary schools. She had to prepare them for these 'good' primary schools…*

While some preschools were forthright about the reason why they teach Standard One curriculum at preschool, others were not.

> Waititu: *Their curriculum is good but I feel they move them a little faster such that the homework is Class One English, Kiswahili, Mathematics and they are at pre-unit. When I asked about that, they said "well we want to prepare them so that by the time they go to Class One, they will do well."*

The above comments suggest that parents in the current study were aware of the importance of the curriculum in ensuring high quality experiences for children. They however, expressed difficulties in establishing what preschools taught prior to enrolling their children. These parents reported that although there was an appropriate curriculum for preschools recommended by the Ministry of Education, different preschools chose to teach what would make their children attain high marks in the Standard One interviews.

Data suggest that preschools were using homework as a measurable outcome to demonstrate that children were working hard at preschool. Also, as Okwalo observed, individual preschools tended to give homework because others were doing it:

... the demand to fit in certain ways ... the competition. ... it's like the more homework you bring home, the more it looks like they are working. I don't necessarily think that is productive.

Waititu*: I feel there is a little bit lack of professionalism. I went one time to find out how my son is progressing in school. ... The next time my child came home with homework. ... He was just three and a half years and in baby class. ... I went back to school and I asked them, "why the homework?" They said, "You asked for progress." I thought to myself, homework and progress are different. I wanted a talk, to have a chat on how my son was progressing. So I felt and I still feel the school lacks that professionalism.*

Introducing formal learning very early. In spite of all parents' desire for a carefree life for their children, most of the preschool programmes do not practice play-based learning. Parents reported that their children were being introduced to formal learning while too young. Playgroups, which parents would have preferred for their very young children, were *"far and way out of [parents'] financial capability..."* (Ushindi). Dilemma lies in the perceived pressure to either enrol very young children into preschool, knowing very well that these programmes were not '*Ideal*' for them, or leaving them at home, which was considered to be '*Ideal*', yet disadvantaging them against their peers:

Ushindi: *There is no playgroup. They kind of blend it with learning no matter how young. The children start learning very early. By the time they are in KG1 they have already learnt the basic sounds in KG2 ... writing numbers 1–10, and some are already writing their names at ages 3–4.*

Underscored in parents' comments below, was the pressure and stress that formal education had on children, which Kanini intimated was *"too much, just too much. Kids are*

being introduced to the adult world too early". These parents blamed the practice on the system of education which seemed oblivious to the developmental levels of children. However, some parents were aware that the Ministry of education had a recommended curriculum considered appropriate for young children, with child-centred pedagogies, as stated by Wanjiku: *"When designing that curriculum, the curriculum developers know what should be covered at preschool."* Notwithstanding this, experiences of Ndindi, Maritim and Chebet suggest that preschools introduce formal learning early to young children against their parents' will and at times without their knowledge or consent.

> **Researcher**: *When did your children start learning?*

> Ndindi*: From the very first week, they started learning, and had to carry home work. They started formal learning very early …*

> Maritim*: She began in a day care then in fact she was introduced to school almost without us knowing. … the school which had been a day care had developed into a kindergarten. She was already in it. They didn't inform us … So she began schooling very early.*

> Chebet: *I think in our Kenyan system ... is a bit stressful to the children because at three years they are already being given number work and other things to work with and yet you know developmentally they are not yet there.*

Children are coerced to score high marks. Parent participants reported that some schools used corporal punishment to push children to attain high marks in the tests. Furthermore, the normative comparisons of children resulted in discrimination and alienation of those children considered below average. Such practices were said to reduce teachers' sensitivity to individual needs, as well as decrease a child's self-esteem and their motivation to learn. Wambui and Naisiaye explained:

Wambui: *There was caning and bullying ... the teacher would bully children. ... instead of the child being taught how to express himself, ... it gave him phobia ... they made him think that he is not worth because he had failed in some subjects ... destroying the character of that child.*

Naisiaye: ... *it is unfortunate because the minute you don't do it* [achieve high marks] *then you feel like you are a useless person, you lose your self-confidence, even the society doesn't respect you as much as those who do well academically.*

Effects of competition. According to parents in the current study, competition among schools and children was negatively affecting the child's well-being. Four negative effects emerged from the data: '*Stressing the child*', '*Reducing children to robots*', '*Eroding a child's self-esteem*' and '*Effects of competition on parents*'.

Stressing the child. Drilling children for exams was stressing children by putting pressure on them to attain high marks. Such stress emanated from the amount of work and high levels of cognition that such work called for. Wanjiku stated: "*I found my child getting strained*", an observation that resonates with most parent participants. Contrary to the friendly and home-like environments wanted for their children in their '*Ideal*', parents in the current study reported the learning environments being hostile to children. Tumaini told of her daughter's experience, who she had to move from a preschool that she described as ideal because it closed down.

Researcher: *How was this school different from the one she had come from?*

Tumaini: *She went and found that kids were learning. It was not introduction any more ... they were doing exams, they had to know additions, alphabets, reading and whatever else. This was now her third term and in my view she was traumatised. That is what I think.*

Researcher: *What made you think so?*

Tumaini: *Because if my daughter sat with you she would be doing sums with her fingers 1, 2, and 3, muttering abcde ... because that is what was drummed into her the whole day. ... for me it was a very hostile environment especially coming from a place where she enjoyed learning ... you could see the child was stressed.*

More stress on the children was associated with the increased amount of work children had to do, both at school and at home. Emphasis on good grades, parent participants observed, denied children their childhood and killed enjoyment in learning.

Chebet: *Today you go to homes every child whether in preschool or in primary school they are all overloaded with a lot of work. ... That is why we are raising a much stressed generation of children because from when they were supposed to be children they were never given space to be. They have always been overloaded with a lot of homework and many things and so school is no longer enjoyable. I think they go and they follow because they are told to.*

Other parents were concerned that exam driven learning denied children opportunities for their overall development. In common with many of the parents, Waititu was distraught about being informed that her son would be sitting for exams when enrolling him to preschool:

I also asked about what they learn, so we were told they were just taken through the basics like distinguishing numbers. In fact when I was told at some particular point they have to do an exam, I asked, "an exam for what? At baby class?" The teacher explained, "We just test whether they can paint within a circle and other simple things. They will be tested in what they learn". I was already conscious that they may be taught at very high level.

223

Ushindi was angry that the family's weekend programme was interrupted because her son had to do homework even on weekends and sometimes very late into the night:

It is a weekend for god's sake we can't even go anywhere 'ati mom niko na [mom I have] homework'. They are doing so much ... because of this grading. They can be given like 20 sums until the child is just crying. Its 11.00 pm, they have not slept, they have to go to school the next morning.

Despite teachers' assurances that children would be tested in simple things, Waititu and other parents reported that preschools administered paper and pencil tests to children. Promising one thing and doing another, as noted earlier under the category '*Hearsay*', made these parents apprehensive about whether preschools provide accurate information about the quality of their services.

Reducing children to robots. Mwasambwa observed that the kind of teaching and learning processes children were being exposed to fail to capture real-life activities and resulted in rote learning, denying children opportunities to acquire skills for long-term learning. As reported under *'The Ideal'*, children learn and display their skills through both structured and unstructured play. Furthermore, such skills as problem solving, literacy, self-assertiveness, communication and social interaction are better demonstrated in children's everyday activities such as games, talking to their peers and free play. Mwasambwa observed, "*... they are not being taught how to learn. They are just being pumped and fed with information. That is not learning.*"

Likewise, Mutiso stated he disliked the current practice because, instead of creating opportunities for children to explore and experiment with knowledge, teachers make children memorise items that are likely to be in the tests. Rote learning was said to stifle a child's creativity, critical thinking processes and desire to explore:

There is no cognitive thinking ... there is nothing. The kid is made like a robot. We are not producing children that are supposed to think. ... That is what is wrong with the whole system. ... Kids are just like robots, who ... read, produce, read produce. I don't favour the current system of education at all, at all.

Eroding a child's self-esteem. Parent participants reported that the amount of pressure and stress that children were being subjected to made them lose confidence. Emphasis on passing exams and the accompanying grading and ranking of children led to tracking and labelling of children. Instead of catering for individual differences and giving attention to each child, as are these parents' desires, children are pushed to be at the same level with others. Similarly, rather than supporting children in acquiring social and communication skills, as in *'The Ideal'*, parents in the current study said that grading children instils fear through intimidation, particularly on children who do not seem to perform as well as their peers. Ushindi described her daughter's experience:

She reached a level whereby she could not understand what the rest are taught. So she would feel out of place. "No I can't do it". She would say no matter how simple a task. Even the little effort she was putting is going down. So you see the challenge? If she was alone in her own class, that would be different, but you see they are mixed, the rest are moving and she is like "oh am not able to do well am not doing well." So what do you do? That is quite a challenge.

Lack of self-confidence was reflected in their phobia of exams, whereby some children were said to be unable to perform simple tasks during exam times which they would otherwise perform in a normal classroom. Others, like Ushindi's daughter cited above, gave up and stopped trying altogether. Still others were reported to have an outright fear of school. Wanjiku narrated her sons experience with one of the preschools:

For my last born, the school he went to, I later came to realise that they laid a lot of emphasis on exams right from that early stage…. I realised which the teacher confirmed that when my son was told that they were doing exams, even something that he would do in a normal class, he would not do it well. So it is like he had exam fear. I was very concerned to imagine, if he is developing exam fear at preschool level, what will happen by the time he is to sit for national exams at the end of primary and secondary levels?

Researcher: *Why do you think your son developed exam phobia?*

Wanjiku: *The head teacher put a lot of pressure on the teachers to make sure that the students are achieving a minimum grade which to me was not an average. ... I do not believe a child at preschool should be burdened with exams.*

Parent participants reported that both inter- and intra-school competitions were having effects not only on the children, as discussed above, but also on them, as discussed below.

Effects of competition on parents. Many parents interviewed in the current study reported that they were unhappy with the amount of pressure that their children were subjected to in order to pass exams. The focus on passing exams in a way turned preschool into an educational project, where both the child and the parent have to work hard. These parents reported feeling frustrated, stressed and sometimes conflicted. Evident in the following excerpt is also a feeling of being short-changed, where preschools did not meet parents' expectations. Even for those parents who considered academic excellence an important factor in their choice, they felt that the amount of pressure on the child was too much as illustrated in the following conversation:

Researcher: *How does this make you feel? You want your child to play more, develop more and yet teachers seem to be more interested in the grades?*

226

Waititu: *May be that is what has frustrated me because I think that is not what I was looking for in a school. In fact I keep saying it's not about him being number one, I would like him to do very well academically, but in most cases good academic performance means that there is a lot of drilling. So I expected no drill but a balance, so that they have learnt. ... It's more than just books.*

Naisiaye: *It is unfortunate, it is discouraging. It is something that I am very unhappy about. ... If I was able to, I would change. ... That's why you are seeing a lot of pressure. People are doing anything to pass exams...*

Researcher: *Why do you think preschools emphasis exams?*

Naisiaye: *Because our system emphasises exams and academics. So a child and all of us will do anything to pass exams. Anything else can be neglected as long as a child passes exams. ... What parents are doing is out of social pressure, wanting somebody to make it, and we think that making it is academically.*

The above conversation suggests that the market drive for high academic achievements is transferred into explicit expectations of parents. Parents in the current study suggested that there was pressure on preschools to achieve high grades. These parents although unhappy about the practice, perceived themselves helpless to change the system of education. They reasoned, as Naisiaye explained and earlier discussed in '*Desire for Success*', that the drive for high academic achievements is entrenched in the society and in the preschool market. Wakesho reported that parents' attempts to raise objections about exams went unheeded, as schools were more concerned about their marketability. Other parents like Wakesho and Waititu stated that they feared that their children might be victimised if they were seen to question school decisions:

Wakesho: *Most of us have small children where basically all of them are in private schools so we would complain ... we are just accepting it. Even if you complain about the amount of work that's the only thing they care about. ... yet that is not okay. ... we feel it's overwhelming.*

Waititu: *Some of the other reasons why I don't go quite often, I feel as if they will start to pick on my son, penalising him just because the mother is always asking about things.*

Another effect of competition was conflict for parent participants. Such conflict arose from the discrepancy of these parents' ideals and the kinds of experiences preschools provided for their children. Parents interviewed in the current study reported that, contrary to their ideals of early childhood, the amount, level and nature of skills expected demand too much of children's time and abilities. These expectations, parents reasoned, made children carry adult responsibilities at a very early age, denying them the chance to be children. Rhetoric of parents' involvement is evident in Wakesho's comments below, where teachers state that parents have the power to decide what their children should learn, yet in reality schools did not consider parents' objections to their practices:

I have always clashed with the school director over it [amount of homework] *... it's too much. ... There are times I just tell him not to do it, like he has been given homework in each and every subject, or if it's too difficult ... I tell him just do whatever you can.*

Researcher: *What do you do at such times when your son can't finish homework?*

Ushindi: *I write a note to the teacher ... In any case they tell us we are the bosses.*

Waititu: *Still I struggle with it because it seems ... their interest is to get high*

performing students … I don't think really that is what I am looking for.

In the next section, although not explicitly mentioned in *'The Ideal',* I look at how in reality the cost of ECEC services and availability do influence parents' *'The Play of Choice'* under the categories '*Affordability'* and *'Proximity'.*

Affordability.
Naisiaye: *The other factor was finances ... the preschool fees is a major determining factor. As much as I want a particular preschool, if I can't afford it then it is definitely not possible ... an affordable preschool … a place that is inexpensive.*

Affordability was a recurrent theme among parents as they described their experiences in looking for a preschool and their eventual choices. Parents said that despite their perceived ideals of a preschool, cost of the services was a determining factor in the choices they made. Many talked about not being able to afford their ideal preschools:

Mutiso: *We were constrained financially, so we took our children to the school we thought was more convenient in terms of money.*

Researcher: *Was it your ideal preschool?*

Mutiso: *It was not the best school … but like I said, cost was a major factor in making the final decision. We chose the one that was moderate in our thinking and could meet at least part of the other criteria for our ideal.*

Parents in the current study reported that even if a preschool matched their ideal, *"it should be affordable"* (Tumaini) for them to choose it. They compared the charges and chose those preschools affordable to them: *"It was inexpensive ... Cost was comparatively better than what the other surrounding preschools were charging"* (Wanjiku). As suggested by Wanjiku, the high cost of services, especially those that would have been considered 'ideal',

limited parents choices: "*In terms of cost you find that the average Kenyan parent may not afford the school that would be ideal for their children. ... The school fee was critical.*"

Parent participants found it difficult to find a satisfactory preschool in a convenient and high quality place that was affordable. Further, the data suggest that these parents get what they pay for and that higher quality costs more. Akoth bemoaned the high fees charged by some of the preschools that she would have considered 'ideal'. For her, the choice of preschool that parents generally eventually make is a balancing act among many factors including affordability, proximity and meeting the child's needs:

> *It is very difficult because in the first place you want a place where your children will be happy, learn, develop mentally, emotionally, everything about them, and ... not too expensive.*

> **Researcher**: *Were there such preschools available?*

> Akoth: *There was this preschool, the environment is very conducive, has lots of play items but it is expensive. There is also another one ... this is also a good school. ... there are not too many kids but the kind of quotes they gave us, were a bit crazy, especially when you have two kids, it would be too much. So the thing was balancing between distance, good school and also money ... that was not easy.*

Kanini, who teaches in a high-cost school, confirmed Wanjiku's assertions that the average Kenyan may not be able to afford her/his ideal preschool. Kanini considered herself lucky to be able to take her children to what she considered an ideal preschool, as teaching in the same school meant that she paid a subsidised rate for her twin daughters to go there. Kanini teaches in one of the high-cost schools, only affordable to a few upper middle class and upper class parents:

*I am glad that I had the opportunity for them to be exposed to this kind of a programme. I only pay a percentage of the fees. I wish it was affordable. It would have been good if this was available and affordable to the ordinary mwananchi (*citizen*).*

The view that most parents in the current study looked for preschools that they could afford, even when it meant sacrificing their ideals, explains these parents allegations that generally there were long queues of parents waiting for those preschools considered of high quality but of moderate charges alluded to earlier in '*Finding a Preschool*'. It may also explain why parent participants reported feeling pressure to enrol their children early to secure such positions as are available in these preschools.

Parents interviewed in the current reported avoiding preschools that were beyond their affordability, even though these preschools matched their '*Ideal*'. It was especially hard for those parents with younger children to find preschools that were purely play-based and affordable. Ushindi explained her frustration in looking for a preschool for her three-year old daughter. She settled for a preschool, not because it could meet her child's needs, but because it was the only one available and affordable:

... Also lacking is a pure play group. They charge a lot of money for play groups. ... such places would be far and way out of your financial capability so you find it is difficult.

Underlying Ushindi's comments is the relationship between availability and affordability. As suggested and evident in the data, some services are only found in places where residents are perceived as having a higher purchasing power. While some parents interviewed for this study indicated that they did not have much of a choice, others in relatively affluent neighbourhoods reported an abundance. Wanjiku, one of the parents who

lived in such a neighbourhood, said that she had several preschools which met some of her ideals from which she could choose.

Factors influencing affordability. The demand for preschool and the associated high prices was seen to be fuelled by different factors including changed socio-economic structures, minimal government involvement, and a highly competitive education system. In this section I discuss the first two factors because I have already discussed the latter under '_Desire for Success'_ and '_Competition_'.

Changed socio-economic structures. Parents interviewed in this study said that changed economic and social structures call for alternative child care arrangements. Those relatives who previously helped with child care are either in school, in some form of employment or live in rural areas. Parents, particularly those in the urban centres, have to hire caregivers from the community. In most cases, those hired as caregivers, popularly known as 'house-girls', 'maids' or 'house-helps', are primary school graduates or school dropouts. Parent participants reported a recent problem in being able to find reliable and dependable house-helps to look after their children. The demand for alternative child care outside the family is further compounded by the fact that mothers, who would previously have stayed at home to provide child care, are now career women. As Kanini pointed out, "_The family structure has changed. We are not housewives ... we go to work, sometimes until late, so you have to take your child to a preschool ... there is a very big need in the market"._

Often, parents need to feel comfortable and have a sense of trust with those whom they leave their children with. Some parents interviewed in the current study said that they enrolled their children into preschool at an earlier age than their ideal age because they either could not get reliable house-helps or did not trust the house-help to provide the quality of care they wanted for their children. Responding to the question of why they enrolled their children

at preschool yet they had house-helps at home, Kanini and Ushindi said that they considered preschool a better and more supportive place for their children.

> **Researcher**: *Many working mothers have house-help at home, why would they still want to enrol their very young children to preschool?*
>
> Kanini: *... because house-helps are not reliable, you employ her today then she disappears, or if she is there she is somebody else, you don't want your children to follow that standard. You want to give them a bench mark, so you take them to school where teachers are trained and certified and leave the children learning...*
>
> Ushindi: *It was quite difficult taking care of them together. I had a major problem ... my children were only two years apart. At one point I had to employ two house-helps ... They are not reliable, and then the children are not exposed to activities when you are not in the house.*

As implied by Ushindi in the comments above, and a view that resonates with other parents, house-help staff had no training in child care and some of them would be too restrictive, denying children opportunities to play or to explore. Others were said to neglect children, leaving them to watch television all day. Such apprehensions make parents want alternative child care arrangements, which have in turn led to a rapid growth in the preschool market, its demand and associated high costs. Ushindi and Kanini demonstrate their dissatisfaction with the experiences of their children at home in the following conversation with the researcher.

> Ushindi: *The house-help would be so strict on them [children] that they are not allowed to experiment with things, or to be themselves. You will find that your child is actually quiet the whole day. They are not playing, they are not talking, and they are not interacting at all at all. This is very sickening. ... at school they are able to*

interact with other children and the teacher who is actually trained understands. Even

if it is at least for a few hours I think it would help them be able to develop

intellectually.

Kanini: *... like for my kids I had to take them because I was having issues with house-*

helps... they were not minding the children as such. So it was like I would rather take

them to school, where there is some structure than leave them at home.

Parents interviewed in the current said that they compromised their ideals by enrolling their children into preschool earlier than they would have wished. Most parents said that they wished they could keep their children at home a little longer, preferably up to when they are five years of age. However, due to the above challenges with house-help, societal pressure and the market demand (as earlier stated), parents considered preschool a better place for their children. Parents reasoned that at preschool children interact with other children, and assumed that the teachers are trained and would therefore take good care of their children. However, as discussed earlier under '*Competition*' and its associated pressure on children, school was not always an ideal place for the child. Furthermore, parents complained of some teachers not having appropriate training and therefore being unable to provide the rich experiences parents envisaged for their children.

Minimal government involvement. Further analysis of data revealed that government involvement was considered an important element in regulating the preschool market. Parents posited that the woes and high costs of preschools could be explained by the minimal role the government played in the early childhood sector. Parents stated that there was minimal government involvement in the sector, which left a feeling that preschools' activities were uncoordinated. As Nyaore explained, there was a general feeling that the early childhood sector was a field for all, with no one taking responsibility:

It is nice if the government gave a little more input in early childhood education and participated more ... I haven't felt the presence of the government in preschool. Schools seem to run the agenda, run the syllabus...

Researcher: *Why do you say so?*

Nyaore: *Different schools do different things and there are many groups that set exams. It seems like these are ventures by individuals who are making money out of it. ... After going to different schools ... it didn't look very coordinated. It didn't look like schools were doing the same things ... I felt like there wasn't control. There wasn't a common syllabus or curriculum ...*

The above conversation with Nyaore suggests that there is no standardisation of the services provided. There is also a notion that the market approach was exploiting parents. Mwasambwa, a parent who is a writer and who worked as a curriculum developer with the Ministry of Education, supported these allegations by imploring the government to do more to regulate preschool services to assure parents of high quality. He pointed out that although there is a Policy Framework and Service Quality Guidelines that should be guiding preschool practice, the government has not done enough to create awareness, empower for implementation or to legislate the policies:

The government needs to do a lot of work.

Researcher*: What do you think the government should do?*

Mwasambwa: ... establish certain standards in early childhood education. When you create an option where school A is doing one thing and school B is doing another then you have given parents the options of going to school B which is doing things

differently. But if everybody is doing the same standard thing, then the options of moving from one place to another are not there.

Researcher*: Recently there was the development of Early Childhood Development Policy Framework and the Early Childhood Development Service Standard Guidelines, don't you think they are helping?*

Mwasambwa: *I think it is more than that. It's more than just coming up with a document and throwing it around. It is much more than that. There must be concerted efforts to ensure that the document is implemented as designed ... a collective effort by the players. If it is at the policy level then let that policy be clear ... let everybody know this is what is expected of you. Then at the implementation level, are we monitoring how that policy is being implemented? Who is monitoring that? Who is empowering those who are supposed to implement? So I think it is more than just having a policy and saying we have a policy. Policies remain just statements … if not acted upon.*

Mwasambwa's comments suggest that although there is a Policy Framework as well as Service Guidelines in place, they have not been enforced. He contended that the necessary structure and support for their implementation is lacking. He talked about the need to create awareness among all stakeholders about the policy and to empower those who are charged with its implementation.

Probably associated with lack of government enforcement of its policies, parents said that preschools offered low quality services including employing either unqualified teachers or those with low qualifications, having low adult to child ratios and poor, inadequate and sometimes inappropriate facilities presumably to save on operational costs. Parents like

236

Waititu pointed out that with the low salaries paid to teachers, most of the preschools were unable to attract highly qualified staff:

> *When you talk to other parents we had a strong feeling that they hire untrained teachers. ... The main idea is to pay them less ... I know the challenge of maybe the degree people [holders] going to the preschool is the pay. ... If the school was able to pay well it would attract highly qualified teachers.*

> **Researcher**: *What do you think preschools should do?*

> Waititu: *... hire professional teachers. Since the school serves me conveniently I would be willing to pay a little more. The principal should be willing to spend money by hiring professionals who can handle the kids well and then arrange to pay them well.*

Similarly, parents affirmed that preschools compromised on staff to child ratios, with some teachers handling as many as forty or more children per class. Some of the parents said that classes were too large to give individual attention to every child:

> Tumaini: *In the school my daughter was previously there were 44 children in class with one teacher. The poor lady was totally overwhelmed ... she didn't know one child from another. ... So we realised that our daughter was not getting individual attention.*

> Akoth: *Most of the preschools we were finding had 30 kids sometimes more than thirty. ... we were thinking this is too huge.*

What is more, some parents pointed out that the preschools their children attended did not have adequate facilities. These facilities include equipment such as chairs, teaching, learning, and play materials and space. Those preschools may have compromised on quality

to remain affordable to the majority of parents. Limited facilities and large groups may explain why most preschools used more didactic pedagogies, as opposed to play-based learning and other child-centred approaches.

> Wakesho: *I don't like the school ... because there is no space for the children to play. To play they have to go to another compound and I don't like my children moving between schools, one for swimming, and another for playing and so on. ... They can't play football during breaks because the space is so kidogo (*small*).*

> Waititu: *They don't have a playground ... there is no space ... also they need more things for play ...*

Some preschools were also said to compromise on the security of children, as Manyasi described the preschool his children attended:

> *It was not well equipped ... facilities were poor. It was just a church building converted to a school during the week. When it comes to extracurricular activities ... the place is not good because it is near a polluted river... There is no permanent fence along the river bank and the teachers are not able look out for every child every minute.*

Kyalo decried the poor state of some of the preschools. His comments, which resonate with other parents, suggest that individuals opened preschools without much attention to quality:

> *... Most people just set up a school even kwa nyumba yake (*in his/her house*) halafu wanaweka kibao hapo nje (*then they put a sign post outside*) ... yet people bring their children to study. ... There is no playing ground, there is nothing, the environment is not conducive ... the place is congested...*

Kyalo's comments seem to confirm earlier assertions that although there are policies to govern the establishment and practice of preschools, these policies are not being enforced. He states that despite the poor state of preschools, parents still enrolled their children in such preschools probably because of the low charges. More importantly, the comments underscore the growing demand for alternative care especially in the urban areas.

Proximity.
Nyaore*: I did not want my children at that age to go to a school that they would close a major road. That again defined the kind of school I was looking for. ... the schools that I had to consider were not very many. I actually only went to two schools. ... I chose the one that was nearest. ... my kids could take themselves to school and come back home. It was safe enough...*

The category, '*Proximity*', is discussed in relation to how near preschools were from parents' homes. Parents articulated a strong preference for preschools that were conveniently located to their homes, ideally within walking distance. This category supports parents' wishes in their description of *'The Ideal'* that children should be afforded support to be children. Parents conceptualised early childhood as a vulnerable stage when children need protection from the demands of adult life. Such demands include the stress of waking up early to catch a bus to school and being driven through the town as the bus picked up and dropped off other children. Parents preferred preschools that were near their homes, sometimes compromising other ideals to obtain this closer proximity.

'*Proximity*' as a factor of choice is closely linked to '*Affordability*', because even if a school is at the doorstep, parents must still be able to afford to send their child/ren there. Some parents considered proximity as a component of quality that was crucial in their choices. Responding to the question about what they considered while choosing a preschool,

many parents said that they looked for preschools that were near their homes, preferably where children could walk to and from school with the help of an adult or an older sibling.

> Nyaore: *For a three and a half year old child, I looked for a school that was near.*

> Wanjiku: *... proximity. I will always look for a school that is near especially for a preschool. I believe my child should not be crossing from one side of town to another to go to preschool. ... That is one thing that really influenced my choice. ... Proximity was critical.*

> Ndindi: *... The proximity of the school to home ... I chose a school that was nearest to where we were staying.*

> Waititu: *... nearness to home ... a school that is very close to home. Where possible the child can walk to and from school.*

Asked why '*Proximity*' was important, some parents said that the preschool child was still young and needed more time to sleep. Preference of preschools in the neighbourhood is in line with parents' ideals of childhood as a time of vulnerability, requiring protection and support from adults. By choosing a preschool in the neighbourhood, the child could sleep in, in the mornings, walk to and from school, and could return home early. Parents recognise the need for sleep for the young child and protection from stress or situations that may harm the child demonstrated in the following interview excerpts. When asked why they preferred preschools in the neighbourhood,

> **Researcher**: *Why was it important to you to take your child to a preschool in your neighbourhood?*

Ndindi: *I felt they were still young. I did not want a place where they would wake up so early to be in school on time. So I needed a place where they would just walk to preschool and take the shortest time possible to arrive home, if possible even at lunch time. That is the most ideal for a beginner for the first whole year. So I did not look whether the school was good or not, just a school that was near.*

Nyaore: *The idea of children at three and a half years on the road to some school five kilometres away was out of the question. I wanted them to wake up comfortably and leave the house at eight o'clock. So I had to look for a school at a certain radius of where I was living.*

Waititu: *... bearing in mind especially being in Nairobi if the school is very far, they have to wake up like at 5 am or at 6 am to beat traffic jam, the nearer the better. They will have their adequate sleep in the morning, get home early and be able to go to school sober. I think just the nearness of home makes a difference...*

Parents in the current study were particularly concerned about the amount of time it takes to transport children to and from school because of the heavy traffic in the city. Travelling to preschools far from home also posed challenges, especially for parents who did not own cars. Parents were apprehensive about the safety of public transport. Some cited negligence of school transport, hence the appeal for preschools in the neighbourhood. Parents like Mbogo indicated that he compromised other aspects of his ideal for the safety of his child:

*... It is not the best. But at that level I would not want my kid to board a matatu (*term used to refer to public transport in Kenya*) to school. I also have had experiences ... where children who use school transport are squeezed in. One parent was complaining how his child was pushed on to the floor of the bus yet no one seemed*

241

bothered. So for me safety overrides the other factors of an ideal preschool as per now but not in the long term.

Waititu stated it was reassuring for her to know that she could reach her child in the shortest time possible, if or when needed. Other parents, like Ushindi, contended that the short distance from home to school helped the child transit smoothly from home to school because of the familiar neighbourhood:

With schooling, the challenge is that when they are that young they heavily depend on the parents for support. In most of the time they would lean on you so you have to find a school that is near home because you find that starting school is a lot of stress for the child.

However for some parents, although they chose preschools in the neighbourhood, they required transport to either drop off or pick up their children or use school transport (most private schools in the city provide school transport). Parents like Naliaka and Ndege insisted on finding preschools that provided transport and picked up and dropped off their children at home, further limiting their choices. It is evident from their comments that those parents who could afford to pay for such specifications had more choice, further grounding '*Affordability*' and '*Proximity*' as strong factors of choice:

Naliaka: *We always try to also get a school that would pick up and drop the children at the door.*

Ndege: *I also looked at where are they were being picked from and where are they dropped. Some schools have picking points ... "No, you take my child from me in the morning and you bring my child back to me." So I was quite keen on the transport system.*

Where transport services were not available, some parents had to make adjustments to drop their children to school or choose a different preschool altogether, which further strengthens the view that those who could afford to pay more had more choice

While most parents considered proximity of the preschool to their home for the convenience of the child, others like Tumaini, Serende and Okwalo, considered their own convenience in dropping off and picking up the child in relation to their place of work or home.

> Tumaini: *Why I chose to go there was because of proximity. Of course convenience … it should be in a place such that it doesn't take you too out of your way. When my son was in his second school I was working in the neighbourhood, the sister was in another neighbouring school so it was a general neighbourhood. Okay, it was far from where we lived but at least we were all in the same area.*

> Serende: *… I was lucky the organisation I work for has a nursery school. So it was easy for me and my wife to settle on that school because, one, it is within reach and two, it is accessible.*

The overall affordability of preschools could be increased by transport cost. Therefore, Waititu considered choosing a preschool in the neighbourhood as a way of saving: "*It shouldn't be too costly especially on the running cost. … the nearer it is ... parents are saving on the transport cost.*"

Although the proximity of preschool to their homes determined parents' choices, it was evident from the data that families' ideal preschools were not particularly evenly distributed within their neighbourhoods. Some parents who were determined to choose schools only in the neighbourhood found themselves with very few alternatives. As Nyaore explained in the opening quote, she had only two preschools to choose from. Waititu also

stated that she considered the two preschools that were in her neighbourhood. Others, like Manyasi, chose the only preschool that was in his neighbourhood although he indicated it was far from his ideal:

What we considered was the proximity. The place was near us and other options were too far. We wouldn't subject our daughter to such long travel to get to an alternative school. So under the circumstances we felt that that was what we could offer.

Yet others, like Wanjiku who lived in a relatively affluent neighbourhood, said that there were several preschools in her neighbourhood that met her ideal which she could choose from. Nevertheless, she acknowledged '*Proximity*' of preschools as one of the factors that made parents not choose their ideal:

One of the things that would prevent parents from choosing their ideal preschool is the issue of proximity ... Most parents would be living very far from where their ideal preschool could be. ... I am lucky because in the neighbourhood where I am staying I have quite a number of preschools around me that are not too far away and met most of the criteria that I had put...

A few parents were willing to forego preschools in their neighbourhoods if they did not match their ideals. For example, although Akoth stated that she would have preferred her children to walk to and from school, she chose a preschool that was far from home where her children needed to be transported. Two of the preschools in her neighbourhood were too expensive and another one had large classes. Akoth stated the latter preschool would not have given her children the kind of individual attention she thought ideal for them. Another one, which she thought was appropriate and affordable, had a long queue of other parents waiting:

I found it very difficult. .. .like the school that is next to us very close it's just a walking distance ... the class was too large. ... I thought that my children are at two

different levels. I was looking for a place where they could receive individual attention...

Similarly, Kyalo could not find a preschool in his neighbourhood that matched his ideal:

So I moved round until I found this school X kindergarten in the village in place Y.... I was looking for a place where this child can learn ... I said this is the school.

Summary

In this chapter, I have looked at parents' experiences in finding a preschool and with the preschools that they chose for their children. It is evident from the data reported in this chapter that parents' searches for preschools were guided by their ideals, as presented in Chapter Five. Parents searched information about the attributes of a preschool before making a choice. '*Hearsay*' emerged as the main source of information informing parents' choices. Such information was further augmented by parents' individual visits to preschools. Parents cited different challenges during their search for preschools including mistrust in preschools as sources of information about their services, lack of readily available information about preschools, and conflicting information from informants.

In comparing the actual preschools parents chose for their children with the '*The Ideal*' most parents felt that there was no close match. The context was a mediating factor of parents' choices. Parents cited such contextual factors as '*Desire for Success*', '*Competition*', '*Affordability*', and '*Proximity*' as the main factors that mediated their choices. Parents experienced conflict, dilemmas and compromises as they balanced '*The Ideals*' with '*The Realities*'. Parents desire for their children to succeed both academically and in life impacts on their choices and experiences with preschools. Society's definitions of success and associated expectations are frequently the explicit expectations of parents. Desiring to advantage their children in a competitive society, school and job market, parents choose

preschools strategically. The choice of a preschool is associated with future academic and career progression. The market approach to the provision of ECEC services set preschools against each other competing for more parents. Competition among preschools is reflected at the classroom level where children are tested and graded constantly to ascertain their preparedness for passing the Standard One interview, a prerequisite of joining a 'good' primary school. Both preschools and parents employ different strategies to position children for success. Instead of the intended advantage, parents reported that these strategies were having serious negative effects on their children. Other systemic factors influencing choice, and associated with the market approach to providing ECEC, are the charges for these services and their availability in parents' neighbourhoods.

It is evident in the data that parents perceive early childhood as a vulnerable age with the child needing care, protection and support from adults. Furthermore, the child and his/her needs emerged central in the considerations parents made in their choices. Although in their choices parents compromised their ideals, they still believed themselves to be acting in the best interest of the child within their means and situations. Moreover, working in the best interest of their children, parents sometimes compromised the immediate needs for the perceived future good.

In the next chapter I examine the research data presented in Chapters Five and Six using the prism of the research focus. Within the constructivist paradigm, grounded theory is generated to explain the process of how tertiary educated parents living in Nairobi choose and enrol their children in preschool.

Chapter Seven: Synthesis, Discussion, Recommendations and Conclusion

The Grounded Conceptual Model

The Grounded Conceptual Model (Figure 6.0 below) illustrates the process of defining high quality ECEC programmes, choosing and experiencing these services as presented in chapter five and six respectively The key elements of the model are derived from the recognition that the overarching theme that emerged from data is 'Let the Child be a Child' which is seen as putting the interests of the child at the centre in the process of defining quality ECEC services and making choices about when and where the child should attend preschool. The model represents a process of moving from 'The Ideal' to 'The Real' and includes key factors that played upon parents choices as well as the experiences that both children and parents had with the services that were chosen. In their definitions of the ideal preschool, parents wanted the child to be a child, to play, to be free as well as to be autonomous in development and learning. These components of the ideal are captured in blue in the model. It was evident from data that parents were informed by these ideals as they searched for preschools that would best meet their children's needs. Parents' ideals defined the attributes they looked for when considering different preschools. These attributes were also used to gauge whether the preschool that parents chose matched or did not match their ideals.

The choices that parents make of ECEC services are contextually specific. Several factors mediated the choices that parents made. These factors were either at personal level (defined as individual context) or at the system level beyond the control of parents (defined as systemic context). These two contexts are captured in the theme 'Play of Choice: the Real' (discussed in chapter six and represented in pink in the model). Each of these factors: desire for success, competition, affordability, beliefs and values, preferences and resources, and availability are subjectively defined. Individual parents make a considered decision in the best interests of their child/ren by weighing up the subjectively significant elements of their ideals and realities. Once the choice is made, it becomes 'The Real' for that family

247

represented in purple. This often means that factors that may or may not have been significant for them in the 'Play of Choice' are magnified within the lived experience of life at preschool. For example, whereas such factors as proximity, cost and availability of services were not main features of parents' descriptions of their ideal preschools, they were major considerations during the search for and actual choice of preschools. These realities have subjective effects for both parents and children and are either positive in cases where 'The Real' matched 'the Ideal' (represented in red) or negative where "The Real' did not match in 'The Ideal' (represented in green). These effects capture parents struggle to decide what is more important for their children in a competitive context of education (as demonstrated in the vignette, 'Shattered dreams-Haraka in School') yet at the same time meeting the perceived childhood needs of their children (represented in their ideals). Parents experiences bring to the fore, three key issues: one, although parents had a good understating of what is high quality early childhood education and care as captured in 'The Ideal', they made choices for pragmatic reasons as captured in 'The Real'; two, in balancing 'ideals and realities', children were experiencing less than the best in the preschools that parents chose; and three, parents see the need for effective partnership in realising their ideal, yet they could be said to take a more passive position in their involvement in their children's learning. These key issues are discussed in details later in this chapter. The following is the Grounded Conceptual Model illustrating the process of parents' definitions of high quality ECEC, their choice and experiences as presented in data (Chapter five and six).
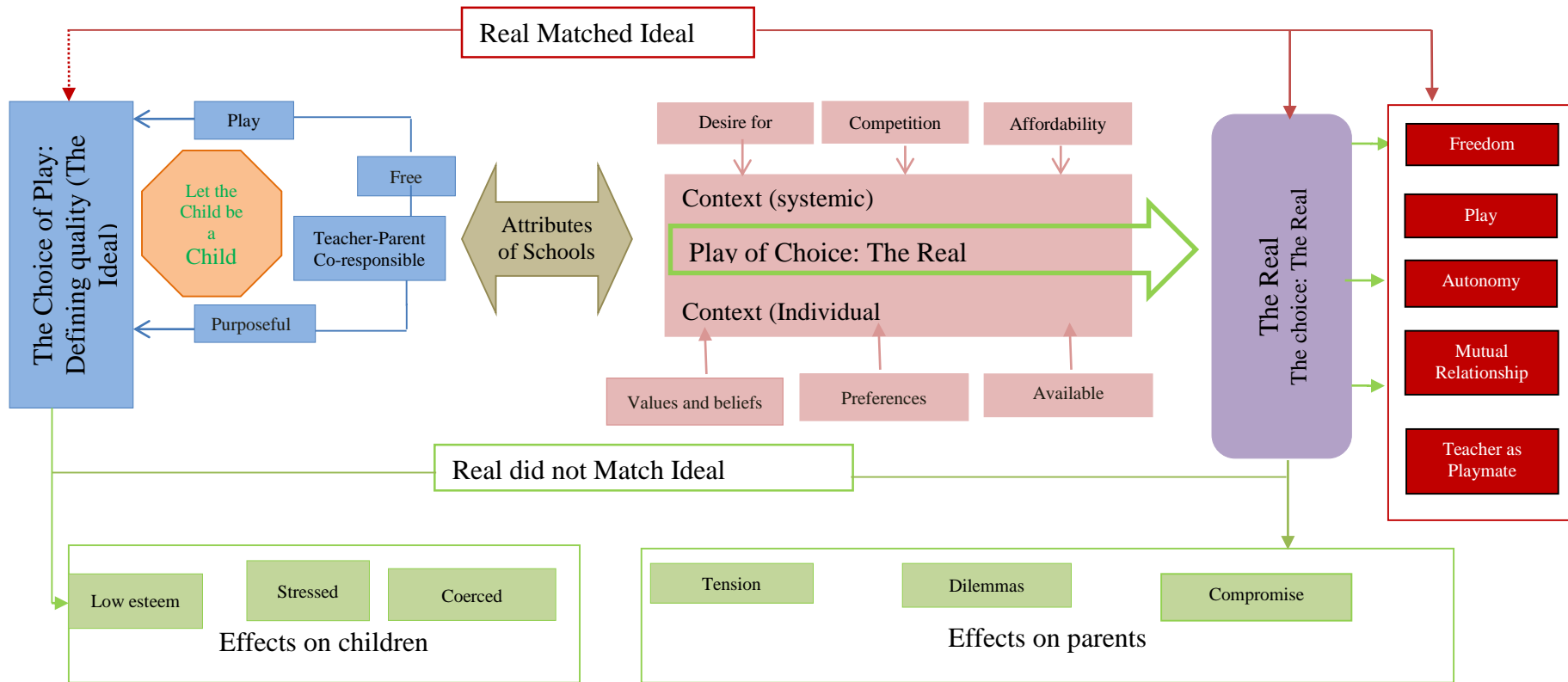
Figure 6 .1 Grounded Theory Conceptual Model

Haraka is a Kiswahili word meaning 'hurry'. I began this chapter with Haraka's story to show metaphorically what parents in this study felt about their children's experiences at preschool. Haraka's story began in Chapter One, showing Haraka's life before joining preschool and the process her parents undertook when looking for a preschool for her to attend. The following vignette 'Shattered Dreams – Haraka in school' is based on some of the parents' experiences with the preschools in which they had enrolled their children. Haraka's story also epitomises conflicts that parents experience in their attempt to balance their ideals and the realities on the ground.

Shattered Dreams – Haraka in School

> *Haraka's parents do not see their daughter as often as they did before she joined preschool. Although sometimes her mother comes home early from work, Haraka does not get home until 5.00 pm. On some days, when there is heavy traffic, Haraka does not get home until much later, sometimes not until 6.00 pm.*

> *Haraka comes home from preschool very tired. She cannot go for evening walks and play with her mother or her neighbours. Every day, Haraka comes home with homework that she must complete by the next day for preschool. Haraka sometimes cries through the homework because she wants to play or sleep. Haraka's mother, who is home most of the time, sees her child getting stressed. But she must see to it that Haraka completes her homework. She must sign Haraka's homework book; otherwise Haraka will be reprimanded by the teacher. Haraka's mother (who has a background in teacher education, although not practicing) knows that what her daughter is getting in preschool is not what she had hoped for.*

> *Haraka's parents had taken a lot of time to look for a preschool that would meet her needs. They wanted a preschool where Haraka could play with her friends; where she*

could learn through play and develop an appetite for learning. They had hoped that learning would be fun for Haraka as she explored and experimented with new ideas, with her friends and as an individual.

Haraka's parents are concerned about the amount and level of homework that she brings home daily. They discuss it and agree that Haraka's mother should visit the preschool and discuss the matter with the teacher. When Haraka's mother goes to the preschool, she is informed that she will need to talk to the school manager, who will determine whether it is necessary for her to talk to the teacher. Haraka's mother explains to the manager that Haraka is getting very stressed because of the amount and the level of homework she is bringing home. The manager is very sympathetic about the situation but explains, "If we don't teach the children Standard One Maths and English, and test and monitor where they are at, there is no way they will pass the Standard One interview. Other preschools are doing it; we have to do like everyone else. When our school was not doing well in the Standard One interview, a number of parents withdrew their children. What do we do?"

Haraka's mother returns home unsure of what to do next. On one hand, she chose the preschool because she thought her child's needs would be met. She now feels her daughter is being denied a chance to be a child. On the other hand, she wants Haraka to join a good primary school so that she will eventually become a doctor. If Haraka does not pass the Standard One interview, she will be unable to attend a primary school with an excellent reputation. Her dreams of a preschool are shattered. She feels trapped. She feels helpless to change the situation and so does her husband.

Haraka's mother reports to her husband about the visit to Haraka's preschool earlier in the day. They both agree to call one of their family friends to find out about the

experiences they have had with their son. Their son is Haraka's age. Their friends think that the preschool their son is attending is meeting his needs. They report that they think their son has been having a lot of fun; there is an emphasis on play, exploring and trying out things.

The following day, Haraka's mother decides to check out the preschool on her way home from work. She is impressed by what she sees – the facilities are excellent; there is a big, well equipped playground; a spacious compound; and the buildings all looked very child friendly. She talks with the manager, who takes her for a tour through the preschool. Later that evening, she tells about her visit to her husband. They both agree that it would be an appropriate preschool for Haraka. However, three things stand in their way. One, the preschool is over on the other side of the city. Although the preschool provides transport and is willing to pick up and drop Haraka home, they consider the distance too far for Haraka, who is still only three and a half years old. Two, the preschool's fees are very high. Three, Haraka's parents are unsure whether, if they changed her to that preschool, she will still pass the Standard One interview for the primary school of their choice. Will she still be able to progress to higher levels, as they envisaged? They agree that, at the moment, they have to let her remain in the preschool she is in, even though it may not meet all of their 'ideal' requirements.

The above vignette about Haraka's experiences at school is used to demonstrate the main issues that emerged from the study. Key among these issues, as demonstrated above, is the internal struggle of parents to decide what is more important for their children – the natural enjoyment of childhood (as captured in the '*Ideal*') or the steady (and perhaps stressful) progression through the prescribed steps required to obtain a 'good' education in Kenya (the '*Real*'). In this chapter, I discuss these issues under the headings: Good Understanding versus Pragmatic Reasons; Balancing Ideals and Realities; and Effective

Partnerships. I then present suggestions made by parents on how to improve their choices, followed by implications for policy and practice. I also revisit the research questions; discuss the strengths and limitations of the study; look at areas for further study; and provide the thesis conclusions.

Key Issues

This study found that instead of the 'happy-go-lucky' childhood that parents wanted for their children, there is a feeling of 'the hurried' child; elucidated in the story of Haraka. Parents felt that their children were being denied a chance to be children, by carrying responsibilities that were meant for older children and being forced to grow up too early. Findings, as presented through Haraka's story, highlighted three critical issues that emerged from the study:

- Good understanding versus pragmatic reasons – Parents have a good understanding of quality ECEC (including the value of play in learning) that aligns with the literature, yet they make their choices for pragmatic, rather than quality, reasons such as academic stature, affordability, proximity and similar values with home.

- Balancing ideals and realities – Parents claim to be acting in the best interests of the child, yet in trying to balance ideals and realities their children are getting less than the best.

- Effective partnerships – Parents understand and value partnerships with teachers; indeed they wanted these partnerships to occur. Yet from their reports, they took a back seat and gave teachers the main responsibility for their children's learning.

The following section will cover each of these key issues.

Good understanding versus pragmatic reasons. Choosing ECEC services is complex, although at face value it looks simple and straightforward. Socio-cultural contexts play a key role in determining the types of services that parents choose for their children. While parents may have a good understanding of the components that constitute high quality ECEC programmes, they do not always choose such programmes. This is because they also make choices for pragmatic reasons.

Pragmatic concerns have been cited in the literature as major considerations for parents in the choices they make. These practical reasons, although seemingly similar, are not universal but vary from one context and country to another and affect each parent differently. For example, Wrohlich (2011) observed that a prominent issue in the USA is child care costs for working mothers, while in most European countries the main concerns are availability and accessibility. Interestingly, Goodfellow (2003) reported that in Australia both financial barriers and accessibility are cited as major factors in child care choice. A further issue in Australia, as Noble (2005) emphasized, is that of parents' choices being constrained by what was available, particularly in some geographical areas.

Parents in the current study had a good understanding of high quality ECEC programmes as demonstrated in Chapter Four. This idealism is, however, not supported by the realities actually occurring. These parents chose ECEC services for pragmatic reasons including academic stature, proximity, cost and congruence between home and school values. Previous research by Vincent and Ball (2001) confirmed that parents sometimes find it difficult to find an ECEC service that 'fits' with their 'ideals' as well as serving their pragmatic concerns.

Paradoxically, although parents' choices are individual, they are also influenced by societal expectations, approvals and disapprovals. In terms of social structures, social

networks formerly available to parents for child care may no longer be available. Technological changes have increased the numbers of women joining the formal labour market, and enlarged the demand for alternative child care. Such complexities necessitate decision making based on pragmatic considerations. As such, the social context with its associated rules make choices of ECEC services all the more multifaceted and pragmatic reasons all the more dominant (Vincent & Ball, 2001). In spite of parents' realities (limited resources, need to find care quickly, work schedules and lack of adequate choices of services), the literature records that parents who predominately use pragmatic reasons to choose services often receive lower quality services.

As discussed in Chapter Two, parents' participation in their children's learning and development is critical and so are the choices they make for supplementary care. Furthermore, the quality of ECEC services has ongoing ramifications for children's future life success, both academic and social. It is therefore important that parents are able to choose services based on high quality rather than solely for pragmatic reasons. Throughout this thesis, parents are assumed to be partners in the provision of high quality ECEC services. With this assumption in mind, possible solutions therefore promote the enhanced role that parents can actively play.

Shattered dreams. Like Haraka's parents, parents in this study live with shattered dreams. Central to this discussion is the notion of power within the education structure, the school and the wider community. The issue of power is enacted in the provision of services from which parents can choose, and the extent to which parents can exercise choice, or express their views when services do not match their aspirations. Unless high quality services are available and affordable for parents they are not able to match their ideals and therefore meet the perceived needs of their children.

ECEC services in Kenya, particularly in most urban areas, are essentially market-driven (Table 1.4: Chapter One). The issues of availability and affordability (discussed in Chapters Two and Six) are central to this discussion. Parental preferences are constrained by the types of ECEC services available in their communities and whether they are affordable. Findings of the current study align with the literature, where different studies reported that although parents valued the quality of services in which they enrolled their children, such considerations were blurred by the costs as well as the choice of available services (Del Boca, et al., 2004; Harrison & Ungerer, 2005; Peyton, et al., 2001). Vincent and Ball (2001, p. 649) in particular talk about middle class parents compromising in terms of carers, shortages of alternatives and the need to find care quickly. Whilst these parents could be said to have skills and resources to operate in the school market, such realities compelled parents to accept preschools that were not 'ideal' or just 'good enough', a reality that resonates with most parents in the current study.

The current study informs us that, for these parents', their desired accessibility and affordability are difficult to achieve within Kenya's current ECEC service provision. Challenges in finding high quality ECEC services meant that these parents were constantly involved in dilemmas, compromise and 'balancing ideals and realities', which often left them choosing services of lower quality.

Acting in the child's best interest. Parenting has become more multifarious requiring more planning and increasing levels of strategic behaviour to meet the ever changing needs of children (Woodhead & Keynes, 1996). Such planning involves caring, as well as arranging for supplementary care, to meet the child's immediate and future needs. This new dimension of caring for children and 'acting in the child's best interest' "in relation to an increasingly competitive and unpredictable future and resulting dilemmas about how to act for the best" is an emerging challenge that is laced with uncertainty (S Ball, 2004, p. 8).

In the midst of such uncertainties, 'acting in the child's best interest', as Sinclair (2005) argues: "is open to interpretation. What for instance is the child's 'best interest'? Who decides?" (p. 229). This intersection of ideals and realities creates a space in which parents find themselves in a 'double bind'. The question to ask here is: In 'balancing ideals and realities', are parents actually acting in the best interest of their children? Unsurprisingly, this is a question that the parents in the current study frequently asked themselves.

Parents' narratives about their choices reveal tension and anxiety, particularly in wanting services that meet their children's individual needs and being able to gauge whether their children were disadvantaged in any way due to their pursuit for future success. Similar tension is also experienced in deciding when to enrol their children in preschool. Whilst most parents said they wished to keep their children at home longer (considered being ideal for the young child), in reality they chose to enrol them in preschool (considered ideal for school readiness) earlier than four years of age, the age recommended for starting preschool by the government. Another area of tension was between parents' ideal services and what was actually available. Not unlike other parents recorded in the literature (Vincent & Ball, 2001) such tension results in compromises.

Balancing ideals and realities. Like Haraka's parents, parents in the current study have shattered dreams; dreams envisaged in their ideals of the kind of early childhood experiences they want for their children dissolve in the light of reality. These parents demonstrated that they love their children and have a genuine interest in choosing services that meet their children's needs. However, in reality they found services that matched their ideals to be too expensive or too far from where they were living.

There is a feeling of 'being caught between a rock and a hard place': the rock is meeting their children's immediate needs for development, and the hard place is the future

needs of academic progression and later career life, dictated by the imposed examination process. How ECEC services balance these two components remains a challenge, yet is critical to parents' choices as well as to how they resolve their dilemmas. It could be argued from the findings presented in Chapter Six that most services lean towards fulfilling the academic demands required by the competitive education system. Therefore, parents struggled to meet the middle ground, often trading off children's immediate needs for the perceived security of the academic orientation of the chosen service.

The market approach to the provision of ECEC services (ideals of neo-liberalism) is seen as a way of increasing choice for parents. The assumption made by neo-liberals is that the free choice market will make services more responsive to parents' needs, which in turn will increase quality. However, as experienced by parents in the current study, parents' choices of ECEC services are often a function of constraints and compromises, as well as of parents' preferences. Both systemic factors and individual circumstances work together to potentially limit parents' choices. This key finding of the current study underscores the need to understand parents' individual and social contexts. If we are to claim free choice for parents and improved efficiency then we also need to understand parents' individual and collective social contexts, and the impact these have on choice making. Policymakers, as well as service providers, need to actively listen to parents and address systemic factors that impede parents from choosing services that match their aspirations (Goodfellow, 2003; Larner & Phillips, 2002; OECD, 2001a, 2006), otherwise ECEC services are susceptible to reverting to the lowest common denominator rather than engaging in a model of continuous improvement. Therefore, effective partnerships between teachers and parents become vital to create understanding on services that will serve families' needs as well as those of individual children.

Effective partnership. The third issue that emerged from the data is that of partnership between teachers and parents. The role of partnership in realising the rich environments that parents wanted for their children was evident in this current study. Parents acknowledged that meeting their ideals of ECEC was a shared responsibility between the teachers and themselves. This aligns with current global trends championing for the need of partnership with families in providing high quality ECEC services. OECD (2001a, 2006) particularly states that partnering with parents is central to improving ECEC settings to meet children's needs. In the following section I will describe partnership as understood by parents in the current study and outline how it might be enhanced so as to increase parents' chances of choosing high quality ECEC services, and to ensure children experience high quality programmes. This will be discussed under three main subheadings: 'Good understanding versus passive role', 'Partnership and parity', and 'It takes two to tango'.

Good understanding versus passive role. Parents in this study understand and value partnerships with teachers; indeed they wanted partnerships with the teachers. However, the roles parents identified themselves playing in their children's learning seemed to take a 'back seat' while they gave teachers the main responsibility for their children's learning. The roles they identified for themselves were: '*Supporting the Child*', '*Walking Alongside the Teacher*', *'Keeping their Ears on the Ground*', and *'Parent as a Co-teacher*'.

These roles could be considered passive in the sense that they did not entail substantive decision making concerning the content, pedagogies or policies governing the provision of ECEC services or the overall education system; issues that parents raised as concerns in their interviews. These more passive roles are somewhat ironic given that the parents in this study are considered to have both the cultural capital and educational resources necessary to effectively engage with teachers and staff (see Berthelsen & Walker, 2008;

259

Symeou, 2007; Vincent & Martin, 2002). The group of parents in the study were highly educated; many were trained as teachers. They had sound information about schooling, and were familiar with the curriculum and the wider educational system. They were able to successfully monitor their children's learning and highlight areas of discrepancies and conflicts with this learning and what they wanted for their children. Yet, as the roles reported above demonstrate, parents described themselves as merely supporters for their children whilst it was the teachers who were fulfilling school agendas. They saw themselves as merely managing different problems that their children encountered in preschool.

Interestingly, like other middle class parents in the literature (Ball, 2003, 2004; Vincent & Ball, 2001) this group of parents used their social and economic capital to try to advantage their children. They chose private-for-profit preschools, that were believed to offer better services than the community ones; changed preschools for their children when they were dissatisfied with services; provided home environments that supported their children's learning and development; and hired private tutors when they felt their children were lagging behind. Conversely, they appeared powerless under the teacher's jurisdiction and expressed reliance on teachers' professional expertise to ensure their children's educational success. Unsurprisingly, as Vincent (2000) argues, the ability to choose and exit from services that are inadequate has little relationship with having a 'voice'. Having a 'voice' is the attempt to individually or collectively make changes to the practice, policies and products rather than opting out.

Yet, there are limited opportunities in most schools to exercise individual or collective 'voice' (Vincent, 2000). Vincent (2000) is of the view that 'voice' is a more unfamiliar response than exit, more 'messy' and uncertain in its success. Although parental lobbying for their own children is familiar to schools' staff, its success is determined by the extent to which the school structure is receptive. This is an issue that is discussed later in this section. Attesting to such uncertainties of parental lobbying, some parents in the current study

260

reported that their attempts to question school practices that they were unhappy with met with opposition from the school staff. However, there were also some positive cases, where parents' views were accepted, but these were much less frequent and generally only when the issues raised did not involve substantial matters such as pedagogy, curricula or school practice.

Partnership and parity. Partnership is cited as one of the main components of high quality ECEC programmes (Bennett, 2006; Crozier & Davies, 2007; Goodfellow, 2003; OECD, 2001a, 2001b, 2006). Its role in realising parents' ideals was also evident in this study. Partnership denotes equal status, where partners have equal say in decisions that are made. In reality, generally teacher-parent partnerships occur in the social contexts of unequal power relations (Crozier & Davies, 2007; Crozier et al., 2008). The environment created by teachers, administrators and other staff is critical in determining the extent to which effective partnerships between families and teachers are formed and add value to children's experiences. In this study, the parents were aware that the learning environments they wanted for their children in the early years required cooperation. Yet they were cognizant of the fact that the learning experiences are circumscribed within the school context and beyond their and their children's control. This may explain why, although valuing partnerships with teachers, they left the responsibility of their children's learning almost solely to the teachers.

Partnerships with parents should be considered at two levels: policy and service (see Chapter Two). Parents' active roles are important at these two levels if their children are to experience high quality ECEC environments. According to the partnership discourse, supported by other discourses such as neo-liberalism promoting free market in the provision of services and increased choice, parents are supposed to be more autonomous, and empowered to play an active role informing both policy and practice to effectively meet

young children's needs (Apple, 2001c; Campbell, et al., 2009). While on paper this may be stipulated, the reality for parents in this study is the reverse. Instead of feeling empowered to actively make choices, engage and shape the learning and developmental experiences of their children, they reported that they had very limited power to contribute to major decisions about their children's education. Parents believed that the government had the power to change the education system by enforcing legislation to increase educational as well as job opportunities. This may explain why parents' perceived roles related more closely to the service provision level than to policy matters. Three key factors emerged and may account for parental construction of their role: the traditional cultural view of 'teachers as experts' in Kenya inhibits parents' participation; there is a lack of school structures to encourage participatory partnership with parents; and Kenya still maintains an ECEC policy context which, in practice and despite rhetoric, does not recognise parents as equal partners.

It takes two to tango. Effective partnership needs time, energy, commitment and resources (Crozier, 2000) from all stakeholders. Parents as key stakeholders have all of these components, albeit to varying degrees. Furthermore, other factors come into play, which either impede or enable partnerships. Among these, four issues stand out and have relevance in making parents more proactive in the partnership to make meaningful changes in their children's learning and development. These are: cultural capital made up of parents' past experiences and knowledge; the way school staff relate to and communicate with parents to help them feel part of their children's learning; how parents perceive their roles in partnerships with teachers; and the partnership discourse in operation (Crozier, 2000). As cultural capital has already been discussed above, the following discussion will concentrate on the remaining three factors.

School-home communication. Effective school-home communication is important in creating congruence between the two environments and improving their ability to meet children's needs. Furthermore, positive communication between school staff and parents is said to contribute to the success of ECEC services (Hughes & MacNaughton, 2001). Parents in the current study were adamant that school values matched those of their families. They also wanted preschools with open communication channels where they could freely share information. However, as discussed later in this section, effective communication has been problematic due to bureaucratic school structures, knowledge politics and policies that promote an insubordinate position of the parent against that of the teacher.

School staff appears to make parents feel either that they are welcome or that they are unable to partner with them in their children's learning. Home-to-school and school-to-home communication are important for effective teacher partnership. Bronfenbrenner (1979) explained how home and school interconnections are nurtured and maintained by regular, open and mutual communication in the interest of the child. These views were shared by parents in this study. Additionally, they believed that school-home communication could be enhanced through more regular informal forums such as open days, prize giving days, sports and athletics as well as social nights, chatting during drop-offs and pick-up times, as well as through more formal means including diaries, school newsletters and teacher-parent conferences. However, in this study and in the literature (Lemmer, 2012), it seems that school representatives maintain the power to determine how, and how often, parents should be involved, as well as how and when communication should occur.

Often school representatives can be seen to put 'boundaries' (Crozier, 2000) between themselves and parents by defining what issues parents can and cannot engage in. As reported in this study, parents had few opportunities to openly discuss with teachers any substantial issues concerning their children's experiences. As enacted in Haraka's story,

Haraka's mother could not talk to the teacher directly but must first speak to the manager, who filters what should be discussed with the teacher. Crozier (2000) argues that marginalisation of this sort not only leads to a sense of hopelessness with respect to parents' having a voice, but also to a sense of them not wanting to be involved.

How parents perceive their role. Seen from a different perspective, parents could also be said to put boundaries on what issues they want to engage in based on their past experiences. Such boundaries are alluded to in Haraka's story and are also evident in the findings reported in Chapters Five and Six. Parents were particular about their roles and the distinct role of the teacher. Although they acknowledged that these roles are complementary, there was an emphasis on teachers as professionals rather than parents, despite parents reporting that most teachers were not trained and those who were had very low levels of training (mostly primary school or high school graduates). This view of 'teachers as experts' expressed by parents in this study, has been influenced and shaped by similar discourses within the community and in Kenyan policy contexts.

Global literature also attests to the politics of knowledge surrounding teacher-parent relationships (Crozier & Davies, 2007; P. Hughes & MacNaughton, 2001). There is the portrayal of parents being ignorant of appropriate child rearing practices and the idea that best practices need to be learnt from the teachers, thereby making parental knowledge supplementary rather than complementary, with much parental knowledge being ignored as not professional (P Hughes & MacNaughton, 2000). Seen this way, Hughes and MacNaughton (2000) continue, "involvement in early education is admission of ignorance-hardly an incentive to become involved" (p. 244). Parents' involvement needs to be redefined as a way of enhancing local democracies that create local funds of knowledge (Macy, 2012) on what is in the children's best interest.

Current discourse of partnership. Partnership and parents' involvement in the provision

of high quality ECEC services are recent discourses, both internationally and at national

levels (OECD, 2001a, 2001b, 2006; Republic of Kenya, 2006a). In spite of such

endorsement at policy level, parents' voices regarding ECEC policies remain marginalised

(Irvine, 2005). Policies are riddled with rhetoric about the importance of providing space for

parents' participation. Though claiming to promote the central role of parents in the provision

of high quality ECEC services that are responsive to families as well as children's needs,

these policies still promote the image of the passive parent (OECD, 2001a, 2006; Republic of

Kenya, 2006b). In these policies there is much talk about 'supporting the parent',

'empowering parents' and 'creating space' for parents' participation; most of which position

parents as passive and in need of help. Other policies that claim to empower parents,

particularly those championed by neo-liberals such as 'free choice' and parents as consumers,

have also been criticised of crippling parents' collective voice (Campbell, et al., 2009; Hursh,

2005; Marginson, 1997). Some authors have questioned the genuineness in considering

parents as consumers with rights to make appropriate choices that meet their children's and

family's needs. Irvine (2005) in particular postulates that "there is some evidence to suggest

that the focus on individual consumers marginalises collective parental action" (p. 246).

These authors call for the need for advocacy to give voice to parents' views and thereby

position them as equal partners in the provision of high quality ECEC services.

Vincent (2000), in her study on parents' involvement in schools in the UK, champions the

"parent as participant" (p. 7). She considers the participant's role to be more proactive and

therefore influencing decision making processes. Irvine (2005) also calls for parents'

collective voice in influencing policy in ECEC. There is a need for a mind shift by

policymakers, researchers and parents themselves; from conceptualising parents as requiring

support to providing an enabling role for parents' views to be shared. Such advocacy would

include creating an environment with equitable communication processes and participatory decision making. Bernie and Lall (2008) are of the view that parents have been denied access to discourses of reform. This study takes the discussion further, suggesting that parents should position themselves as 'protagonists' (Crozier, 2000); utilising their voices, cultural and economic capital to put pressure on school representatives and policymakers to ensure their participation in policymaking for the wellbeing of their children.

There is need for a re-orientation of parental participation to a more equitable framework. In such a framework, the power to define parent participation would be with both parents and school staff, rather than with one or the other (Lemmer, 2012). Such partnership would mean that teachers, as well as being experts, would also function as learners about families' cultures and experiences. Likewise, parents would learn about the school, which would result in a mutual understanding for the benefit of their children. This resonates with parents' wishes in this study.

This kind of involvement creates real networks that include staff-parents, parent-parent, staff-children and parent-children-community-organisation-local administration relations. It emphasises the importance of open communication among the players; awareness and sensitivities to each party's needs; and opportunities for interactions (Rinaldi, 2006). To this end, teachers, school administrators and policymakers must be willing to develop partnerships with parents at an equal status; what parents described as "being mutual".

In this section I have discussed the key issues that emerged from the data. These key issues have elaborated on the process that parents are involved in as they define high quality ECEC services and attempt to make choices that meet their children's needs. The discussion has shed light on the complexities of a process that otherwise looked straightforward at face value: namely that of making choices of ECEC services. The process entails dilemmas,

266

tensions and compromises as parents attempt to 'act in the child's best interest, balancing "ideals and realities"'. Such complexities more often favour pragmatic reasons over idealism. Therefore, the context comprising individual circumstances as well as systemic factors work together to mediate parents' choices and children's early childhood experiences. In the following section I revisit the research questions, which is then followed by recommendations by the parents in this study, and I then highlight future implications for policy and practice. The strengths and weaknesses of grounded theory approach to this research are provided, as well as areas for further research. I then conclude the thesis and lastly end with a coda of an envisaged ideal preschool.

Research Questions Revisited

The aim of this research was to understand the decisions of parents who are professionals and living in urban Nairobi concerning their children's early childhood education. These decisions are made within each parent, and are the products of their social context. Social contexts shape parents' aspirations for their children and their expectations of these services. It was imperative, therefore, to understand the social context in which these decisions are being made and within which ECEC is defined, including notions of quality and best practice (Dahlberg & Moss, 2008; Woodhead & Keynes, 1996). More importantly, the underlying aim of this study was to legitimise and give voice to parents' understandings of quality ECEC and, in so doing so, help them to negotiate the preschool market and make choices that meet their aspirations. Exploring the process of choice and how parents interact with these services brought to the fore critical issues that impede parents from choosing their ideals. Such knowledge is important in filling an identified gap in the literature, by highlighting parents' views of what is important to them in ECEC services. Potentially, the study findings can initiate and inform dialogues on ECEC policy, practice and reform agenda in Kenya.

The following research questions guided the study:

- What are parents' aspirations for their children within private-for-profit ECEC services?

- What are parents' experiences in finding and choosing private-for-profit ECEC services that meet their aspirations for their children?

- How are parents' aspirations and their choices impacted on by the prevailing practices of the system of education and social discourses?

The first part of the data analysis answered the first research question, revealing parents' ideals of ECEC services. Findings from this question established that parents' ideals of ECEC services match those in ECEC literature. This congruence between parents' views and those of experts in the field of ECEC extends to the recognition that learning should be play-based; learning environments need to be well equipped with appropriate learning resources; there should be small group activities and highly qualified, well-renumerated teachers; teachers should be caring and friendly to children and are willing to invite parents to be partners. The second part of the analysis answered the second and the third research questions and focused on parents' choices and experiences with the services that they chose for their children. The analysis highlighted the complexities of parents' choices by revealing the contexts in which parents' choices are mediated. The findings of this study have implications for future policy as well as practice. If applied, they have the potential to improve both parents' choices to match their ideals and early childhood experiences for children.

Implications for the Future

In this section, I present the implications for the future from the study findings. These include suggestions made by parents regarding implications for policy and practice. This study underscores the need to promote parents as advocates for their children and to help parents consider their individual and collective roles at both policy and service levels. Furthermore,

this study advocates the need for all parents to see themselves as a strong force that can change practices that do not adequately address the needs of children and families. The study suggests that more research on parents' experiences would act as an arena where parents' voices could be heard. To this end, this section puts forward suggestions made by this group of parents about the changes they would like to see to ensure their children can experience high quality ECEC in Kenya.

Suggestions made by parents. The parents wanted to see changes to Kenyan policy encouraging parent participation in ECEC services. Among the suggestions parents made that could facilitate choices that matched their ideals were: developmentally appropriate ECEC programmes; no exams at preschool level; standardised services; and higher training and better remuneration for teachers. Each of these suggestions is discussed below.

Developmentally appropriate programmes. Throughout this research, parents' constant plea was '*Let the Child be a Child*'. They wanted preschool programmes that were holistic in nature and child-centred. They highlighted the need for programmes to be responsive to children's individual needs. Parents believed that the government has the power to change the system of education to meet children's individual needs rather than emphasising examinations. Notably, current frameworks do not seem to ensure high quality services for parents. At the service level, there is more emphasis on examinations with associated rote learning and didactic teaching. Parents believed that enforcing legislation will ensure that services followed the set guidelines by the Ministry of Education through the *Early childhood development service standard guidelines for Kenya (Republic of Kenya, 2006a)*

No examinations for pre-schoolers. Closely related to having developmentally appropriate programmes was parents' desire that the Standard One interview be removed as a

269

requirement for formal school enrolment. The majority of parents stated that examinations ought not to be used to assess children's learning progress at preschool and that associated strategies used to coerce children to perform better, such as the ranking of children and corporal punishment, should be abolished. Parents wanted teachers to be more creative in their assessments, using approaches such as observation, documentation and methods that were more child-centred. Overemphasis on examinations was said to be denying children opportunities to just be children, due to the amount and level of work that children were expected to cover.

Standardise services. Parents wanted services to be standardised so that they would be assured of high quality services, no matter which preschool they choose. Parents believed that the government has the power to enforce legislation and monitor quality assurance. A number of parents were of the view that service providers were sacrificing quality for profits.

Higher training and better remuneration for teachers. Parents wanted higher trained preschool teachers, preferably at degree or diploma levels, who are well remunerated, commensurate to their work. Parents believed preschool teachers were poorly paid, yet they worked with children at their most vulnerable stage. Some parents suggested that due to the poor pay, preschool teaching does not attract highly qualified personnel. Others said service providers hired unqualified teachers, or those with low training, so they could pay them less and increase their profits. There was consensus amongst the parents that if teachers were trained at higher levels and were well renumerated, they would provide high quality learning experiences for their children. Higher training and pay were believed to also raise the social status of preschool teachers. Citing examples of high-cost preschools, parents reported that service providers would be able to attract highly trained personnel if they gave them better terms. However, as discussed earlier, parents can only afford limited costs for high quality

programmes. The government's involvement in terms of capital investment would go a long way in making high quality services affordable.

Implications for Policy and Practice
Based on their views on quality ECEC services and their experiences, the insights of parents in the current study provide useful information for the Ministry of Education, service providers and parents in Kenya on quality ECEC and parents' participation. This study suggests the following implications for ECEC policy and practice: considering the context of parents' choices; a more proactive role for the government, and advocacy for both the individual and collective parental voice.

Considering the context of parents' choices. This study highlights the importance of listening to parents to gain deeper insight into the complexities behind their choice making. Findings also highlight aspects of policy and practice requiring further attention. For example, while the Kenyan government has developed a Policy Framework, and an accompanying Service Standard Guidelines to rationalise the framework, it was evident from parents' experiences that different service providers offer services of varying quality, with some being described as 'deplorable'.

Findings align with Bronfenbrenner's (1979) Ecological Theory that argues that different systems work together to impact on child development. In this study, different systems were seen to work together to influence parents' choices, as well as the eventual classroom experiences for children. For example, macro-systems such as society's expectations and demands, the wider education system, parents' expectations and the job market, all work together to influence the micro-environment of the child. To increase opportunities for parents to choose high quality ECEC services, issues to do with the wider educational system such as requirements for enrolment in formal education, opportunities at all levels of education, and a job market to match demand need to be addressed. Addressing

271

parents' macro-political, social and economic systems is important. As Wilkinson, Kemmis and others (2009) state: "to change education involves also changing the practice architectures, that is the mediating preconditions which prefigure educational practices" (p. 5).

A more proactive role for the government. To increase accessibility to affordable high quality ECEC services for parents, there is a need for a more proactive government role. To a great extent, the government determines provision of educational opportunities and structures the education system through its policies. However, as explained previously, in a market-driven approach private providers are the ones who are more responsible for the provision of educational opportunities, while the government adopts a coordinating role with limited intervention. As such, in a market-driven approach, family contributions are by far the largest ECEC revenue source. To remain economically viable ECEC services must set fees high enough to cover costs, maintain full enrolment and collect fees in full and on time. The market approach makes programmes particularly vulnerable to market conditions such as competition; cost cutting; and disparities in their distributions, especially in regions seen to be of low returns. Due to these market forces there are sharp disparities in terms of quality in the available services.

Promotion of a market approach to the provision of education and the 'hallowing' out of the government has been criticised for promoting efficiency and individuality at the expense of equity and community. Education becomes more a private than a public good. Seen this way, schools are said to be increasingly concerned about their competitiveness in the market, their skill oriented learning and individual needs than about the broader issues of "equity, justice and social citizenship" (Cambron-McCabe and McCarthy, 2005, p. 212). Furthermore, where government services are inadequate, to ensure equal access and/or good quality, demand-driven private schools of different types and quality fill the gaps (Kitaev,

1999). As evidenced in the current study, this means paucity and inequality of opportunity for children and families in different parts of urban Nairobi as well as services of varying degrees of quality. Such disparities must be addressed to provide equal opportunities for all children to have high quality early childhood experiences.

One way that the government could increase accessibility is by creating an enabling environment for service providers. As business enterprises, ECEC service providers must be assured of their profits in order to be willing to establish their services in a given area. The role of the government is crucial if equal accessibility, both in terms of availability and affordability, is to be achieved. International research (OECD, 2001a, 2001b, 2006) shows that in comparison, ECEC is provided more equitably in countries where there is stronger state funding, policy setting and service delivery than through the market approach. The cost of providing high quality ECEC services cannot be adequately met by Kenyan parents. Government funding, particularly capital investment would go a long way in ensuring that charges are kept at a minimum and services are more affordable for many parents. Particularly in developing countries, where parents are not provided with any financial assistance, it is important that private-for-profit services are also affordable to most parents.

Policy governing provision and implementation of ECEC services is important in ensuring high standards of the services provided, particularly where different providers are involved, as is the case in Nairobi. However, policies or standards remain empty statements if there are no suitable ways of assessing their achievement. Policy governing the provision of ECEC services in Kenya is riddled with rhetoric about standards of services and parental involvement when providing services that meet families and children's needs. Haraka's parents attempted through the school to challenge practice that failed to fit within the policy framework, but this was unsuccessful. In their interviews, parents' reported school representatives blame the highly competitive education system on the government, claiming

to be helpless to change the system. Although in a market-driven approach the government would ideally take up the co-ordination role, findings of this study suggest that there are loopholes in the system. As such, services that do not seem to meet the minimum standard are still in operation. Due to the high costs of services that are considered high quality, parents are pushed to lower quality services because they are more affordable. Information presented in Chapter Six attests to these assertions, as parents narrated the poor standards of some of the preschools. Enforcement of current legislation (policy framework and service standard guidelines) is important, as they will most likely assure parents of standard services in any preschool they choose to enrol their children. Such enforcement has the potential to challenge the exam enforced process of admission to formal school, lead to higher training of teachers and establishment of better terms of services for preschool teachers, as well as quality monitoring and control cited as major impediments to the achievement of the ideal.

Finally, there is a need for parents' acceptance of their involvement with the schools so they can advocate for their own children. Hall (2004) explains that "agency is about the ability to act with intent and awareness, and this raises important questions about individual and collective responsibility and culpability" (p. 38). His view is that individuals are active agents who have the ability to claim and resist discourses that constitute their lives. Robinson and Diaz (2006) make a valuable point that is especially relevant to this study: "Ultimately and critically, individual subjects have to take responsibility for their position in discourse and its implications for the perpetuation of social inequalities and injustices. Consequently, agency is a critical concept in terms of social justice education." (p. 39). Seen in the context of this study, the architecture of the system of education, as well as the school structure, more often act as impediments to parents' attempts to challenge the current practice. Schools' representatives problematise parents as being hard to reach or ignore their knowledge altogether (Crozier & Davies, 2007). Such an approach lays the responsibility of reaching out

onto the parents, yet at the same time limits and sometimes blocks opportunities for parents to exercise their voices. Parents in this study were divided about whose responsibility it is to promote their interactions with the school staff. Differences notwithstanding, parents' agency is fundamental in changing a practice that is not currently meeting their children's needs.

The view that parents have been silent partners in the provision of high quality ECEC services is well documented (Hughes & MacNaughton, 2000, 2001; Larner & Phillips, 2002). Yet parents continue to carry the sole responsibility for caring for their children and deciding on alternative care. Policymakers, researchers, professionals and school administrators must now acknowledge parents as equal partners, who are knowledgeable and unequivocal about the kind of experiences they want for their children in the early years. This study and the design adopted were developed because of an identified gap in the literature investigating Kenyan parents' aspirations of ECEC services and how they negotiate the preschool market to choose services that match these aspirations. While listening to parents is considered important, both in the literature and in policy reform (Goodfellow, 2003; Noble, 2005; OECD, 2001a; Republic of Kenya, 2006b), parents' views have largely remained unheard.

Researchers have helped to raise awareness of the importance of investing high quality ECEC services (Chapter two). It is gratifying to know that there is an increasing amount of research being conducted on the role of family characteristics and preferences on the choice of alternative care for their children. There is also increased global advocacy supporting parents in providing quality to their children, including empowering them in the choices that they make. There is a need to carry out more research on how parents negotiate the preschool market in order to inform both policy and practice. Furthermore, a more inclusive model of quality ECEC that incorporates parents' views is important. Creating such a model will entail initiatives like having open and public forums to share information, where parents can engage in public debates concerning issues involving their children. Such forums

would create spaces where parents' views are negotiated and dialogued to guide policy as well as practice. The aim would be to create shared understandings and make children's issues everyone's business.

Activism for both individual and collective parental voice. Parents in this study expressed their inability to change systemic factors that would help achieve their ideal of ECEC. Through parents' narratives, there were clear limits of their agency and the degree to which they could exercise their voice in relation to services as well as wider policy. Some parents said that they had raised their concerns with particular preschool representatives about their practices, but they were defensive, blaming the system of education and competition from other providers. Individual withdrawal from services that were perceived to be inadequate apparently did not change anything. More often exiting parents did not discuss the issues with the particular preschool representatives. Others exited after raising issues and receiving no positive responses. However, a number of parents said there was no point in exiting a service because they were unsure about available alternatives.

Policy and practice concerning parents' involvement needs to be reviewed, so that it more strongly promotes and facilitates a collective parental voice. Furthermore, parents need to be sensitised (particularly the group of parents considered for this study) to their cultural capital, as well as resources they hold to create the changes they want for their children. The group of parents in the current study has both the socio-cultural capital as well as the resources to provide leadership to lessen disparities in quality of ECEC services reported in Chapter Six. Using their 'voice', these parents could provide pockets of good practice which can then spread to other schools. To use Vincent's (2000) words, parents:

> …can potentially build up networks of parents away from any one school and the
>
> complex relations which exist between individual parents, teachers and children. …

they can form 'protected enclaves' in which groups of parents can meet and discuss their views on the provision of education, locally and nationally and from this, formulate an agenda to take into the wide public sphere (p. 20).

Finally, when parents collectively act as children's advocates, children's issues become everyone's business. This study echoes Cannella's (2000) argument that early childhood be founded on structures that value and struggle for justice and equal opportunities embracing different voices of the young ones, as well as critical activism. Childhood must be recognised as a political space worthy to be protected and to embrace those who are younger as equal partners in the struggle for providing high quality experiences in the early years.

In this section I have looked at future implications of this current study for both policy and practice. For parents to choose services that meet their ideals there is a need for concerted effort by all stakeholders. The government, researchers, professionals, schools' administrators and the community must play their roles and at the same time acknowledge and promote parents' agency in providing services that meet their aspirations and their children's needs. The responsibility for bringing the ideal to fruition is 'we': all stakeholders.

Strengths and limitations of the Study
This study has addressed an identified gap in the literature, providing new insights into a particular group of Kenyan parents' understanding of high quality ECEC services, the process of making choices, as well as their experiences with the services. However it is important to note that while the study has generated critical implications for both policy and practice, there are also limitations associated with its design.

The benefits of a grounded theory approach. The findings of this study were facilitated through the use of a Constructivist Grounded Theory, which emphasises exploring multiple realities, ties and the complexities through which people experience and deal with a phenomenon. The perceived strengths of grounded theory in general, and constructivist

grounded theory in particular, support its use in the current study. Through the use of semi-structured in-depth interviews, analyses that stayed close to the data and constant comparison, it is argued that the grounded theory approach in this study provides a rich way of understanding how parents negotiate the preschool market and make choices. Besides, the study reveals complexities, views and actions of a small group of educated, professional parents in urban Nairobi in choosing preschool services. The grounded theory approach as evidenced in this study can be used to explore a variety of other issues in the provision of high quality ECEC services.

Moreover, the study captured parents' individual views and experiences, revealing the complexities involved in the process of choice of ECEC services. The flexibility and openness of the approach to creativity allowed the use of conversations constructed from' interviews to capture individual parents' responses. The approach also yielded a wide and contextually sensitive explanation of parents' views about high quality ECEC and the process of choice. Grounded theory analysis directed attention to the interplay between different factors in influencing parents' choices. It is therefore argued that the findings represent a major contribution to ECEC literature in its exploration and explanation of an under researched area – that of parents involvement in the provision of high ECEC services.

Constructivist grounded theory was chosen for the current study because of its ability to reveal social processes in order to describe a phenomenon. Based on the strengths of constructivist grounded theory, this study has articulated what it means to be a parent in urban Nairobi, to engage in defining high quality ECEC services and attempts to choose high quality services. Constructivist grounded theory has been hailed because of its concern for multiple perspectives and in bringing to the fore the socio-cultural contexts through which such perspectives are constructed. The current study revealed both the individual as well as the systemic contexts that interplay to mediate parents' choices.

Additionally, the constructivist grounded theory analysis underscored the importance of understanding parents' contexts in order to facilitate parents' choices of high quality ECEC services. Such understandings are important as they align themselves with current discourses that question previous views of quality as being objective and universal. Instead, more recent arguments point to the idea that quality is subjective and dynamic and needs to be contextualised (Dahlberg & Moss, 2008; Fleer & Hedegaard, 2010; Woodhead & Keynes, 1996) if ECEC reform agendas, policies and practices are to address families and children's needs. The findings also add parents' 'voice' to the definitions of quality ECEC.

Finally, this study meets the criteria outlined in Chapter Three and discussed in Chapter Four as proposed by Charmaz (2006). In terms of 'Credibility', the study process in data collection, as well as the analyses articulated in Chapter Four and the appendixes (C, H, I, and L) elaborate on how concepts, themes and categories were constructed. As far as 'Originality' is concerned, this study is innovative in the codes, categories and themes that emerged from the data. The use of grounded theory in exploring parents' definitions of quality and choice is among the first in Kenya and among few others globally. The creative way in which data was presented in the form of conversations constructed from parents scripts provide 'Resonance' to the findings. Use of pseudo-names as an ethical consideration to protect parents' identities notwithstanding, this way of presentation also foregrounds parents' voices, making these findings accessible to parents who are fundamental to the phenomenon under study. Finally, as maintained throughout this thesis, the findings of this study have the potential for being applied to the Kenyan context to inform policy as well as in designing programmes that meet both parents aspirations as well as children's needs, hence fulfilling the criteria for 'Usefulness'.

Limitations of the study. Only 23 out of the many millions of parents with children at preschool were interviewed for this research study, and these parents were highly educated

and of higher socio-economic status. This research study neither claims representation of all parents nor can it be generalised to all populations. Rather, the intent of this research, in line with grounded theory, is "concerned with meaning and interpretation, and recognises the importance of context and process and is inductive and hermeneutic in strategy" (Maxwell, 2004, p. 36).

Parents in this research study were recruited through snowballing, where individuals could recommend others whom they thought would be willing to participate in the research study and had relevant information. The recruitment went on until no more new information was obtained in succeeding interviews. However, participants who did not join the study may have provided additional information.

Another weakness of this study is that the researcher is not able to take back the final report for parents to validate the conceptual constructions of data. While this would have been ideal to add to the rigor of the research process, as well as increase authenticity of the findings, this was not possible due to time and cost limitations. I undertook my studies in Australia and only travelled to Kenya to collect data. Travelling back to validate the final constructions would have been too expensive and outside the capability of the researcher. However, authenticity was enhanced through simultaneous data collection and analysis, constant comparison and memoing throughout the research process.

Further Studies
Based on the findings and the implications discussed above, this study recommends further investigation by extending the study to other groups of parents; reviewing current approaches to partnerships in the provision of ECEC services; and exploring teachers and/or children's views on high quality ECEC services.

Extending the study to other groups of parents. This study explored aspirations and experiences of a small group of parents who are professionals living in urban Nairobi. The

study findings may have application to similar groups of parents in urban Nairobi or other urban areas. As stated earlier, explanations provided through grounded theory are tentative and can be expanded further. The emerging themes and categories in the current study could be strengthened and expanded by repeating the study with other groups of parents. This could provide further scope for using grounded theory in exploring parents' aspirations, choices and experiences of the ECEC services. Furthermore, this study could be extended to other contexts internationally to explore variations in parents' perceptions of high quality ECEC services and how they make their choices. This is particularly important for challenging universal definitions of quality ECEC to help ensure that ECEC services are more responsive to both parents' and children's needs. Opportunities also exist for researchers to explore the experiences of parents using community-based preschools, which constitute 75% of preschools in Kenya.

Reviewing current approaches to partnerships in the provision of ECEC services. This study argues for new approaches to partnerships, which treat parents as equals, consulting and dialoguing, but more importantly, sensitising and encouraging parents to be advocates of their children's wellbeing. Areas for further research in this context include exploring ways through which parents can be empowered as children's advocates; more democratic participation in the decision making processes; as well as the role of Parents Associations in decision making both at policy and service level.

Exploring teachers and/or children's views on high quality ECEC services. Future research could explore the related views of other stakeholders, such as teachers or children in ECEC. Teachers are the implementers of services and children are the direct consumers of these services. The aim would be to investigate their aspirations, perceptions of high quality ECEC services and their experiences with these services. The findings could reveal areas of congruence and discrepancies, to inform both policy and practice.

Conclusion

One of the reasons I began this study was because of my experience as a teacher educator in Kenya and as a parent of young children looking for ECEC services. I was concerned about the discrepancy between my expectations, government policy and my lived experience. It seemed to me that children were being 'robbed' of their childhood, at least as it was known to me during my years of growing up. Being a teacher educator, I was aware of the importance of early years' experiences in influencing a child's future. I wanted to explore what parents' aspirations of preschools were and whether the preschools they chose met these aspirations. I wanted to understand the situation. Furthermore, I wanted to discover parents' lived experiences with the services that they chose for their children and how their social contexts influenced their choices.

As there was no theory to explain the process, a constructivist grounded theory approach was considered an appropriate research design. Creswell (2013) recommends the use of grounded theory in the absence of a theory to explain or understand a process. In the absence of such a theory, the findings of this study are important as they provide a framework of understanding parents' choices in a marketised ECEC.

Creating an enabling environment, including increasing access and affordability to high quality ECEC services and promoting parents' agency and equal partnerships, is essential in providing ECEC services that match parents' aspirations and meet their children's needs. If governments, policymakers, researchers, and professionals are serious about parents being central stakeholders, it is imperative that parents' views become commonplace, both in policy and practice. The issue of parents' agency needs to be embraced and acknowledged as a resource that can be tapped into, to enrich children's early years' experiences, at home, in school and in the community; thus "returning childhood to children".

I conclude this thesis with a third vignette encapsulating two parents' dream of ECEC services ('*The Ideal*') where children will be free to be children, free to explore, free to play and free to become. Such a preschool will be a community where parents, teachers, children, and all find their space; a community of learners.

Coda

Maua – Haraka's New Friend
Haraka has a new friend called Maua. Haraka and Maua met at a friend's birthday over the weekend. Maua is a happy-go-lucky child. She seems unperturbed by anything. Four characteristics describe Mau: joyful, intriguing, inquisitive and very independently minded. Interestingly, her characteristics match her name, which means 'blossom'. Maua could be said to be blossoming in every sense of the word. Maua's parents were not previously known to Haraka's parents, until they met over the weekend.

Haraka, Maua and the other children played together. They also had time to chat. Haraka had many questions for Maua. "What is the name of your teacher? Do you like school? Do you play games?" Maua told of how she likes to play with her friends; that they have rabbits in preschool and that at the moment they are collecting carton boxes to build a big city.

Haraka talked about her new friend all the way home and for the rest of the evening. She wanted to have more chances to play with Maua. She wanted to move to Maua's preschool so that they could play more, and do all the good things that Maua talked about.

Haraka was not the only one to talk about Maua. Her parents were also talking about Maua. Haraka's mother narrated to her husband about her encounter with Maua's mother; how they talked about preschool and her intriguing story of Maua's preschool.

Haraka's mother reported Maua's mother's story verbatim: She talked about how at first she was also having trouble with the preschool. She was the chairperson of the Parents Association in her preschool. Occasionally, parents had tried to raise issues with the preschool management, but they were too busy thinking about grades.

About a year ago, the preschool was taken up by a new management. She described the new manager as being very receptive and forward looking. During the manager's first month at the preschool, Maua's mother mobilised parents and sought an audience with the manager.

Coincidently, the manager was already planning for what he called a community meeting where all parents, teachers and children would be invited. So it was not hard to fix a day for Maua's mother and the other parents to meet with him.

Maua's mother said, "The manager talked about collaborative partnership. He invited us to make suggestions about what and how we wanted our children to learn. Prior to the meeting, children had been talking with teachers in their classrooms about their interests. Everyone was excited about the meeting. The meeting went on longer than we expected but it was worth it. It made a difference for all of us".

Maua's mother went on uninterrupted, "We are a committed community. We share information and discuss with teachers about how to best teach our children. We respect everyone and embrace diversity. Even when we have differing views, and we often do, we dialogue; we ask questions and listen to each other, both teachers and parents. We aim to create understanding. This has made us grow. We meet regularly, both informally and formally. Although we are all very busy parents, we volunteer at different times to sit in classes, or talk to the management or sometimes act as teaching assistants. At the moment we are collecting parents' views about this Standard One interview. We intend to seek an

audience with the District Education Office. I think it's high time somebody started

working".

Maua's mother goes on excitedly, "I would describe us as one bunch of learners;

teachers, parents and our children. Learning is fun for all of us. Above all, our children find

it fun to learn; they are happy, and we are happy".

Reference List

Adams, D., & Swadener, E. (2000). Early childhood education and teacher development in Kenya: Lessons learnt. *Child Youth and Care Forum, 29*(6).

Alakeson, V. (2004). A 2020 vision for early years: extending choice; improving life chances. *London: Social Market Foundation*.

Andrews, M., Lyne, P., & Riley, E. (1996). Validity in qualitative health care research: An exploration of the impact of individual researcher perspectives within collaborative enquiry. *Journal of Advanced Nursing, 23*(3), 441-447.

Angelides, P., Theophanous, L., & Leigh, J. (2006). Understanding teacher-parent relationships for improving preprimary schools in Cyprus. *Educational Review, 58*(3), 303-316.

Apple, M. W. (2001a). Comparing neo-liberal projects and inequality in education. *Comparative Education, 37*(4), 409-423.

Apple, M. W. (2001b). Creating profits by creating failures: Standards, markets, and inequality in education. *International Journal of Inclusive Education, 5*(2-3), 103-118.

Apple, M. W. (2001c). Markets, standards, teaching, and teacher education. *Journal of Teacher Education, 52*(3), 182-196.

Ashby, G., Kennedy, A., & Mellor, E. (2002). Early childhood services in Australia: Recent Commonwealth and state initiatives. *International developments in early childhood services*, 6-28.

Ball, S. (1994). *Education reform: A critical and post-structural approach*: Open University Press Buckingham.

Ball, S. (2003). *Class strategies and the education market: The middle classes and social advantage*: Routledge.

Ball, S. (2003). The risks of social reproduction: the middle class and education markets. *London review of education, 1*(3), 163-175.

Ball, S. (2004). Education for sale! The commodification of everything? *Department of Education and Professional Studies Annual Lecture, Institute of Education, London (June 2004)*.

Ball, S. (2007). Education, class fractions and the local rules of spatial relations. *Urban Studies, 44*(7), 1175.

Ball, S., Vincent, C., Kemp, S., & Pietikainen, S. (2004). Middle class fractions, childcare and the 'relational' and 'normative'aspects of class practices. *The Sociological Review, 52*(4), 478-502.

Barbour, R. (2001). Checklists for improving rigour in qualitative research: A case of the tail wagging the dog? *British Medical Journal, 322*(7294), 1115.

Barkan, J. D. (2011). *Kenya: Assessing Risks to Stability*. Washington, DC: Centre for Strategic and International Studies.

Barnett, W. (1995). Long-term outcomes of early childhood programs. *The Future of Children, 5*(3).

Belfield, C. (2007). *Financing early childhood care and education: An international review*.

Belfield, C., Nores, M., Barnett, W., & Schweinhart, L. (2006). The High/Scope Perry preschool program: Cost benefit analysis using data from the age-40 followup. *Journal of Human Resources, 41*(1), 162.

Bennett, J. (2006). New policy conclusions from starting strong II an update on the OECD early childhood policy reviews. *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal, 14*(2), 141-156.

Berk, L., Mann, T., & Organ, A. (2006). How play motivates and enhances children cognitive and social-emotional growth. Oxford University Press, New York.

Bernie, J., & Lall, M. (2008). Building bridges between home and school mathematics: A review of the Ocean Mathematics Project, Institute of Education.

Berthelsen, D., & Walker, S. (2008). Parents' involvement in their children's education. *Family Matters 2008 No. 79 Australian Institute of Family Studies*, 34-41.

Bertram, T., & Pascal, C. (2001). *The OECD thematic review of early childhood education and care: Background report for the United Kingdom.*

Black, A. L., & Halliwell, G. (2000). Accessing practical knowledge: How? Why? *Teaching and Teacher Education, 16*(1), 103-115.

Bodrova, E. (2008). Make believe play versus academic skills: a Vygotskian approach to today's dilemma of early childhood education. *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal, 16*(3), 357-369.

Bogard, K., Traylor, F., & Takanishi, R. (2008). Teacher education and PK outcomes: Are we asking the right questions? *Early Childhood Research Quarterly, 23*(1), 1-6.

Bowes, J., Harrison, L., Ungerer, J., Simpson, T., Wise, S., Sanson, A., et al. (2004). Child care choices: A longitudinal study of children, families and child care in partnership with policy makers. *The Australian Educational Researcher, 31*(3), 69-86.

Bown, K., & Sumsion, J. (2007). Voices from the other side of the fence: Early childhood teachers' experiences with mandatory regulatory requirements. *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood, 8*(1), 30-49.

Boychuk, D., & Morgan, D. (2004). Grounded theory: Reflections on the emergence vs. forcing debate. *Journal of Advanced Nursing, 48*(6), 605-612.

Bronfenbrenner, U., & Morris, P. A. (2006). The bioecological model of human development. *Handbook of child psychology*.

Bruner, J. S. (1972). Nature and uses of immaturity. *American Psychologist, 27*(8), 687.

Bryant, A., & Charmaz, K. (2010). Grounded theory. *Elsevier Ltd*.

Buchmann, C. (1999). The state and schooling in Kenya: Historical developments and current challenges. *Africa Today*, 95-117.

Bunyi, G. (1999). Rethinking the place of African indigenous languages in African education. *International Journal of Educational Development, 19*(4-5), 337-350.

Burchinal, M. R., & Cryer, D. (2003). Diversity, child care quality, and developmental outcomes. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly, 18*(4), 401-426.

Burchinal, M. R., Cryer, D., Clifford, R., & Howes, C. (2002). Caregiver training and classroom quality in child care centres. *Applied Developmental Science, 6*(1), 2-11.

Burchinal, M. R., & Peisner-Feinberg, R. (2002). Development of academic skills from preschool through second grade: Family and classroom predictors of developmental trajectories. *Journal of School Psychology, 40*(5), 415-436.

Burchinal, M. R., Roberts, J., Riggins Jr, R., Zeisel, S., Neebe, E., & Bryant, D. (2000). Relating quality of center-based child care to early cognitive and language development longitudinally. *Child Development, 71*(2), 339-357.

Campbell, C., Proctor, H., & Sherington, G. (2009). *School choice: How parents negotiate the new school market in Australia*. Crows Nest NSW: Allen & Unwin.

Cannella, G. S. (2000). Critical and feminist reconstructions of early childhood education: continuing the conversations. *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood, 1*(2), 215-221.

Ceglowski, D. (2004). How stakeholder groups define quality in child care. *Early Childhood Education Journal, 32*(2), 101-111.

Chan, L., & Chan, L. (2003). Early childhood education in Hong Kong and its challenges. *Early Child Development and Care, 173*(1), 7-17.

Charmaz, K. (2000). Grounded theory: Objectivist and constructivist methods. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 509-535). London: Sage.

Charmaz, K. (2003). Qualitative interviewing and grounded theory analysis. *Inside interviewing: New lenses, new concerns*, 311-330.

Charmaz, K. (2006). *Constructing grounded theory*. London: SAGE Publications.

Cho, J., & Trent, A. (2006). Validity in qualitative research revisited. *Qualitative Research, 6*(3), 319.

Clarke-Stewart, K., Vandell, D., Burchinal, M. R., O'Brien, M., & McCartney, K. (2002). Do regulable features of child-care homes affect children's development? *Early Childhood Research Quarterly, 17*(1), 52-86.

Colbourne, L., & Sque, M. (2004). Split personalities: Role conflict between the nurse and the nurse researcher. *Nursing Times Research, 9*(4), 297.

Coleman, G., & O'Connor, R. (2007). Using grounded theory to understand software process improvement: A study of Irish software product companies. *Information and Software Technology, 49*(6), 654-667.

Coleman, J. S. (1988). Social capital in the creation of human capital. *American journal of sociology*, 95-120.

Coles, J. (2008). *How the formal education system in Kenya is changing the culture of the Maasai community. Theses and Dissertations* Wilfrid Laurier University, Ottawa, Canada.

Corbin, J., & Strauss, A. (2008). *Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures of grounded theory* (3 ed.). Los Angeles: SAGE Publications.

Creswell, J. W. (2007). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (Second edition ed.). London: Sage.

Creswell, J. W. (2013). *Qualitative inquiry and research* (Third Edition ed.). Los Angeles: Sage.

Crozier, G. (2000). Parents and schools: Partners or protagonists?

Crozier, G., & Davies, J. (2007). Hard to reach parents or hard to reach schools? A discussion of home-school relations, with particular reference to Bangladeshi and Pakistani parents. *British Educational Research Journal, 33*(3), 295-313.

Crozier, G., Reay, D., James, D., Jamieson, F., Beedell, P., Hollingworth, S., et al. (2008). White middleclass parents, identities, educational choice and the urban

comprehensive school: Dilemmas, ambivalence and moral ambiguity. *British Journal of Sociology of Education, 29*(3), 261-272.

Cryer, D. (1999). Defining and assessing early childhood program quality. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, 563*(1), 35-58.

Cryer, D., & Burchinal, M. R. (1997). Parents as child care consumers. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly, 12*(1), 35-58.

Cryer, D., & Clifford, C. (2003). *OECD thematic review of education and care policy: Background report United States of America*. Retrieved from http://www.oecd.org/copyr.htm.

Curby, T., Lo Casale-Crouch, J., Konold, T., Pianta, R., Howes, C., Burchinal, M. R., et al. (2009). The Relations of observed pre-K classroom quality profiles to children's achievement and social competence. *Early Education & Development 20*(2), 346-372.

Cutcliffe, J. (2000). Methodological issues in grounded theory. *Journal of Advanced Nursing, 31*(6), 1476-1484.

Cutcliffe, J. (2003). Reconsidering reflexivity: Introducing the case for intellectual entrepreneurship. *Qualitative Health Research, 13*(1), 136.

Cutcliffe, J. (2005). Adapt or adopt: developing and transgressing the methodological boundaries of grounded theory. *Journal of Advanced Nursing, 51*(4), 421-428.

Dahlberg, G., & Moss, P. (2008). Beyond quality in early childhood education and care–Languages of evaluation. *New Zealand Journal of Teachers' Work, 5*(1), 21-26.

Dahlberg, G., Moss, P., & Pence, A. (2007). *Beyond quality in early childhood education and care: Languages of evaluation*: Taylor & Francis.

Del Boca, D., Locatelli, M., & Vuri, D. (2004). *Child care choices by Italian households*: Forschungsinstitut zur Zukunft der Arbeit.

Denk, N., Kaufmann, L., & Carter, C. R. (2012). Qualitative research special issue: Increasing the rigor of grounded theoryrResearch–ArReview of the SCM literature. *International Journal of Physical Distribution & Logistics Management, 42*(8), 3-3.

Denscombe, M. (2007). *The good research guide for small-scale social research projects* (3 ed.). Berkshire, England: Mc Graw Hill.

Deslandes, R. (2001). *A vision of home-school partnership: Three complementary conceptual frameworks*. Paper presented at the European Research Network about Parents in Education (ERNAPE) Conference 2001: "A Bridge to the Future - Collaboration between Parents, Schools and Communities" Retrieved from http://www.its.kun.nl/web/publikaties/pdf-files/rapporten/aBridgetothefuture.pd

Duncan, R., & Tarulli, D. (2003). Play as the leading activity of the preschool period: Insights from Vygotsky, Leont'ev, and Bakhtin. *Early Education and Development, 14*(3), 271-292.

Duncan, S., Edwards, R., Reynolds, T., & Alldred, P. (2004). Mothers and child care: policies, values and theories. *Children & Society, 18*(4), 254-265.

Fantuzzo, J., McWayne, C., Perry, M., & Childs, S. (2004). Multiple dimensions of family involvement and their relations to behavioral and learning competencies for urban, low-income children. *School Psychology Review, 33*(4), 467-481.

Fleer, M. (2000). *An early childhood research agenda: Voices from the field*: Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs.

Fleer, M., & Hedegaard, M. (2010). Children's development as participation in everyday practices across different institutions. *Mind, Culture, and Activity, 17*(2), 149-168.

Flick, U. (2006). *An introduction to qualitative research* (Third Edition ed.). London: Sage.

Flick, U. (2009). *An introduction to qualitative reserach* (4 ed.). Singapore: SAGE.

Fung, C., & Cheng, D. (2012). Consensus or dissensus? Stakeholders' views on the role of play in learning. *Early Years, 32*(1), 17-33.

Gatheru, R. (2005). *Kenya: from colonization to independence, 1888-1970*: McFarland & Company.

Glaser, B. (1978). *Advances of methodology of grounded theory: Theoretical sensitivity*. California: Sociology Press.

Glaser, B. (1992). *Emergence vs forcing: Basics of grounded theory analysis*. California: Sociology Press.

Glaser, B. (1998). *Doing grounded theory: Issues and discussions*. Mill Valley: The Sociology Press.

Glaser, B. (2001). *The grounded theory perspectives:Conceptualization contrasted with description*. Mill Valley, CA: Sociology Press.

Glaser, B. (2002). Constructivist grounded theory? *3*(3),

Glaser, B., & Holton, J. (2004). Remodelling grounded theory *Forum: Qualitative Social Research*.

Glaser, B., & Strauss, A. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research*. Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company.

Golafshani, N. (2003). Understanding reliability and validity in qualitative research. *The Qualitative Report, 8*(4), 597-607.

Golinkoff, R., Hirsh-Pasek, K., & Singer, D. (2006). Why play = learning a challenge. In Play = learning: How play motivates and enhances children's cognitive and social–emotional growth. In D. G. Singer, R. M. Golinkoff & K. Hirsh-Pasek (Eds.), *Play equals learning*. New York: Oxford University Press, USA.

Goodfellow, J. (2003). Reframing early education: What do parents value for their children. *Comunicação apresentada na 'Australian Association for Research in Education Conference', Fremantle. Retirado Fevereiro, 17*.

Goodfellow, J., & Laverty, J. (2003). Grandparents supporting working families. *Family Matters*, 14-19.

Goulding, C. (2002). *Grounded theory: A practical guide for management, business and market researchers*: SAGE Publications Ltd.

Goulding, C. (2005). Grounded theory, ethnography and phenomenology for marketing research. *European Journal of Marketing, 39*(3/4), 294-308.

Green, J., & Thorogood, N. (2004). *Qualitative methods for health research*: Sage Publications Ltd.

Guarte, J. M., & Barrios, E. B. (2006). Estimation under purposive sampling. *Communications in Statistics-Simulation and Computation, 35*(2), 277-284.

Hall, W. A., & Callery, P. (2001). Enhancing the rigor of grounded theory: incorporating reflexivity and relationality. *Qualitative Health Research, 11*(2), 257.

Hamre, B., & Pianta, R. (2005). Can instructional and emotional support in the first-grade classroom make a difference for children at risk of school failure? *Child Development, 76*(5), 949-967.

Hand, K., Wise, S., & Australian Institute of Family Studies [AIFS]. (2006). *Parenting partnerships in culturally diverse child care settings: A care provider perspective*: Australian Institute of Family Studies.

Harrison, L., & Ungerer, J. (2005). What can the longitudinal study of Australian children tell us about infants' and 4 to 5 year olds' experiences of early childhood education and care? *Australian Institute of Family Studies, Family Matters No. 72*.

Hayden, J., De Gioia, K., Hadley, F., & New South Wales Department of Community Services. (2003). *Enhancing partnerships and networks with non-English speaking families in early childhood settings: Final report*: NSW Dept. of Community Services.

Heath, H., & Cowley, S. (2004). Developing a grounded theory approach: A comparison of Glaser and Strauss. *International Journal of Nursing Studies, 41*(2), 141-150.

Heystek, J. (2003). Parents as governors and partners in schools. *Education and Urban Society, 35*(3), 328.

Hildenbrand, B. (2010). Mediating structure and interaction in grounded theory. In A. Bryant & K. Charmaz (Eds.), *The sage handbook of grounded theory* (pp. 539-564). Singapore: SAGE.

Hughes, P., & MacNaughton, G. (2000). Consensus, dissensus or community: The politics of parent involvement in early childhood education. *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood, 1*(3), 241-258.

Hughes, P., & MacNaughton, G. (2001). Building equitable staff-parent communication in early childhood settings: An Australian case study. *Early Childhood Research & Practice, 3*(2).

Hursh, D. W. (2005). Neo-liberalism, markets and accountability: Transforming education and undermining democracy in the United States and England. *Policy Futures in Education, 3*(1), 3-15.

Hursh, D. W., & Henderson, J. A. (2011). Contesting global neoliberalism and creating alternative futures. *Discourse: studies in the cultural politics of education, 32*(2), 171-185.

Institute of Policy Analysis and Research [IPAR]. (2008). Radical Reform for Kenya's education sector: Implementing policies responsive to Vision 2030. *Institute of Policy Analysis and Research (IPAR)*(Policy View Issue 4).

Irele, A., & Jeyifo, B. (2010). *Encyclopedia of African thought* (Vol. 1): Oxford Univ Pr.

Irvine, S. (2002). Parent conceptions of their role in early childhood education and care public policy and service development. *Current Issues in Phenomenography Symposium, Canberra*.

Irvine, S. (2005). *Parent conceptions of their role in early childhood education and care: A phenomenographic study from Queensland, Australia.* Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane, Queensland, Australia.

Jatrana, S. (2007). Who is minding the kids? Preferences, choices and childcare arrangements of working mothers in India. *Social Change, 37*(4), 110-130.

Jeynes, W. H. (2005). A meta-analysis of the relation of parental involvement to urban elementary school student academic achievement. *Urban Education, 40*(3), 237-268.

Jinnah, H., & Walters, L. (2008). Including parents in evaluation of a child development program: Relevance of parental involvement. *Early Childhood Research & Practice, 10*(1).

Kamerman, S. B. (2000). Early childhood education and care: An overview of developments in the OECD countries. *International Journal of Educational Research, 33*(1), 7-29.

Kamerman, S. B. (2001). Early childhood education and care: International perspectives. *The Institute for Child and Family Policy, Columbia University*.

Kenya National Bureau of Statistics. (2012a). *Economic survey 2012 highlights*.

Kenya National Bureau of Statistics. (2012b). *Kenya facts and figures 2012*.

Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (KNBS). (2010). *Kenya 2009 population and housing census highlights*.

Kenya National Bureau of Statistics [KNBS]. (2001). *Socio-economic profile of population. Population and housing census*.

KIE-NACECE. (2004). *UNESCO/OECD early childhood policy review project. Report of a stakeholders' consultation.* Paper presented at the Stakeholders' Consultation, Nairobi-Kenya

Kinnunen, P., & Simon, B. (2012). Phenomenography and grounded theory as research methods in computing education research field. *Computer Science Education, 22*(2), 199-218.

Kipkorir, L. I., & Njenga, A. W. (1993). *A case study of early childhood care and education in Kenya*. Paper presented at the Education For All (EFA) Forum.

Kitaev, I. (1999). Private education in sub-Saharan Africa: A re-examination of theories and concepts related to its development and finance. *International Institute for Education and Planning iiep*.

Kornstad, T., & Thoresen, T. O. (2007). A discrete choice model for labor supply and childcare. *Journal of Population Economics, 20*(4), 781-803.

Kreyenfeld, M., & Hank, K. (2000). Does the availability of child care influence the employment of mothers? Findings from western Germany. *Population Research and Policy Review, 19*(4), 317-337.

Kvale, S., & Brinkmann, S. (2009). *Interviews: Learning the craft of qualitative research interviewing* (2nd ed.): SAGE Publications, Inc.

Lareau, A. (1987). Social class differences in family-school relationships: The importance of cultural capital. *Sociology of education, 60*(2), 73-85.

Larner, M., & Phillips, D. (2002). Defining and valuing quality as a parent. In L. Ferguson, M. Lavalette & G. Mooney (Eds.), *Rethinking welfare: A critical perspective* (pp. 43-60). Great Britain: Sage.

Laugharn, P. (2002). *Quality, viable and susainbalbe early childhood development services for the African child.* Paper presented at the Ealry Childhood Development Regional Conference Mombasa, Kenya.

Lee, J., & Walsh, D. (2004). Quality in early childhood programs: Reflections from programs evaluation practices. *American Journal of Evaluation, 25*, 351-373.

Lemmer, E. (2012). Who's doing the talking? Teacher and parent experiences of parent-teacher conferences. *South African of Education, 32*, 83-86.

Leonard, D., & McAdam, R. (2001). Grounded theory methodology and practitioner reflexivity in TQM research. *International Journal of Quality & Reliability Management, 18*(2), 180-194.

Lingard, B. (2010). Testing times: The need for new intelligent accountabilities for schooling. *QTU Professional Magazine, 24*(November), 13-19.

Locke, K. D. (2001). *Grounded theory in management research*: Sage Publications Limited.

Love, J., Harrison, L., Sagi-Scwartz, A., van Ijzendoorn, M., Ross, C., & Ungerer, J. (2003). Child care quality matters: How conclusions may vary in context *Child Development from Eric database, 74*, 1021-1033.

Lynch, K. (2006). Neo-liberalism and marketisation: The implications for higher education. *European Educational Research Journal, 5*(1), 1-17.

Macy, M. (2012). Reflecting children's cultures and languages in Ms. Macy's early childhood classroom.

Marah, J. (2006). The virtues and challenges in traditional African Education. *The Journal of Pan African Studies, 1* (4), 15-24.

Marginson, S. (1997). *Markets in education*. Sydney: Allen & Unwin.

Marshall, N. L. (2004). The quality of early childhood care and children's development. *American Psychological Society, 3*(4), 165-168.

Martin, P., & Turner, B. (1986). Grounded theory and organizational research. *The Journal of Applied Behavioural Science, 22*(2), 141-157.

Mashburn, A., Pianta, R., Hamre, B., Downer, J., Barbarin, O., Bryant, D., et al. (2008). Measures of classroom quality in prekindergarten and children's development of academic, language, and social skills. *Child Development, 79*(3), 732-749.

Masse, L., & Barnett, W. (2002). A benefit-cost analysis of the Abecedarian early childhood intervention. *Cost-Effectiveness and Educational Policy*, 157-176.

Matavire, R., & Brown, I. (2008). *Investigating the use of grounded theory in information systems research*.

McCain, N., & Mustard, F. (1999). *Reversing the real brain drain: Early years final report*. Toronto, Ontario.

McCain, N., & Mustard, F. (2002). *The early years study three years later: From early child developemnt to human development: Enabling communities*. Toronto.

McCain, N., & Mustard, F. (2011). *Early years Study 3: Making decisions, taking action*. Toronto, Ontaria: Council for Early Child Development.

McCain, N., Mustard, F., & Shanker, S. (2007). *Early Years Study 2: Putting science into action*. Toronto Ontario: Council for Early Child Development.

McGhee, G., Marland, G. R., & Atkinson, J. (2007). Grounded theory research: Literature reviewing and reflexivity. *Journal of Advanced Nursing, 60*(3), 334-342.

Melhuish, E., Belsky, J., Leyland, A. H., & Barnes, J. (2008). Effects of fully-established Sure Start Local Programmes on 3-year-old children and their families living in England: a quasi-experimental observational study. *The Lancet, 372*(9650), 1641-1647.

Mills, J., Bonner, A., & Francis, K. (2006). The development of constructivist grounded theory *International Journal of Nursing Practice, 12*(1), 8-13.

Mills, J., Bonner, A., & Francis, K. (2008). Adopting a constructivist approach to grounded theory: implications for research design. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods, 5*(1), 25.

Mirugi-Mukundi, G. (2006). *The impact of corruption on governance: an appraisal of the practice of the rule of law in Kenya.* Unpublished Dissetation, University of Pretoria.

Mitchell, W., & Sloper, P. (2001). Quality in services for disabled children and their families: What can theory, policy and research on children's and parents' views tell us? *Children & Society, 15*(4), 237-252.

Moghaddam, A. (2006). Coding issues in grounded theory. *Issues In Educational Research, 16*(1), 52-66.

Mooney, A., & Munton, A. (1998). Quality in early childhood services: Parent, provider and policy perspectives. *Children and Society 12*, 101-112.

Morse, J., Barrett, M., Mayan, M., Olson, K., & Spiers, J. (2008). Verification strategies for establishing reliability and validity in qualitative research. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods, 1*(2), 13-22.

Moss, P. (2003). Getting beyond childcare: Reflections on recent policy and future possibilities.

Munn, P. (2010). Play or learning in early years curricula? And what about the cultures in which early years education systems are embedded? *International Journal of Early Years Education, 18*(3), 183-184.

Mustard, F. (2005). *Early child development and experience-based brain development-the scientific underpinnings of the importance of early childhood development in a globalized world*. Paper presented at the The World Bank International Symposium on Early Child Development-A Priority for Sustained Economic Growth & Equity

Mustard, F. (2006). Early child development sets the foundation for learning, behaviour and health. *The CAP Journal (The Canadian Association of Principals), 14*(3).

Mustard, F. (2007). Early childhood development & poverty. *Impact*(Summer 2007), 12.

Mwiria, K. (1990). Kenya's Harambee secondary school movement: the contradictions of public policy. *Comparative Education Review, 34*(3), 350-368.

Mwiria, K. (1991). Education for subordination: African education in colonial Kenya. *History of Education, 20*(3), 261-273.

NACECE. (2002). *Quality, viable and sustainable early childhood development services for the African child. .* Paper presented at the Early childhood development regional conference Mombasa, Kenya.

National Centre for Early Childhood Education [NACECE]. (1987). *Early chidhood education in Kenya: Implications on policy and practice.* Paper presented at the Jadini Seminar on early childhood education in Kenya, Jadini Kenya.

National Centre for Early Childhood Education [NACECE]. (2002). *Quality, viable and sustainable early childhood development services for the African child.* Paper presented at the Early childhood development regional conference Mombasa Kenya.

Natsoulas, T. (1998). The Kenyan government and the Kikuyu independent schools: From attempted control to suppression, 1929–1952. *Historian, 60*(2), 289-306.

Ngaruiya, S. (2004). *Assessing the influence of different early childhood development models on pre-school children's school readiness in Kenya.*

Ngugi wa Thiong'o. (1985). The language of African literature. *New Left Review, 1*(150), 109-127.

Noble, K. (2005). *Early childhood education and care: Parents conceptions of ECEC servces and choice of services.* Queensland University of Technology.

O'Reilly, M., & Parker, N. (2012). 'Unsatisfactory Saturation': a critical exploration of the notion of saturated sample sizes in qualitative research. *Qualitative Research*.

O'Reilly, K., & Marx, S. (2012). Demystifying Grounded Theory for Business Research. *Organizational Research Methods, 15*(2), 247-262.

OECD. (2001a). Citizens as Partners: OECD handbook on information, consultation and public participation in policy-making. In M. Gramberger (Eds.)

OECD. (2001b). *Starting strong: Early childhood education and care*.

OECD. (2004). *Starting strong curiculula and pedagogies in early childhood education and care: Five curriculum outlines*.

OECD. (2006). *Starting strong II: Early childhood education and care*.

Owino, W., & Abagi, O. (2000). *Cost Sharing in Education and Health in Kenya*.

Peisner-Feinberg, E., Burchinal, M. R., Clifford, R., Culkin, M., Howes, C., Kagan, S., et al. (2001). The relation of preschool child care quality to children's cognitive and social developmental trajectories through second grade. *Child Development, 72*(5), 1534-1553.

Pence, A., & Unesco. (2004). *ECD policy development and implementation in Africa*: United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization.

Peyton, V., Jacobs, A., O'Brien, M., & Roy, C. (2001). Reasons for choosing child care: Associations with family factors, quality, and satisfaction. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly, 16*(2), 191-208.

Phillips, D., & Adams, G. (2001). Child care and our youngest children. *The Future of Children*, 35-51.

Phillips, D., Mekos, D., Scarr, S., McCartney, K., & Abbott-Shim, M. (2002). Within and beyond the classroom door: Assessing quality in child care centres *Early Childhood Quarterly, 15*(4), 475-496.

Pratt, J. (2012). The problem of grounded theory. *University of East London, Centre for Institutional Studies*.

Reay, D. (1996). Dealing with difficult differences: Reflexivity and social class in feminist research. *Feminism & Psychology, 6*(3), 443-456.

Rennie, D. L., Phillips, J. R., & Quartaro, G. K. (1988). Grounded theory: A promising approach to conceptualization in psychology? *Canadian Psychology/Psychologie Canadienne, 29*(2), 139-150.

Republic of Kenya. (2004). *UNESCO/OECD early childhood policy project: Report of stakeholders' consultation*.

Republic of Kenya. (2005a). *The Kenya education sector support programme 2005-2010: Delivering quality education and training to all Kenyans*.

Republic of Kenya. (2005b). *Ministry of Education Science and Technology (MOEST) sessional paper 1 on policy framework for education, training and research (Sessional Paper 1 2005)*.

Republic of Kenya. (2005c). *The UNESCO/OECD early childhood policy review project: The background report of Kenya*.

Republic of Kenya. (2006a). *Early childhood development service standard guidelines for Kenya*.

Republic of Kenya. (2006b). *National early childhood development policy framework*.

Republic of Kenya. (2012). *Task force on the re-alignment of the education sector to the constitution of Kenya 2010 towards a globally competitive quality education for sustainable development report of the task force*. Retrieved from http://www.vision2030.go.ke/cms/vds/Task_Force_Final_Report_Feb_20123.pdf.

Reynolds, A. J., Temple, J. A., Robertson, D. L., & Mann, E. A. (2002). Age 21 cost-benefit analysis of the Title I Chicago child-parent centers. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis, 24*(4), 267-303.

Reynolds, A. J., Temple, J. A., White, B. A., Ou, S., & Robertson, D. L. (2010). Age-26 cost-benefit analysis of the Child-Parent Center early education program. *Child Development*, 379-404.

Rinaldi, C. (2006). *In dialogue with Reggio Emilia: Listening, researching and learning*. London: Routledge.

Russo, H. (2012). *Rethinking the role of play and creativity at the centre of curriculum and assessment. A New York city school's journey to re-imaging education for a changing world*. Paper presented at the ICCP World Conference.

Sagi, A., Koren-Karie, N., Gini, M., Ziv, Y., & Joels, T. (2002). Shedding further light on the effects of various types and quality of early child care on infant–mother attachment relationship: The Haifa study of early child care. *Child Development, 73*(4), 1166-1186.

Saracho, O., & Spodek, B. (2007). Early childhood teachers' preparation and the quality of program. *Early Child Development and Care 177*(1), 71-91.

Schneider, M., Teske, P., Marschall, M., Mintrom, M., & Roch, C. (1997). Institutional arrangements and the creation of social capital: The effects of public school choice. *American Political Science Review*, 82-93.

Schweinhart, L., Montie, J., Xiang, Z., Barnett, W., Belfield, C., & Nores, M. (2005). Lifetime effects:The High/Scope Perry Preschool study through age 40.

Seaman, J. (2008). Adopting a grounded theory approach to cultural-historical research: Conflicting methodologies or complementary methods? *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 1-17.

Silverman, D. (2009). *Doing qualitative research*: Sage Publications Ltd.

Silverman, D. (2010). *Qualitative research* (Third ed.). Los Angeles: SAGE Publications Ltd.

Sinclair, T. (2005). Mad, bad or sad? Ideology, distorted communication and child abuse prevention. *Journal of Sociology, 41*(3), 227-246.

Society for International Development [SID]. (2004). Pulling apart: Facts and figures on inequality in Kenya, Rich and poor: National discourses on poverty, inequality, and growth project (RAPP)

Somerset, A. (2007). A preliminary note on Kenya primary school enrolment trends over four decades.

Stanfield, J. (2008). Kenya's forgotten independent school movement. *Economic Affairs Volume, Issue, Article first published online: 28 JUN 2008, 25*(4).

Stobart, G. (2008). *Testing times: The uses and abuses of assessment*: Taylor & Francis.

Strauss, A. (1987). *Qualitative analysis for social scientists*: Cambridge University Press.

Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1990). *Basics of qualitative research*: Sage Publications Newbury Park, Calif.

Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1997). *Grounded theory in practice*. London: SAGE Publications

Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1998). *Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory*. London: SAGE Publications.

Sullivan, A. (2001). Cultural capital and educational attainment. *Sociology, 35*(4), 893-912.

Swadener, E., Kabiru, M., & Njenga, A. (1997). A collaborative study of changing child-rearing and community mobilisation in Kenya   *Early Education and Development, 8* (3), 285-306.

Swadener, E., Kabiru, M., & Njenga, A. (2000). *Does the village still raise the child?A Collaborative study of changing child-rearing practices and early education in Kenya*. New York: State University of New York Press.

Swadener, E., Wachira, P., Kabiru, M., & Njenga, A. (2008). Linking policy discourse to everyday life in Kenya: Impacts of neoliberal policies on early education and childrearing. *Africa's Future, Africa's Challenge: Early Childhood Care and Development in Sub-Saharan Africa*, 407.

Symeou, L. (2007). Cultural capital and family involvement in children's education: tales from two primary schools in Cyprus. *British Journal of Sociology of Education, 28*(4), 473-487.

Tanner, E., Welsh, E., & Lewis, J. (2006). The quality-defining process in early years services: A case study. *Children & Society, 20*(1), 4-16.

Transparency International. (2011). The 2011 corruption perceptions index measures the perceived levels of public sector corruption in 183 countries and territories around the world. 2012, from http://cpi.transparency.org/cpi2011/

UNESCO/OECD. (2005). *Background report of Kenya for the UNESCO/OECD early childhood policy review project*.

United Nations. (2011). Indicators of poverty and hunger.

Vincent, C. (2000). *Including parents? Education, citizenship and parental agency*: Open University Press.

Vincent, C., & Ball, S. (2001). A Market in love? Choosing pre-school childcare. *British Educational Research Journal, 27*(5), 633-651.

Vincent, C., & Ball, S. (2004). The social geography of childcare: Making up a middle-class child. *British Journal of Sociology of Education, 25*(2), 229-244.

Vincent, C., & Martin, J. (2000). School-based parents' groups-a politics of voice and representation? *Journal of Education Policy, 15*(5), 459-480.

Vincent, C., & Martin, J. (2002). Class, culture and agency: Researching parental voice. *Discourse: studies in the cultural politics of education, 23*(1), 108-127.

Vygotsky, L. (1978). Interaction between learning and development. *Readings on the development of children*, 34-41.

wa Gĩthĩnji, M., & Holmquist, F. (2012). Reform and political impunity in Kenya: transparency without Accountability. *African Studies Review, 55*(1), 53-74.

Walker, D., & Myrick, F. (2006). Grounded theory: An exploration of process and procedure. *Qualitative Health Research, 16*(4), 547.

Wilkinson, J., Kemmis, S., Hardy, I., & Edwards-Groves, C. (2009). *Leading and learning: Developing ecologies of educational practice.* Paper presented at the Australian

Association for Research in Education International ConferencWilliam, R., Donohue, M., & Tully, E. (2012). Learning how to help others: Two-year-olds' social learning of a prosocial act. Department of Psychology, Georgia State
>   University, Atlanta, GA 30302, USA.
>   http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jecp.2012.11.004

Wise, S., & Sanson, A. (2000). *Child care in cultural context: Issues for new research.*
>   Research Paper No. 22, December 2000. Australian Institute of Family Studies-Commonwealth of Australia. Melbourne.
>   http://www.aifs.gov.au/institute/pubs/RP22.pdf

Woodhead, M., & Keynes, M. (1996). In search of the rainbow: Pathways to quality in large-scale programmes for young disadvantaged children

Wrohlich, K. (2011). *Labor supply and child care choices in a rationed child care market. Discussion Papers of DIW.*

Yan, W., & Lin, Q. (2005). Parent involvement and mathematics achievement: Contrast across racial and ethnic groups. *The Journal of Educational Research, 99*(2), 116-127.

APPENDIX A: INFORMATION FOR ADMINISTRATORS

INFORMATION FOR ADMINISTRATORS

PROJECT COORDINATOR   Mary Kimani
PROJECT TITLE: Quality Early Childhood Education and Care: Parents perspectives
SCHOOL   JCU School of Education
CONTACT DETAILS   mary.githaiga@jcu.edu.au

What is the project about?
This project is about gathering parents' views on choosing quality Early Childhood Education and Care for their children. The parents' responses during an interview will provide information (data) that I will use to develop my PhD thesis. The information will be made available through a PhD thesis, academic and professional publications. Approval to conduct this study has been granted by the James Cook University Human Ethics Committee and the Ministry of Science and Technology (Kenya).

What does it involve you in?
I am requesting you to either volunteer any two parents that are most likely to provide the information I aim to gather for the research project described above; or give information to the parents and ask for those who would be interested to volunteer. I will then make contact with the parents and invite them for a face to face interview at their convenience. The interview will take two hours at a time and place of their choice. The parents may be called upon later over the phone to clarify issues or fill in some information gaps that may be identified during the data analysis. The interview will be audio-taped, transcribed and analysed.

My commitment to you and to the parent:
The parent may stop or leave the interview at any time.
You or/and the parent will be provided with a copy of the final report on request.
All information gathered is strictly confidential. The names of participating individuals and schools or other familiar locations will NOT appear in the study reports. In some cases pseudonyms may be used.
All data will be securely locked in a filing cabinet in the School of Education, James Cook University for five years and then it will be destroyed.

The parent will be free to withdraw their consent by contacting Mary Kimani (or to stop the interview at any time without fear of reprisal.

Thank you for taking time to consider this request.

I will call you within the month to seek your response.

If you would like further information please contact me at the email address and telephone number above. Alternatively, you can contact my PhD supervisor, Dr Sharn Rocco, sharn.rocco@jcu.edu.au or Tina Langford, Ethics Officer, James Cook University, tina.langford@jcu.edu.au

APPENDIX B: INFORMATION FOR PARENTS

INFORMATION FOR PARTICIPANTS

PROJECT COORDINATOR	Mary Kimani
PROJECT TITLE:	Quality Early Childhood Education and Care: Parents perspectives
SCHOOL	JCU School of Education
CONTACT DETAILS	Mary.githaiga@jcu.edu.au

What is the project about?
This project is about gathering parents' views on quality Early Childhood Education and Care. Your responses during an interview will provide information (data) that I will use to develop my PhD thesis. The information will be made available through a PhD thesis, academic and professional publications. Approval to conduct this study has been granted by the James Cook University Human Ethics Committee and the Ministry of Science and Technology (Kenya).

What does it involve you in?
You are invited to volunteer if you are interested in being interviewed for the research project described above. The interview will be at a time and place of your choice. It will take no more than two hours. Following the interview, you may be telephoned to clarify issues or fill in some information gaps that may be identified during the data analysis. The interview will be audio-taped, transcribed and analysed.

Our commitment to you:
You may stop or leave the interview at any time or choose not to answer some questions.
You will be provided with a copy of the final report on request.
All information gathered is strictly confidential. Your name, locations or any details that may identify you will NOT appear in the study reports. Pseudonyms will be used in some cases.
All data will be securely locked in a filing cabinet in the School of Education, James Cook University for five years and then it will be destroyed.

You are free to withdraw your consent by contacting Mary Kimani (   ) or to stop the interview at any time without fear of reprisal.

Thank you for taking time to consider this request.

If you are willing to participate in this project, please keep this sheet for your personal records and, complete and sign the consent statements attached & return to the school head.

If you have any queries about the project contact Mary Kimani (details above).

If you have concerns about the ethics of this project contact my PhD supervisor, Dr Sharn Rocco, sharn.rocco@jcu.edu.auor Ethics Officer, James Cook University, Tina.Langford@jcu.edu.au

APPENDIX C: INFORMED CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPATING PARENTS

INFORMED CONSENT FORM: FOR PARTICIPATING PARENTS

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR	Mary Kimani
PROJECT TITLE:	Parents' Perceptions of Quality Early Childhood Education and Care in Kenya
SCHOOL	JCU School of Education
CONTACT DETAILS	mary.githaiga@jcu.edu.au

What is the project about?
This project will gather parents' views on quality Early Childhood Education and Care. Your responses during an interview will provide the information (data) which I will analyse to develop my PhD thesis. As well this information will inform local policy formulation and practice in early childhood education and care that will address the needs of the child and parents in Kenya. The information will be made available through a PhD thesis, academic and professional publications.

What does it involve you in?
You are invited to be interviewed for the research project described above. The interview will take two hours in a time and place of your choice. You may be called upon later over the phone to clarify issues or fill in some information gaps that may be identified during the data analysis. The interview will be audio-taped and transcribed and analysed later.

Our commitment to you:
You do not need to answer any of the questions if you are uncomfortable. You may stop or leave the interview at any time. You will be provided with a copy of the final report on request.
All information gathered is strictly confidential and names or other familiar locations will NOT appear in the study reports. Pseudo names will be used for any extracts used in the writings.
All data will be securely locked in a filing cabinet in the School of Education, James Cook University for five years and then it will be destroyed.

Thank you for taking time to consider this request.

If you consent to participating in this project, please complete and sign the consent statements below & return to the school head.

The aims of this project have been clearly explained to me and I understand what is wanted of me. I know that taking part is voluntary and I am aware that I can stop taking part in it at any time and may refuse to answer any questions.
I agree (print name) _____
(Please tick appropriate boxes)
☐Participating in an audio-taped interview.
☐To the report being used for PhD thesis and academic publications, conferences and on-line.

Name of consenting adult:*(printed)*	
Signature:	Date:

APPENDIX D: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS AND HOW THEY ADDRESSED THE
RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Research Questions	Key Information Needed	Sample Questions
What do parents consider to be important for their children when they attend preschool? Changed to: *What are parents' aspirations of their children within private-for –profit ECEC services?*	Description of an ideal preschool Ideas about the role of parents Practices of educating their children	If you were to come up with an ideal preschool, what things would you consider to be most important? You have explained that an ideal preschool would have the following characteristics, would you want to explain why and how these characteristics are the important to you? What do you do to help your child learn: At home? In the preschool? How do you do this?
How do parents' considerations of what is important for their children at preschool shape the choices they make for their children? Changed to? *What are parents' experiences in finding private-for-profit ECEC services that meet their aspirations for their children?*	Underlying beliefs, values and experiences of choosing preschools Decision-making Factors beyond themselves that may influence their decisions	Did you attend a preschool? Why/why not? What do you remember from that time of your life? How do your parents if at all, feel about your child/ren attending preschool? Why do you think early childhood education is important? Where and who should provide early childhood education? What would you like your child/ren to be doing at preschool? Is that what they are doing? How do you know? Tell me about your experience of finding a preschool for each of your children. What sorts of questions did you ask when you first made contact with schools? Did you visit the school before deciding? If yes: What did you look for when you went there? If no: Why not? When did you start thinking about schooling for your children? Why was it important to consider taking your children to school when you did? How did you make your final decision? In which ways has your child attending preschool changed your lives as a family? How do you feel about that? What sorts of experiences do you think are important for young children?

		How do you think they learn these things?
How parents' do concerns fit with what is happening in Kenyan education? Changed to: *How are parents' aspirations and their choices impacted on by the prevailing practices of the system of education and social discourses?*	Expectations and demands of service providers How they communicate their expectations and demands to service providers How they interact with service providers How they assess that their children's needs are being met and what they do if they are not being met Evaluation of the service What else they believe the service could provide	What kind of relationships do you think preschool teachers should have with children? Why? Is your child/ren's teacher like that? How do you know? What kind of relationship do you have with your child/ren's school/teachers? How do you think this relationship could be strengthened? How often do you interact with teachers and the schools administration/head teacher? What do you like about the school? What would you change if you could? You have said if it was within your power, you would change…, why would this be important to you? What do you do if you or your child has a problem or a concern about the school?

APPENDIX E: COMPONENTS CONSIDERED IMPORTANT BY PARENTS DURING THEIR SEARCH FOR PRESCHOOLS

Components considered important by parents during their search for preschools

Components	Corresponding Code used in *'The Ideal; Choice of Play' or 'The Real: Play of Choice'*		Examples of supporting quotes	Source
	Ideal	Real		
Proximity	*Let the Child be Free*	*Proximity*	Naliaka*: Its proximity to where we lived. We considered how far the school was from the place where we lived. We chose schools that were not more than ten minutes from our house.*	16
Staff characteristics and training	*Acting Professionally*	*Teacher-parent relationship*	Nyaore: *I went and talked to the teacher she impressed me very much by the way she talked to me, the way she presented the school and the way I saw her receiving the children who were already there. She inspired my confidence* Wakesho: *I also wanted to meet the manager. I talked to the manager and I liked her.*	18
Fee charges		*Affordability*	Wakesho: *Affordability... You don't go to a school which you know it's way beyond your financial reach. ...some were very high, those ones you don't even ask them what kind of facilities they have.*	14
Facilities	*Let the Child Play* *Home-like Facilities*	*Let the child play* *Affordability*	Ndindi: *I looked at the facilities. Were there enough facilities for playing and learning?* Waititu: *...the environment within the school. Do they have good playground where during break children can play games?*	11

Congruence between school and home values	*Let the Child be Purposeful*	*Teacher-parent relationship purposeful*	Naliaka: ...*a good school run with the values we wanted instilled in our children, like hard work, and an academic culture. Where children are interested in reading, there is discipline and there is also an emphasis on learning, yet there was some fun scheduled in the programme.*	11
School transport	*Let the Child be a Child*	*Let the child be a child*	Ndege: *So I was very keen on how they handle children. Do they have transport? I wanted one that has got transport. That is part of care. So in the event of me not being able to pick up the child I know my child is safe and they can be brought home. I also looked at when and where are they were being picked up and dropped.* Wanjiku*: The convenience of the school transport. What kind of school transport was available? How safe and convenient was it? Did they have a minder in the car? Do they overload children?*	9
Class sizes	*Teacher as a Playmate*	*Teacher as play mate*	Wanjiku*: The size of the classroom in terms of how many students would a particular school take per class? With preschool, I would expect the teacher would give more personalised attention to each child. I don't expect a teacher to handle too many students. Too many am talking of when a class goes beyond 16-20 students, that's a class I would expect to have one teacher and a teacher assistant.* Mutiso: *We interviewed the teachers. We asked them questions. How many kids do you have? How many teachers?*	8
School's rank		*Desire for success*	Maritim: *We were looking for a school that has a name. Does it perform well?* Naisiaye: *The end of the year when the results are out you know initially they used to advertise the performance of most of the top 100 schools you could know. So that list really was useful because you want to take your child to a school that is performing well.... Where did they feature? If they are not even here you don't even think about it.*	8

Curriculum	*Let the Child be a Child*		Waititu: *...the curriculum and how they understand the stages of child development...*	6

APPENDIX F: EXAMPLES OF EMOTIONAL EXPRESSIONS AND FEELINGS
CAPTURED DURING TRANSCRIPTION

Example 1

I felt that I was participating in my child being bullied. I felt like it is me who took my child to be bullied and I handled the teacher. I went and talked with the teacher…. He had put marks on my sons face, pinching, canning…. I had to move my son from that school to another school whereby he found almost similar things because even the other children are still going through the same things. …I realised that it is either I allow him to continue or I withdrawal him completely from the school. So it wasn't a good experience (Wambui- not her real name).

Example 2

…our daughter only lasted there for a term. She could only last for a term. I couldn't take it anymore….she …found kids there were learning. It was not introduction any more, they were learning … doing exams …additions, alphabets, reading and whatever. …in my view she was traumatised. …if my daughter sat with you she would be doing sums with her fingers, cde, her fingers are doing 1,2,3 or writing on her thighs because that is what was being drummed into her the whole day. So it was such a change and for me a very hostile environment… All this time the teacher is saying how she is behind. I am thinking "behind!" …She actually just lasted for a term…it was too stressful. Ah it was very stressful by the way. The child had to move after one term I didn't want to know about the uniform and the money I had paid after a term she had to leave. Because you could see the child was stressed (Tumaini-pseudo name)

APPENDIX G: EXAMPLES OF MEMOS

Example 1

On 28/07/2009 on what the code 'Academic dynamics I wrote:

There is a sense of parents feeling pressured about their children's academic performance. Despite this pressure there seems to be no guidelines for the parents to gauge whether there is legitimate cause to be concerned at the pace at which their children are learning or not. Parents are torn between what they know would be right for their children and "the pressure from outside." What remains is to compare the child with others in the class. One can feel parents' frustration as this pressure builds up and the parent seems not to know what to do other than to pressure their child/ren to do better.

Is this frustration felt by all the parents? If not what makes it a different experience for one parent from the other?

Example 2

On 29/10/2010

As I continue coding I am wondering whether the parents feeling pressured by the system could be developed into a main theme. Especially when Ushindi acknowledges that she is torn between allowing the child to go through preschool at her pace or succumbing to pressure and allowing her to be coached so that she can be at par with others.

Tumaini identifies the same pressure when she refers to the experience of her child in a new school as traumatising and to the environment as being hostile. The teachers tell her that her child is lagging behind because she cannot read or write whereas the other children can. Yet she reckons in the previous school the child was okay.

Example 3

Same pressure is identified by Wanjiku when she says that the school did not match her ideal in that she realised that towards the mid of pre-unit there was a lot of pressure on the child to perform well in the exams. She seems to succumb to pressure when she asserts that she was satisfied with the explanation given by the head teacher that the child had to perform well in the exams so that they can get into good primary schools. More especially because the particular preschool was not attached to a primary school and so the children has to compete favourably with other children for space in the 'good' schools.

Example 4

2/08/09

As I continue to code and this statement keeps on appearing in each interview, this question continues to linger in my mind. It is the very question that drove me to want to do PhD in early childhood education and eventually the topic of my research. What do parents consider quality early childhood education and care? Are we as Kenyan parents denying our children the opportunity to be children?

Example 4

On 14/08/09

Parents demonstrate extensive knowledge about appropriate practices in early childhood education. Although they do not use theories to explain their information they appear to have a good grasp of what should be happening in early childhood education.

APPENDIX H: ILLUSTRATION OF INITIAL OPEN CODING

The Ideal

Code	Sub-codes	2nd level sub-codes	Text	Sources
Good Practice	Learning processes	Child participates in the learning More time for play	… involve them in a lot of play, a lot of singing and all that in terms of learning there is not more of the board and direct teaching (Ushindi)	12
		Giving child individual attention Child learning at own *pace* Method of teaching	There are some very good things ... The method of teaching is very individual oriented, they give individual attention to the children. In fact they deal with you according to your pace. They move with you according to your pace (Akoth).	12
		Caters for child's development	…that balances in my opinion three things. … the cognitive, intellectual …the social … the spiritual. (Mwasambwa)	11
		Learning that is fun Less stressful *Less work* (home and school)	...making learning fun, less stressful, less work less demands on the child (Wambui)	8 6
		Free environment Kids are kids *Less work* (home and school) Let the child play	A free environment where kids are actually kids at that age. It's not so much academics at that level... (Naisiaye) I would have very little to do with academics. It will just be play. Play play play. ... mainly to be a lot of play. (Kanini)	6 19
	Teacher	Qualifications and training Professionalism	Teachers... have to be trained and trained to a high level. ... real teaching and applying of teaching skills must come. ...if you don't have good trained teachers the preschool is useless (Waititu).	9
	Involving parents		... management can show interest by perhaps by inviting more of parents input ... allow more contribution from the parents or even allow parents to have a particular project (Nyaore).	8
	Facilities	Homely	...the more of a home environment we can make kids feel the better (Okwalo)	4

APPENDIX I: ILLUSTRATION OF CODING OF THE REAL

The Real: Play of Choice

Main theme	Sub-theme	Codes and sub-codes combined from open coding	Excerpts from interviews coded under the codes and sub-codes	Source
The play of choice	Desire for success	Academic pressure dynamics: pressure on the school from parents Social mobility	Because the society believes that a good child is the one who is passing exams and nobody wants her child to be seen as a bad child(Wambui) If a child does not go to a good secondary school the possibility of them passing to go to a university is very low. Performance is determined by the secondary school they go to. (Ushindi)	15 4
	Competition	Real: Learning Process/ too much work Real: Learning Process/ emphasis on literacy and numeracy Academic pressure dynamics: pressure on the child from school	…but I also thought that the kind of education we have here is so academic driven so that even kids in nursery are carrying big bags full of books, coming home with … homework... (Mwasambwa) They laid a lot of emphasis on exams right from that early stage… The head teacher put a lot of pressure on the teachers to make sure that the students are achieving to a particular minimum grade (Wanjiku) Exactly, the same pressure is there. And then the academies are there. They want to proof something. They want to draw, they are marketing, they are doing business so now you find that oh bring your child, he will be able to read a newspaper but I think that is too much. Just too much, Kids… are being introduced to the adult world too early (Wambui)	19 18 9
		Impediments to quality: system of education	No it is the system. If you look at these children… from the time they go to school early in the morning these kids are in the classrooms throughout(Mutisor)	14
	Hearsay	Preschool choice/sources of information/parents	I had prior information about the school that it was one of the performing schools nationally ...through neighbours ...somebody suggested in the neighbourhood that such and such a school would be a good option. (Manyasi) Of course hearing from other parents, ...from the experience of those other parents, having talked to the teachers ...that would be a good place to put our kids and it was cheap. (Okwalo)	21

APPENDIX J: ETHICS APPROVAL

This administrative form
has been removed

APPENDIX K: RESEARCH PERMIT (REPUBLIC OF KENYA)

Content has been removed