


Towards quality early childhood development for refugee children: An exploratory study of a Grade R class in a Durban child care centre

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Dates:

Received: 23 Jan. 2018
 Accepted: 07 Feb. 2019
 Published: 10 July 2019

How to cite this article:

Adams-Ojugbele, R.O. & Moletsane, R., 2019, 'Towards quality early childhood development for refugee children: An exploratory study of a Grade R class in a Durban child care centre', *South African Journal of Childhood Education* 9(1), a616. <https://doi.org/10.4102/sajce.v9i1.616>

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Background: As populations of refugee children increase globally, strategies for providing quality and relevant educational experiences for this group of children has become a priority. This is because research suggests that refugee children tend to experience higher school dropout rates due to, among other factors, poverty, lack of shelter and inadequate nutrition.

Aim: This article reports on an exploratory study of Grade R teachers' interactions with refugee children in a child care centre in Durban and the ways in which these might contribute to the children's readiness for Grade 1 in mainstream schools.

Setting: The study was located in a Grade R class in a Durban refugee child care centre catering for children from neighbouring African countries.

Methods: The study adopted a qualitative ethnographic approach involving classroom and playground observations, as well as informal open-ended interviews with the Grade R teacher and her assistant.

Results: The findings suggest that several factors, including a high teacher-learner ratio (1:48), poor classroom management and pedagogical practices, inadequate and inappropriate resources and a lack of professional development opportunities for teachers influenced the nature of interactions between the refugee children and their teachers.

Conclusions: The findings have negative implications for the children's readiness for Grade 1 and beyond. The findings suggest that unless the provision of early childhood development and education (ECDE) in this centre is significantly improved, for example, by addressing the factors identified in the study, the refugee children in the facility will continue to be poorly prepared for mainstream schooling.

Keywords: classroom interactions; early childhood education and development; refugee children; Grade R; school readiness.

Introduction

The first eight (0–8) years of life of a child are crucial for the development of basic skills such as cognitive, physical and socio-emotional competencies needed for lifelong learning and effective functioning in later life (UNICEF 2012). Similarly, Garcia, Pence and Evans (2008) noted that children's attendance in early childhood education programmes has a positive influence on their academic achievement, the reduction in school dropout, the need for remedial programmes, and an increase in school participation and completion rates. Thus, children's early years are important, as they lay the foundation for later development (Essa 2013; Halle, Vick & Anderson 2010). Children from refugee and immigrant families constitute a growing population of deprived, excluded and vulnerable children because of the nature of the environment and experiences (Block et al. 2014; Vandenbroeck & Lazzari 2014). For example, in recent times, there has been an increase in the number of studies relating to immigrant children's experience in their host countries (Arzubiaga, Noguerón & Sullivan 2009; Grieshaber et al. 2010; Sidhu, Taylor & Christie 2011). In the United States, for example, Prior and Niesz (2013) note that refugee children in the early childhood classrooms find it difficult to adjust to their new environment at first, but later develop resilience that assists them to cope and integrate into their new school environment. Similarly, Shuayb et al. (2016) investigated the education provision and schooling experience of Syrian refugee children in Germany and Lebanon. The study found that refugee children were faced with a number of challenges related to coping and integration into the educational system in the host countries. The challenges experienced by children from refugee families, especially the lack of

access to quality early childhood education in host countries, expose them to the risk of not achieving their developmental potential. To respond to the challenges of refugee children, most interventions targeting refugee and asylum-seeking children have been focused on children's post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Tyrer & Fazel 2014; Vostanis 2016); displacement, migration and acculturation (Hamilton et al. 2000); and psychological symptoms and markers of psychosocial adjustment (Geddes 2012). Interventions that targets educational programmes for these children have focused on their schooling and the different interventions that have been employed to support them in their host countries. These interventions include inclusive programmes that support and promote refugee children's adjustment and effective integration in school. Block et al. (2014) noted that an increase in the number of refugees and asylum seekers across the globe continues to draw the attention of stakeholders to support educational programmes that create supportive and inclusive school environments to promote their school adjustment. In their conclusion, they posited that best practise must address the learning, emotional and social needs of students from the refugee backgrounds.

The majority of children in low socio-economic contexts, including those from refugee and immigrant families, are faced with different kinds of problems at school entry. These include a lack of readiness for formal learning, poor academic performance, inability to interact well with peers and adults, adjustment problems and inability to follow simple school routines in the formal school (Bradley & Corwyn 2002; Caro, McDonald & Willms 2009). The lack of access to a quality preschool experience has been cited as one of the major contributing factors. Bruwer, Hartell and Steyn (2014) and Bulotsky-Shearer, Dominguez and Bell (2012) noted that children from poor socio-economic backgrounds are most likely to enter school with limited school readiness skills or a lack thereof, because of their lack of access to quality early childhood development programmes. They observed that these children often struggle to cope and adapt to the formal school routines and activities. In line with the above, research suggests that the nature and quality of stimulation and experiences children are exposed to in the early years influence the trajectory of their future development and learning outcomes (Britto, Yoshikawa & Boller 2011; Whitebread & Coltman 2008). Studies have shown that providing varied opportunities and materials for children to interact with has important implications for the development of social and cognitive skills (Cabell et al. 2013). Further, a study by Bruwer et al. (2014), which investigated South African teachers' views on the influence of inadequate school readiness on the teaching and learning process, found that children who are classified as not ready for school did not have access to a good quality preschool.

One of the key indicators of a quality early childhood education is the nature of interactions that children engaged in learning activities. A study by Curby, Rimm-Kaufman and Ponitz (2009) observed that the quality and nature of teacher-child interaction in the preschool have been shown

to directly influence children's academic performance and positive school outcomes, especially for children at risk of academic failure (Curby et al. 2009). Similarly, Tu and Hsiao (2008) posited that preschool children learn best in an environment that exposes them to direct interactions with objects, peers and adults in their immediate environment. In their study on preschool teachers' interactions with learners in science teaching, the authors found that both verbal and non-verbal interactions in the classroom promoted skills like curiosity, spirit of inquiry and development of cognition which in turn led to the overall development of the children. In other words, children who are exposed to quality interactions in the early years develop positive interactive skills, cognitive skills, behavioural skills, emotional skills and academic skills that prepare them for success in school and future life (Hamre et al. 2013; Stipek & Byler 2004; Williford et al. 2013). This article therefore examined the ways in which teachers in a Grade R class in a refugee child care centre interacted with learners (mostly refugees from neighbouring African countries). The study was guided by the following research question:

- What is the nature of social and academic interactions between refugee children and their Grade R teachers in a refugee care centre classroom?

Theoretical framework

This study adopted Bronfenbrenner's (2001) Bioecological Model of Human Development to analyse data. The model explains development in terms of interactions between four major elements: process, persons, context and time (PPCT model). It describes the relationships and interactions that exist between the developing child, the school, the home and the community taking into consideration the biological component of the developing person. These relationships and interactions become complex and consistent over time to influence and effect development (Bronfenbrenner 2001; Bronfenbrenner & Morris 2006b; Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta 2000; Tudge et al. 2009). From this perspective, Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2006b) have argued that positive interactions between adults (including caregivers, teachers) and children bring about positive outcomes in children's learning and development. According to Bronfenbrenner (2001), a reciprocal interaction between children and significant others in contexts where they spend time brings about development. Such interactions, according to Bronfenbrenner (2001) and Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2006b), are expected to bring about changes in the learners behaviour, and as time goes by, they are expected to become complex and reciprocal for effective development. Researchers have expounded on the importance of classroom interaction and suggest that positive classroom interaction is a strong tool that brings about development and a positive learning outcome for children (Bronfenbrenner & Morris 2006a; Mashburn et al. 2008). In this study, the framework was used to understand the nature of children's interactions with their teachers in and around their Grade R class and how these might prepare children for successful adaptation in the mainstream school.

In this study, classroom interactions were defined holistically as involving the children's reciprocal social and academic exchanges with teachers and peers, as well as with the teaching and play materials in and around the Grade R classroom. The study was premised on the notion that the quality of classroom interactions between teachers and learners in the classroom determines the trajectory of the children's learning and development in later years (Dodd-Nufrio 2011). Conversely, poor classroom interactions are linked to poor development, behavioural problems, emotional problems and low levels of achievement in later years (Coolahan et al. 2000). Understanding such interactions has implications for the influence these might have on the learners' preparedness for Grade 1 in mainstream schools and their success therein and beyond.

Research design and methodology

As noted above, the major aim of this study was to understand the nature and quality of interactions between a group of refugee children and their teachers and peers in and around their Grade R classroom. To address the questions, the study was located within the social constructivist paradigm. According to the constructivism worldview, knowledge is constructed through interactions and conversations between people in a social context, and through the use of language (Churcher 2014; Vygotsky 1980). Research within this paradigm is interested in the lived experiences of the social actors (Schwandt 1994). Hence, the study investigated the interactions between the children and significant adults in their context of development, with the aim of understanding the phenomena from the perspectives of the participants.

Informed by this paradigm and the Bioecological Model of Human Development, the study adopted a qualitative approach to research (Creswell 2009; Swain 2006). In this study, the setting was a Grade R classroom in a refugee children care centre in the Durban area. The centre was founded by a group of refugee women, with a major sponsorship from an international non-governmental organisation. As such it caters mainly for refugee and immigrant children from Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Malawi, Zimbabwe, the Congo and a few South Africans of a low socio-economic status. Most of the children's parents had only completed primary school and some had no education. Many, particularly those from French-speaking countries and those with little to no education, use their native languages to communicate with their children in the home. This made it difficult for them to assist their children with their homework. The centre caters for children between the ages of 6 months to 6 years. The participants included 48 learners between the ages of five and six in the Grade R class and two adults (the Grade R teacher and a teacher assistant). The Grade R teacher was a South African, while the assistant class teacher was a female refugee from Burundi. The Grade R teacher had a Diploma in Education in Foundation Phase, with 10 years of teaching experience in the preschool setting. The assistant teacher had

an equivalent of Grade 12 with 8 years of teaching experience in the preschool setting. At the time of the study, both teachers had never participated in any professional development training since they started teaching.

Data collection was carried out by the first author who visited the school three times a week over a period of 8 consecutive weeks. Like any study involving young children, this study was faced with some ethical issues which needed to be addressed. Beyond the principles of doing least harm, and the ethical clearance by the university ethics committee, in this study, we were guided by Schenk and Williamson's (2005) ethical principles that inform research with young children. These include ensuring the autonomy of the participants and not coercing them into participating. In particular, because of their age and their particular vulnerability as refugees, the children themselves were not directly interviewed beyond brief informal conversations during classroom and playground activities. Because of the age of the children, we cannot claim that they understood consent and that they had consented to participate. Rather, their parents' and caregivers' consent was sought. This included explaining the focus and purpose of the study to them in a language they understood. Permission was also sought from the school management. The primary data were collected through classroom and playground observations of the learners and their teachers for the period of 8 consecutive weeks during the last academic term in 2013. The first author spent time in the centre carrying out participant observations and conducting informal interviews with the Grade R teachers and the centre management. This was aimed at providing an in-depth account of how a social group (refugee children in a Grade R class) interacted among themselves and with significant others in and around the Grade R classroom. This allowed for an in-depth understanding of the nature and quality of interactions between learners and teachers and among the children during play and learning activities in the Grade R classroom. As a participant observer, she participated in the day-to-day activities and routines in the Grade R classroom, for example, by assisting the Grade R teachers and her assistant during the learning and play activities in the classroom. Our belief is that her involvement in the different classroom activities helped to make the children see her as part of the classroom and not a researcher who was there to study them. The observations were recorded in the field notes for analysis. In addition, informal interviews were conducted with the Grade R teacher, assistant teacher and centre manager. Data analysis was continuous throughout the study. The interviews with both teachers and the centre manager were audio-taped and transcribed verbatim. The transcripts, together with the field notes, were coded and analysed into themes.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical clearance for the study was obtained from the University of KwaZulu-Natal Human and Social Science Ethics Committee, Ethical Clearance number: HSS/0053/0114D.

Study findings

The main focus of this study was to examine the nature and quality of the teachers' social and academic interactions in and around a Grade R classroom at a refugee care centre. The findings are presented in two sub-sections, namely social and academic interactions.

Social interactions

Teacher training and nature of social interaction: Overall, the findings from this study suggest that the nature of interactions in the Grade R class might have been influenced by the quality of the teachers' qualifications and their access (or lack thereof) to professional development programmes. As pointed out by McDonald Connor et al. (2005), the teachers' qualifications and teaching experience have important consequences on their ability to manage the classroom and scaffold learning that is developmentally appropriate for optimal realisation of development and a positive learning outcome. Teachers who are responsible for the education of children, especially the refugee children, are to be adequately qualified and exposed to developmentally appropriate practices that will assist them to manage and support children's learning and play for optimal realisation of development. In this classroom, the lack of participation in professional development programmes seemed to impact negatively on the teachers' classroom practice and interactions with the children. In particular, this was evidenced by their inadequate understanding of the curriculum framework for Grade R (Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement [CAPS]), and their pedagogical strategies (teaching methods used in the classroom) and their approach to classroom discipline seemed inadequate:

'I am not sure if I am doing the right thing. The centre fails to provide us with curriculum framework with which to teach the children. I only do what I feel is right and uses the resource materials I had gathered during my teaching practise of over eight years. We don't ever attend any training, no workshop of any sort. Guess I am stocked in this centre.' (Interview transcript Grade R teacher, 27 October 2013)

This is discussed in more detail later in the article.

Physical space and nature of social interaction: Informed by the notion that educational facilities for young children must support a full range of capabilities in young children (Bowman, Donovan & Burns 2000), this study examined the influence of the physical, social and academic spaces in which the children interacted for curricular as well as extracurricular activities throughout the day. Findings from the study showed that the refugee centre as a teaching and learning environment had an influence on the nature of interactions the children had with their teachers and peers. The location of the centre (on the fourth floor of a dilapidated building) and its architecture prevented the learners from optimally engaging in appropriate activities and interactions that would have enhanced their experiences and learning. In addition, the dilapidated condition of the building and the poor condition of the Grade R classroom and facilities around

it also limited the children's ability to be fully engaged in the teaching and learning environment. This might impact negatively on the children's acquisition of the social and academic skills needed for learning and school success.

Classroom management and pedagogical practices and nature of social interaction: Research evidence indicates a strong relationship between classroom management practices adopted by the teachers as they have a great influence on the children's interaction with their teachers, peers and parents and the acquisition of academic and social skills (Cabell et al. 2013; Pianta et al. 2002). From this study, it was observed that social interactions between the Grade R teachers and the refugee children in and around the classroom were limited by the classroom management practices. The observations indicated that the Grade R teacher and her assistant tended to pay inadequate attention to the learners during some of the activities during the day, while they focused on preparation for the next day's activities or attending to their individual needs, leaving learners to engage in negative activities such as fighting and struggling over toys, play material or space. One explanation for this involves the high teacher-learner ratio (2:48), where one qualified teacher and one assistant teacher were responsible for 48 learners with varied social and learning needs. This meant that the two teachers did not have the time or resources to pay attention to the children who required individual attention and support. During this period, children were left on their own. While it may be argued that leaving young children to choose their own activities during free play may be good for their development, weak or a lack of adult guidance may affect their learning and development. In addition, the findings suggested that the learners did not interact well with their peers during play time. This may have been largely because of the absence of a responsive adult who monitors and encourages positive interactions among the children. When the observations were shared with one of the teachers, she commented thus:

'I know that some things are inappropriate, but the first problem I have with these children is their attitude. I believe their background has a lot to do with this. You hardly can get them to do the right thing. I know what I am supposed to be doing with them, but their population makes it difficult. They lack discipline and are very difficult to curtail.' (Interview with Grade R Teacher, 09 November 2013)

Thus, from this teacher's submission, it became clear that the learners' backgrounds and population were seen as a barrier to the interactions needed for optimal development and learning in Grade R. Interviews with the teachers also suggested that lack of teacher's professional development negatively influenced their ability to handle the prevailing situation in the Grade R classroom.

Academic interactions

Nores and Barnett (2010) posited that high-quality instruction that focuses on specific skills has a positive influence on children's preschool experience. Hamre et al. (2013) observed

that quality feedback and language modelling by a teacher enhances acquisition and development of appropriate concepts and skills in learners. Through the participant observation, the study explored how Grade R teachers interacted with refugee children during various learning activities. The study also examined how these interactions influenced the acquisition of basic academic skills.

The National Curriculum Framework (the CAPS) (South African Department of Basic Education 2011) supports child centeredness and group work as appropriate pedagogies for optimal realisation of learning outcomes and children's overall development (Copple & Bredekamp 2009b; Department of Basic Education 2011; Kim 2011). From the study, it was observed that the Grade R teacher and her assistant did their best to teach basic numeracy, literacy and life skills needed for school readiness. Observations and participation in the Grade R classroom indicated that the teachers' lessons were largely aligned within the CAPS framework. For example, the teachers used the concept of roll-call during the morning sessions to develop numeracy skills in the learners. Also, according to the teachers, having the learners undertake this exercise and repeat it on a daily basis assisted them to master the numbers and number ordering. Secondly, the teacher used different shapes, colours and patterns to support acquisition and development of basic numeracy skills. In addition, the teachers assessed the learners' ability to recognise the different shapes by providing opportunities for sorting and grouping. The learners were guided to join the dots in their worksheets to form different patterns and were made to describe the patterns. The teachers observed that engaging children in such activities supports development of logical thinking and language skills. The Grade R teachers also used the weather charts to teach learners the different weather patterns where learners discussed weather elements such as days, months, dates, seasons and year.

Despite various teaching skills demonstrated by the Grade R teachers in the development of academic skills among refugee children, it was observed that Grade R teacher had gaps in understanding and applying some aspects of CAPS. For example, in a conversation with the Grade R teacher, she commented as captured below:

'I am using the resource materials that I use during my teaching practise years, because I don't have the department's [the CAPS] curriculum. The refugee centre don't have any either. I am not always sure if what I am teaching the children is right. I just do what I feel is right from my studies. They don't have a specific curriculum to follow in this centre, so, I am using my resource materials.' (Interview transcript, 15 November, 2013)

Secondly, the findings indicated that teaching and learning in the Grade R classroom were mostly teacher-centred and didactic in nature. It was observed that the teachers mostly stood in front of the class and 'taught'. For example, the morning usually started with the Grade R teachers leading the learners in reciting different nursery rhymes. This would often be followed by reciting, again in a chorus, the days of

the week, months, seasons of the year and numbers from 1 to 20. After the recitations, the teacher would then teach the day's lessons, involving literacy, numeracy and life skills. Again, the learners would listen while the teacher taught. The teachers mostly used English, as a medium of instruction, limiting interaction as most learners were not well conversant with the language. The language barrier resulted in many of the learners struggling to complete the assigned tasks. As stated in the Developmentally Appropriate Practice Statement (Copple & Bredekamp 2009a), an effective teacher intentionally adapts the learning instruction to the developmental needs of the child. He or she tailors the curriculum to the individual child's needs, determines each child's capabilities based on the learning goal and adjusts their teaching to meet such needs (Copple & Bredekamp 2009b). Yet, the Grade R class teacher seemed to expect that once she gave a general instruction to learners during the morning session on how to complete the different tasks, every learner would be able to complete the day's learning tasks without difficulty. As such, learners were left on their own during this time, and those who struggled with the learning activities were either ignored or ridiculed. In one of the interviews with the teacher, she commented:

'It is difficult to teach these children. They do not understand the English. This makes it difficult for them to understand the learning instructions in the class. My responsibility is to teach them the basic things they need to be ready for school. I am not going to open their heads and put words in them. The children's population is also not helping ... it is difficult to give them individual attention or attend to their individual needs.' (Interview, 15 November 2013)

Reading was one of the academic activities which took place in the Grade R classroom and that constituted an avenue for teachers to interact with the learners. However, as an activity, it was infrequent. The teachers only read to learners twice during the 8 weeks of this study. On the two occasions, the learners showed enthusiasm and paid a lot of attention while the book was being read to them by the class teacher. They were able to answer all questions directed to them about the story. This suggested that the learners could have benefitted more if the teachers read to them more often and in an interactive way. This would contribute towards building their literacy and communication skills (Mol, Bus & De Jong 2009; Reese & Cox 1999).

Discussion

The study sought to understand how the refugee children's interactions with others in and around the care centre influenced their experience in Grade R as well as their readiness for mainstream schooling. This analysis was informed by the bioecological model of human development introduced by Bronfenbrenner (2001). The model explains development in terms of interactions between four major elements: process, persons, context and time. The complex nature of relationships and interactions between the developing child, the school, the home and the community, taking into consideration the biological

component of the developing person, was elucidated in the model (Bronfenbrenner 2001).

The findings suggest that the refugee children in this study had both positive and negative interactions with their teachers during the social and academic activities and routines in the Grade R classroom. Factors within the care centre and Grade R classroom tended to have a negative effect on the nature and quality of the interactions the children experienced with each other and with their teachers. These included teacher qualifications and experience, poor teacher expertise and motivation for managing and scaffolding the children's learning and play activities, a high teacher-learner ratio (2:48), insufficient teaching materials, a lack of conducive space for extracurricular activities and a lack of in-service training and support for teachers. This is consistent with findings from other studies, including Connor et al.'s (2005), which found that the higher the level of the teacher's qualifications and years of experience, the higher the quality of their interaction and responsiveness with the students. In addition, Curby, Grimm and Pianta (2010) posited that high-quality instructional interactions between teachers and learners have a positive impact on children's school outcome. Low levels of instructional interactions between teachers and learners as observed in this study are likely to have a negative impact on the refugee children's overall development. In this study, teaching was mostly teacher-centred, and the learners who struggled did not receive the attention they needed to learn and develop. This suggests that the interactions in this Grade R class lacked the reciprocity between the teacher and learners needed for optimal learning and development (Bronfenbrenner & Morris 2006a). As an illustration, research evidence suggests that reading in the early childhood setting provides children not only with language and literacy skills but also gives room for quality and rich conversations that transcend the content of the book or story, thereby allowing for dialogue between the adult and the child (Reese & Cox 1999; Wasik & Bond 2001). Such quality conversations and dialogue during reading have a positive effect on children's vocabulary and language skills. In this Grade R classroom, our analysis suggests that the learners were not fully engaged in such quality and rich conversations. They were only allowed to answer questions directed at them by the teacher. Considering their backgrounds (refugees from various African countries with different language backgrounds), informed by the scholarship reviewed here, it is not unreasonable to conclude that the children could have benefitted from engaged and interactive reading and other classroom activities than from the teacher-centred pedagogy that dominated the Grade R classroom.

Thus, this article argues that generally, in any context of development, children present varied learning interests and needs and abilities. Thus, it is imperative that their learning needs and interests are taken into consideration in planning and implementing learning and play activities. Such needs in the context of the Grade R class under study would include

the children's background as refugees and linked to their low socio-economic status. The findings in this study suggest that, influenced by such factors as inappropriate pedagogical practices, inadequate teaching and learning resources, and a limited/limiting classroom and school environment, the interactions between the teacher(s) and the refugee children in this Grade R class failed to address the learning and developmental needs of the learners. Arguably, failing to cater for the individual needs of the learners in the Grade R class might have a negative impact on their preparation for mainstream schooling and the trajectory of their future development.

Conclusion

The exploratory study analysed in this article reiterates the importance of quality ECDE provision for all children, including those from refugee families as a necessary foundation for their entry into and success in schooling (and beyond). Providing ECDE for refugee children is important in ensuring that, like all children in society, they receive the care and support they need to reap positive educational and other outcomes later in life. Significantly, the nature and quality of the interactions they have with their teachers (and others) in early childhood influences their development and learning and later success in school and beyond. In this Grade R class, several factors impacted negatively on the quality of these interactions. For example, the teachers' lack of access to professional development opportunities meant that they had an inadequate understanding of the National Curriculum Framework (CAPS) and its requirements and that of relevant pedagogical strategies for use with young children with diverse learning needs, such as the refugee children in their care.

This study argues that for refugee children to be ready for school and succeed therein, quality interactions in the ECDE teaching and learning environment must be ensured. Children must be exposed to developmentally appropriate learning materials and teaching practices in an environment that is conducive and stimulating and that solicits their active participation and engagement. Of course, this cannot be achieved without the active participation of a supportive adult (like the teacher) who scaffolds the children's play and learning activities in ways that lead to their optimal development. This is key also for ensuring that the country achieves the United Nation's sustainable development goals, including, among others, ending poverty and hunger, reducing inequality, providing quality education and ensuring well-being for all. Provision of quality ECDE for refugee children will contribute to eradicating inequality and ensure that they have access to programming that caters for social, educational and health needs.

Despite its importance in advancing the conversation around the need for the quality of early childhood education for refugee children in host countries, this study has several limitations. Notably, the study focused on a small sample of refugee children from one refugee care centre. While a lot can

be learned from this glimpse into the children's experiences of ECDE in this setting, more in-depth and longitudinal studies that focus on the children's experiences from Grade R through the schooling system are needed. Such studies could address questions like: What educational and developmental programmes are on the ground for refugee children who are newly arrived in South Africa? What works in supporting refugee children's learning and development as they progress through the schooling system? Addressing these questions would go a long way towards developing curricula that address the diverse early childhood educational and social needs of these children. For example, based on the findings from this exploratory study, we conclude that targeted ECDE interventions aimed at facilitating the academic and social integration of children at risk, such as refugee children, are needed. These could include institutional policies and programmes that pay specific attention not only to policy development but also to professional development programmes that equip teachers with the necessary knowledge and skills for providing quality ECDE for all children, including those from refugee families. This requires targeted funding for ECDE centres that enrol refugee children so that these interventions are well resourced.

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank the Early Childhood Development Centre community (staff, parents and children) where this study was conducted.

Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no financial or personal relationships that may have inappropriately influenced them in writing this article.

Authors' contributions

This article was compiled by the joint contribution of both authors as follows: data collection was done by R.O.A.-O., while analysis of data and results presentation and the development of the manuscript were done by both R.O.A.-O. and R.M.

Funding information

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial or not-for-profit sectors.

Data availability statement

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as this was not negotiated in the informed consent and permission to conduct the study.

Disclaimer

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of any affiliated agency of the authors.

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