Chapter 6

Findings

6.1 INTRODUCTION

In Chapter 4, I reported on the results from the quantitative data, namely the questionnaires with open-ended responses which were completed by the student-participants. The data from these questionnaires focused on facilities and learning activities which were available in early learning centres. In this regard, I specifically looked into the availability of indoor learning areas, learning activities and outdoor facilities.

In Chapter 5, I gave an account of the results from the qualitative data, namely the interviews with parents (mothers) and teachers, as well as the reflective journals kept by the student-participants. This data from the interviews and reflective journals focused on the understanding of the beneficiaries' (parents, teachers and students) experiences of quality in the early learning centres of the case study. The results derived from the data sources were analysed according to themes, sub-themes and categories in a thematic analysis.

In this chapter, I provide an interpretation of the results and portray the findings in terms of existing literature. I report on supportive and contradictive evidence from the literature, as well as on silences and new insights that emerged from this study.

In the first part of the chapter, I report on findings from the *quantitative data* (questionnaires) of this study with reference to the availability of indoor areas, structured learning activities and outdoor facilities in early learning centres.

6.2 WHAT IS OFFERED BY EARLY LEARNING CENTRES?

In this section I answer the secondary research question, “What is offered by early learning centres?” (refer to 1.5.4).

6.2.1 Learning areas

Quantitative results indicated that nearly all the early learning centres had *book corners, display tables for theme discussions* and *areas for art and cognitive activities.* In line with the results of the current study, existing literature generally highlights the inclusion of these areas in quality early learning centres. As Segal, Bardige, Bardige, Breffni and Woika (2012: 64) point out, high-quality playrooms are likely to offer between five and ten interest centres. Various sources support the inclusion of these indoor areas in early learning centres (Bredekamp, 2011; Bullard, 2010; Seefeldt, 2002).

In the current study, most of the early learning centres had *fantasy* and *block play areas.* In my review of the literature, I found that both these areas are seen as very important to support and enhance dramatic play and creativity in children (Bayley, Broadbent & Featherstone, 2009c; Curtis & Carter, 2003; Mayesky, 2009).

Numeracy seems to be a priority in most of the early learning centres. However, *mathematics corners* and *discovery areas* were visible in less than half of the early learning centres in the current study. Existing literature shows that both these areas can effectively promote the cognitive and explorational abilities of children (Charlesworth & Lind, 2003; Trister-Dodge *et al.,* 2003).

In most cases (more than 70%) *sensopathic, music* or *technology areas* were not available. Existing literature indicates that *music areas* in early learning centres not only provide informal opportunities for children to gain music skills and an appreciation for music but also enhance physical, socio-emotional, cognitive and language development (Bullard, 2010: 273–274). The same author advocates the inclusion of *technology* and *sensopathic areas* which, apart from enhancing cognitive

and physical development, also foster curiosity, experimentation and imagination in young children (Bullard, 2010: 152, 291). Only 17% of centres had *technology areas*. My Master's thesis titled "The implementation of the Learning Area Technology in the primary schools in Gauteng and Free State Provinces" supports this finding and points out that the technology is a relatively new, unfamiliar area and activity in early learning centres. Most of the current teachers were not trained in, or exposed to technology-related activities. Those who did receive training in this area are relatively young and inexperienced and encountered difficulties in introducing such activities where they started their teaching careers (Van Heerden, 2005: 76).

6.2.2 Structured learning activities

The questionnaires revealed that the majority (95%) of early learning centres presented *stories, rhymes, art, music, theme discussions* and *numeracy activities* as part of the structured learning activities of their daily programmes. These results are supported by existing literature regarding the value and importance of these activities to enhance quality in the daily programme of an early learning centre (Davin & Van Staden, 2005; Edwards, 2010; Edwards *et al*., 2009; Isenberg & Jalongo, 2010; Wallace, 2002). According to Becker and Becker (2009: 5), quality in early childhood programmes should not be confused with formal schooling. They argue that there is a tendency to rush children to prepare them academically for school (see 2.5.5), but in doing so, major "factors" are being left out in some early learning centres regarding the daily programme. Becker and Becker (2009: 5) advise teachers, instead of formal inappropriate work, to read to children and to tell them stories. They maintain that asking them questions, encouraging the children to tell stories or participating in alphabet games "will prepare them far better than drills on letters of the alphabet and phonics".

Most of the early learning centres (90%) offered *movement activities, perception* and *baking activities.* In line with the results of the current study, existing literature generally highlights that these activities are also considered important to enhance the quality of the holistic development of children (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009; Davin & Van Staden, 2005; Edwards *et al.*, 2009; Gordon & Browne, 2004; Mayesky, 2009).

These findings indicate that South African early learning centres offer the majority of important structured learning activities which are aimed at the holistic development of children as part of their daily programmes.

I encountered a silence in the early childhood education literature regarding faith-based activities in early learning centres. The high frequency (93%) of the use of *religious stories,* in the current study, corresponds with the responses from the interviews where morals and faith-based values were deemed significant by mothers as well as teachers. However, the literature on early childhood programmes that I consulted, is silent on this matter. This silence could be ascribed to the fact that most of the literature on quality in early learning centres originates from countries where the law either forbids, or restricts religious education in public schools, for example the United States of America, Canada and Australia. In the United States of America religious education is forbidden in public schools, except if it is taught from a neutral, academic perspective, which does not suit the developmental stage of children at early learning centres (Pew Forum, 2007).

In Canada, religion is also largely avoided in public schools. Publicly funded schools for Roman Catholics and Protestant Christians are allowed in some provinces. However, in provinces such as Quebec, a growing level of multiculturalism resulted in the religious education in public schools being abolished in 1998 (Wikipedia, 2011).

The current South African National Policy on Religion and Education, introduced in 2003, makes provision for the teaching of religion in schools. The policy explains why matters related to religion need to be included in public education (DoE, 2003:5). This policy links religion and education with new initiatives in cultural rebirth (the African Renaissance), moral regeneration, and the promotion of values in schools. Religion can play a significant role in preserving our heritage, respecting our diversity, and building a future based on progressive values. South African mothers and teachers seem to regard such values as important.

About *two-thirds* of the early learning centres had *puppet shows*. Existing literature support the value of the inclusion of puppet sh/ows in early learning centres. Puppet shows are specifically valuable with regard to language acquisition; learning of new

vocabulary; as well as acquiring new knowledge; social and life skills; and values (Bullard, 2010; Herr, Larson & Tennyson-Grimm, 2004; Isenberg & Jalongo, 2010; Mayesky, 2009).

Science and technology activities were offered in less than a third of the early learning centres. Existing local research supports the results of the current study. In South Africa, science and technology activities are not frequently being presented in early learning centres (Bosman, 2006; Van Heerden, 2005). From the literature it is evident that the inclusion of both science and technology activities is very beneficial for developing a range of skills, specifically higher order thinking skills like critical and creative thinking and problem-solving skills (Charlesworth & Lind, 2003; Eshach & Fried 2005; Fleer & Hardy 2001; Wallace, 2002). Clarckson, Groenewald, Luke and Ncapai (1998: 4) advocate the inclusion of science and technology in early learning centres, because young children are concrete thinkers who learn best by making, dismantling, examining and experimenting. In their opinion, teachers will be astounded at children's capacity for creative problem-solving and decision-making, which are crucial skills for succeeding in formal education and in life.

Additional language activities were also only offered in less than a third of the early learning centres. In the South African national curriculum, a first additional language is only officially introduced as a subject in Grade 1 (DoBE, 2011:8). Children's literacy experiences preceding Grade 1 are crucial for their learning to read and write (McGee & Richgels, 2003:1). According to Phatudi (2011: 2), more and more schools adopt English as the medium of instruction as early as Grade R. She also argues that these transitions "happen too abruptly without the learners having developed necessary cognitive skills in their first language". The consequences thereof are poor academic performance because learning the new language is a 'battle" for the children (Phatudi, 2011: 2). Deiner (2010: 294) adds weight to Phatudi's statement by saying that to be skilled in using English as a tool for learning, calls for in-depth knowledge, not just for talking and comprehension, but for reading and writing as well.

Robb (1995: 16) argues that the "participatory, interactive, democratic, activity-based, experiential education" found in early learning centres, initiate the ideal environment

for learning a language, especially because fostering the development of language is one of the main aims of early learning education. She is, however, convinced that although these conditions can be utilised to support the acquisition of an additional language, the significance of the child's home language should never be forgotten, whether that home language is going to be the language of instruction in formal education or not. Robb (1995: 16) also suggests that every early learning centre, even monolingual ones, should try to introduce the children to other locally-spoken languages. In South Africa, where there are eleven official languages, one would assume that children would be exposed to an additional language early on in a very informal and incidental way in early learning centres. However, from the data derived from the questionnaires, only 32% of centres introduced learners to an additional language.

6.2.3 Outdoor facilities

Swings, climbing apparatus and slides were present in almost all (95%) of the early learning centres. Existing literature agrees on the significance of having appropriate equipment to enhance the physical development of children and particularly to develop their gross motor skills while challenging them to experiment and take risks (Berry, 2001: 93; Edwards, *et al.,* 2009; Feeney *et al.,* 2006: 193).

An average of 64% of the early learning centres had a *sandpit, blocks, fantasy and wheel toys* available for outdoor play. Results from the current study thus supports insights from existing literature that such areas and apparatus are valuable for the development of numerous skills (Bayley, Broadbent & Featherstone, 2009a; 2009b; 2009c; 2009d; Bullard, 2010; Casey, 2010; Curtis & Carter, 2003).

Only 61% of the centres had *water play areas* available. Although the questionnaires were completed by the respondents in mid-summer, less than a third of the centres presented water play activities. From existing literature, it is clear that water play is perceived by many as very versatile and useful in advancing knowledge and an array of skills in children (Bayley, Broadbent & Featherstone, 2009e; Evans, 2007).

According to the results of the questionnaires, art activities are presented indoors as part of the daily programme in 97% of the cases. Conversely, art activities are not as often part of the outdoor programme compared to the art activities indoors. *Outdoor art activities* and *dollhouses* were present in *half* of the early learning centres. Literature indicates that outdoor art activities and dollhouses encourage children to develop their creativity and social skills (Bayley & Featherstone 2009; Bayley, Broadbent & Featherstone, 2009b; Curtis & Carter, 2003).

A *sensopathic area, animals, vegetable or herb garden* and *woodwork* were usually absent. These areas are present in only 15% of the early learning centres. According to existing literature all these areas can contribute in various ways to children's holistic development (Entz, 2009: 149–150; Essa, 2011: 345; Feeney *et al.,* 2006: 229, 241; Grobler *et al.,* 1996: 46–47; Schirrmacher, 2006: 47; Wellhousen: 2002: 92), they are however sometimes seen as non-essentials and often, based on lack of space and funds, deemed by teachers as 'nice to haves'.

6.2.4 Integrating insights on services provided at early learning centres

It is apparent from the quantitative findings that the most important indoor facilities were available and structured indoor activities presented in the daily programmes in the majority of early learning centres that were part of this study. The availability of the basic indoor facilities and structured learning activities reflects that children will experience the opportunity to develop in a holistic and appropriate way. The unavailability of mathematics, discovery, sensopathic, music and technology areas and lack of science and technology activities, could slow down the development of various perceptual and cognitive abilities in those children who are not exposed to these areas and activities.

In terms of outdoor facilities, big static outdoor structures like climbing frames, swings and slides were available in most centres. Having these structures allow for the development of gross motor skills and movement. A third of preschools lacked other important areas and open-ended materials for sand, water, block and fantasy play and did not possess wheel toys. The absence of these areas and resources may

delay the development of certain important fine and gross motor skills and reduce sensory experiences in the children who are not exposed to these facilities.

6.3 WHAT DO BENEFICIARIES EXPERIENCE AS QUALITY IN EARLY LEARNING CENTRES?

In this section, I answer the secondary question, “What do beneficiaries experience as quality in early learning centres?” (refer to 1.5.4).

In Chapter 2, I explained the theoretical framework which I adapted from Woodhead (1996). Table 6.1 provides a visual layout of how I integrated results from the interviews and reflective journals (explained in Chapter 5) with indicators of the theoretical framework. Under each indicator, I indicated which (and how many) of the participants used that particular aspect as an indicator of quality in early learning centres. In the case of indicators where there were no responses, I indicated such absences in brown.

One generally accepted way of defining and indicating quality in early learning centres is to arrange quality indicators into three groups namely *input (system or structural)* indicators, *process* indicators and *outcome* indicators (see 2.4). In order to ‘measure’ quality outcomes, the latter need to be framed and linked to input and process indicators (OECD, 2009: 13). Pianta, Barnett, Burchinall and Thornburg (2009: 67) point out that in addition to the identification of the direct effects of quality on children’s outcomes, ‘structural and process quality work together to influence children’s development’. They further emphasise the general understanding among researchers that ‘structural’ features affect the process quality that children directly experience in classes that in turn influences their development” (Pianta *et al.,* 2009: 66).

Table 6.1: Integrating results on quality indicators (derived from the data) within the Woodhead (1996) theoretical framework

'Quality' indicators

INPUT (structural) indicators:

Building and grounds
(indoor- and outdoor environments)

- floor space,

Classrooms: spacious	**31**	**8**	**0**
Playground big & spacious	**19**	**0**	**0**
Playground: interesting & well-designed	**9**	**0**	**0**

- toilets

Neat bathrooms	**0**	**0**	**13**

- heating / cooling **ABSENCE**

Materials and equipment

- toys,

Sufficient & variety of apparatus & toys	**27**	**0**	**0**

- furniture

The centre is fully equipped	**7**	**0**	**0**

- teaching resources **ABSENCE**

PROCESS indicators:

Style of care

- adults' responsiveness *& sensitive care-giving*

Children are the number one priority	**17**	**15**	**0**
Children treated with respect & taught respect	**7**	**13**	**15**
Teachers love children, are caring & warm (children well cared for)	**32**	**34**	**37**
Caring, loving & peaceful atmosphere	**15**	**8**	**23**
Teachers are friendly	**17**	**0**	**35**
Friendly, safe atmosphere	**16**	**8**	**11**
Relaxed & comfortable atmosphere	**0**	**0**	**10**
Teachers are fair	**0**	**15**	**0**
Teachers build relationships of trust with children	**0**	**9**	**0**
Teachers act professionally	**9**	**0**	**11**
Teachers are well prepared	**12**	**0**	**12**
Teachers are dedicated & motivated	**12**	**7**	**0**

OUTCOME indicators:

Children's health

- growth levels **ABSENCE**
- illness **ABSENCE**

Abilities

- overall skills and development

Children can develop to their full potential	**7**	**0**	**0**
Children's identities are developed at the centre	**0**	**13**	**0**

Adjustment to school

- transition and achievements in school

The programme equips children to be ready for grade 1	**0**	**23**	**0**

Family attitudes

- parental competence **ABSENCE**
- support for children's learning at home **ABSENCE**

Children's well-being

Children are happy & content and enjoy school	**16**	**48**	**17**

Staff

- qualifications

Teachers are qualified	**40**	**34**	**0**
Teachers are excellent	**8**	**0**	**0**

- wages and conditions **ABSENCE**

- child/staff ratios

Small number of learners in classes	**38**	**7**	**0**

Health and safety features

Centre: safe & offers security	**47**	**47**	**0**
Centre: clean, neat & hygienic	**11**	**21**	**0**

The presence and content of a curriculum

Correct curriculum being used	**7**	**0**	**0**
Educational programme has a high quality/good standard	**18**	**30**	**0**
Life skills addressed through the programme	**0**	**13**	**0**
Programme: challenging & stimulating	**0**	**17**	**0**
Centre provides extra (mural) activities	**16**	**0**	**0**

Teaching & learning methods

- cater for individual needs

Every child is important and receives (full) individual attention	**17**	**17**	**10**
Occupational & speech therapists available	**0**	**10**	**0**

- control/support

Balance between love & discipline	**0**	**14**	**21**
Teachers helpful & supportive	**0**	**40**	**32**

***Learning and social* experiences offered**
(implementation of the curriculum)

- choices & variety

Opportunities for children's holistic development	**32**	**21**	**0**
Enough opportunities for social interaction	**0**	**35**	**0**
Programme encourages learner participation	**15**	**10**	**0**
Children exposed to group work	**10**	**0**	**0**
Programme provides enough time for play	**0**	**12**	**0**

- routines & transitions

ABSENCE

Control and discipline

- boundaries & rules

Discipline, rules and regulations in the centre	**11**	**30**	**30**

- management (a few responses were given)

Relationships among adults

- respect & trust

Good relationships amongst staff members	**0**	**0**	**13**

Relationships between staff, parents and others

- open, welcoming

Teachers have good relationships with parents	**0**	**0**	**21**
Good communication between staff & parents	**0**	**14**	**0**

- cooperative

Good cooperation between staff & parents	**11**	**0**	**10**
Staff work well together	**17**	**0**	**18**

In this part of the chapter, I interpret results in terms of what groups of participants held in high regard concerning the research question 'What are beneficiaries' experiences of quality in early learning centres in South Africa?'

6.3.1 Confirmation of existing knowledge with regard to quality indicators

The only *outcome indicator* that was regarded as extremely important by mothers and important, but not to the same extent, by teachers and students, is children's well-being and more specifically whether children are *happy and content and enjoying school*. Two different studies done in Australia support these findings (Noble, 2005: 110; O'Gorman, 2007: 57). The same outcome was derived from a study about the perceptions of parents from Hong Kong (Yuen & Grieshaber, 2009: 270). This finding is furthermore supported by the results of an extensive study done in the United States of America on the similarities and differences between Chinese-immigrant and European American parents' views of high quality preschool education (Yamamoto & Li, 2011). Their study also shows that the positive psychological state of children, such as enjoyment, being happy, and loving the school are deemed very important by parents. Yamamoto and Li (2011: 5) created the category *positive affect* for such positive psychological states.

None of the *input* indicators were indicated as important quality indicators by *all three groups of participants (teachers, mothers and students).* However, the quality indicators that were valued by these three groups, were all *process* indicators.

6.3.1.1 Socio-emotional well-being

The style of care seems to be very important to teachers and mothers as well as to students. In support of this finding, Becker and Becker (2009: 35) state that young children cannot learn without a solid underpinning of *love and care*. They furthermore say "if the early childhood teacher, who sees the child for the better part of most days, carries forward the work of the parents and provides this solid foundation, the child will go on and learn for the rest of his life". In the same way, Howes (2010: 15) explains that from an attachment theory perspective, children's relationships with

adults contribute significantly to their experiences of being in early learning centres. *Warm, caring and trusting relationships* with teachers, enable children "to explore other interpersonal relationships and learning opportunities" (Howes, 2010: 15).

In correlation with the current study's results, various studies agree on parents' (and researchers') concern regarding the *well-being and best interest of children* as an indication of the quality in early learning centres. According to Howes (2010: 33), the following questions are often asked: "Are they safe and healthy? Do they feel secure and sure that the teachers will keep them safe? Are they learning the skills that they will need to be successful in school? In short, does the early childhood education environment enhance children's development in various ways and provide them with a good start for the rest of their lives?" The results of the current study further support Becker and Becker (2009: 5, 35) who accentuate that children cannot learn anything, cognitively, emotionally or socially without a loving, trusting relationship with a reliable adult caregiver, who actually substitutes the parent for the majority of the day.

In my study, the provision of *individual attention* to children in a *loving, caring, peaceful, friendly and safe atmosphere* featured prominently as a special concern to all the different groups of participants. In my review of the literature, I found various researchers who supported this view. Howes (2010: 18–19) confirms that warm and sensitive interactions encourage children to trust the teacher, not only to take care of them, but also to experience that they are worthy of being taken care of. Howes further points out that children who enjoy emotional support from sensitive and emotionally available teachers, will be eager to approach peers in a friendly way and build friendships, make complex play sequences and to take part in various learning activities, partially because of self-confidence and partially "because they can rely on the teacher for help if they need it". Feeney *et al.* (2006: 275) further point out that "physical environments send strong messages to children about how they are expected to act and whether they are welcome and accepted".

In my study, all groups of participants expressed the need for children to *experience love* in the early learning centre. Literature within this context supports the importance of safety and security as a prerequisite for the feeling of being loved. In

Katz's view (2010: 5), young children need a deep sense of safety. She refers to safety on a psychological level, meaning feeling secure, as a subjective feeling of "being strongly connected and deeply attached to one or more others". This feeling of attachment, connectedness and feeling safe, she explains, "comes not just from being loved, but from feeling loved, wanted, feeling significant, to an optimum (not maximum) degree". Of importance is that the emphasis is on "*feeling loved and wanted*" rather than on being loved and wanted. In Katz's words:

> *There are, no doubt, many children who are loved, but for a wide variety of reasons do not necessarily feel loved. As I understand early development, feeling strongly attached comes not just from the warmth and kindness of parents and caregivers. The feelings are a consequence of children perceiving that what they do or do not do really matters to others – matters so much that others will pick them up, comfort them, get angry and even scold them. Safety, then, grows out of being able to trust people to respond not just warmly but authentically, intensely and honestly (Katz, 2010: 5).*

Good communication between the staff and parents and an interpersonal *relationship of trust between the teachers and children*, are also mentioned by mothers as indicators of quality early learning centres. In correlation with these results, existing literature agrees on the importance of communication, not only for the children's welfare, but to notify parents and to assist them in understanding the aims and programme of the centre (Howes & Richie, 2002: 23). In this regard, Howes and Richie (2002: 23) say:

> *Nowadays, when so much stress is being placed upon teaching children academics beginning with the earliest groups, there is great fear among some child care educators that parents will not understand a developmentally appropriate approach and will demand that the school teach their children reading, maths, and science. The best way to address parents' concerns is through ongoing communication. Most parents want what is best for their child, and the majority of their questions and concerns can be addressed by providing information, inviting their involvement and helping to empower them*.

6.3.1.2 Learning

For mothers and teachers, quality in early learning centres comprises *a high quality educational programme* that provides *sufficient learning opportunities* to enhance children's *holistic development*, Within the context of holistic development, Essa (2011: 237) and Hirsh-Pasek *et al*., (2009: 22) refer to a substantial body of research verifying that preschool children's maturity predict later school success. These researchers also specify that *school readiness* will best be achieved when focusing on the *whole active child* instead of focusing predominantly on the intellectual or the social aspects of children. In order to acknowledge the whole child, Faust (2010: 99) underlines the importance of good observation, support and expanding of children's play and exploration, as well as the introduction of experiences which are based on children's needs and interests.

In the current study, teachers and mothers indicated that they value a quality programme that encourages *learner participation.* Likewise, Bertram and Pascal [s.a]: 2) indicate that "*involvement* is a measure for quality applicable to an endless list of situations and observable at all ages". In their view, children who participate and are actively involved, have good concentration, a specific focus, "want to continue the activity and to persist in it, and are rarely, if ever distracted". Involved children usually are motivated, remarkably observant and responsive to relevant stimuli. Involvement does not occur when the activities are too easy or when the task is too demanding. Bertram and Pascal refer to evidence that children gain deep, motivated, intense and long-term learning experiences from their involvement and participation.

In the current study, teachers and mothers strongly indicated the value they place on *qualified, dedicated and motivated teachers*. Similarly, literature confirms that the most significant factor indicating quality in early learning centres, is the quality of the staff. According to researchers, the level of teachers' formal education is "related to positive outcomes for children such as increased social interaction with adults, development of pro-social behaviours, and improved language and cognitive development" (Golberg, 1999: 31). Jaeckle (2010: 3) also supports this statement in saying that high quality practices in early learning centres impact on children,

specifically those from the most disadvantaged backgrounds. According to Jaeckle research has identified some specific quality provision indicators including highly-qualified, well-trained teachers. In the aforementioned study of Yamamoto and Li (2011: 6), parents of all the different participating groups in their study identified *teacher qualities,* referring to qualifications, experience, responsibility and teachers being loving, as the most important element of a high-quality early learning centre.

In the same way in which teacher participants in the current study particularly focused on the *type of curriculum* being offered in early learning centres, Howard (2010: 51) reports that education in early learning centres, "needs to be far more creative than it has been in the past, as it needs to equip children with the skills and processes required for an unknown tomorrow." She further emphasises the necessity for shifting from a curriculum that is content–driven to one that applies content as a vehicle "to tantalise and provide an overt awareness of 'effective thinking' and problem solving strategies". Howard explains that to do this efficiently, teachers need to understand developmental theories and curriculum pedagogy, particularly in core areas such as "communication, language, literacy, problem solving and reasoning, knowledge and understanding of the world, and creative development, as well as a sound knowledge of normal child development". This will help teachers to observe children effectively, with the aim to plan and bring about "an appropriate degree of cognitive and physical challenges building on the unique nature of each child, to move learning forward" (Howard, 2010: 51).

Using the *correct curriculum* and exposing children to *group work* was regarded by teachers as important. Literature supports this view by explaining that the most appropriate curriculum for children is one "based on theoretically sound early-childhood practices and principles of development" (Carnahan & Terorde-Doyle, 2007).

In the current study, mothers focused on *school readiness* and a *challenging and stimulating programme* that addresses *life skills* as quality indicators. Existing literature, such as Gilliam (2009: i), confirms that school readiness is the goal of early education, but specifically states that "the goal of school and education itself should be to develop healthy, happy and productive citizens". International literature also

shows that children who are ready for school have a combination of resilience promoting qualities such as self-confidence, the ability to anticipate consequences and to cooperate with others, which are most important (Kamel, 2006: 12).

6.3.1.3 Holistic development

Although mothers clearly emphasised the necessity for *school readiness* they simultaneously stated the need for sufficient playtime. This view is supported by the literature. Research shows that emphasis on play does not detract from academic learning, but actually enables children to learn. Becker and Becker (2009: 114) explain that play does not compete with foundational skills: “Through mature play, children learn the very foundational skills that will prepare them for the academic challenges that lie ahead”. Entz (2009: 2) points out that in the course of exploring the world and interaction with people and materials, children learn about who they are and what they can do. Play is regarded as the work of childhood, and for children, the primary focus of life.

In the current study, (only) mothers regarded sufficient opportunities for *social interaction* as an extremely important aspect of quality early learning centres. Similarly several studies confirmed that *positive interactions between teachers and children*, influence children’s social and emotional development. Furthermore, studies indicate that a *positive teaching style* results in more pro-social and socially competent children (Essa, 2011: 156). They will later display positive interactions and relationships with teachers and peers in the primary school and show “lower levels of challenging behaviours and higher levels of competence in school” (Ostrosky & Jung, 2008: 142).

Lastly, in the current study nothing was reported on the process quality indicators *routine and transitions.* Although not directly mentioned in the study, they are implied in other indicators, for example opportunities for holistic development and life skills being addressed through the programme.

6.3.1.4 Values and respect

Teachers, mothers and students all emphasised the importance of having *discipline, rules and regulations* in early learning centres. Literature supports these results by referring to teachers' important role when facilitating play and dealing with children, to provide boundaries with clear rules and agreements for safe play indoors and outdoors and to give clear structure to the children (Laevers, 2005: 18). Englebright Fox (2008: 83) explains that frequent and ongoing conversations between the teachers and children are needed on aspects like the proper use of equipment and toys, the safe number of participants on each piece of apparatus, sharing and taking turns, as well as cleaning and taking care of equipment.

Mothers and students deemed a *balance between love and discipline* as well as *supportive, helpful teachers* as key factors for quality early learning centres. These findings are supported by the literature. According to Howes and Richie (2002: 39), teachers who are available and responsive to children, usually are capable of communicating with children about emotions. They found that children with secure attachment organisation histories perform better than children with insecure attachment histories in tasks that assess emotional understanding – being able to recognise and talk about emotions and their effects. For Drake (2009 [2010]: 5), the adult's responsibility is vital regarding recognising, identifying and assessing children's needs and to be able to intervene in play to support individuals. The timing and nature of such interventions will greatly influence the quality of learning experiences that take place within the environment. Teachers need to plan to observe and engage in play, "either supporting a planned focus or responding spontaneously to children's learning interests" (Drake, 2009 [2010]: 5).

Teachers, mothers, as well as students felt that children must be treated with *respect* and should also be *taught to be respectful* in early learning centres. In correlation with these results, existing literature, for example Katz (2010: 7), agrees that young children have to be in the presence of adults and to acknowledge their authority by merit of their advanced knowledge, wisdom and experience. She further remarks that young children need to be near authoritative adults who apply their extensive power "over the lives of young children with warmth, support, encouragement and adequate

explanations of the limits they impose upon them". In her view, authoritativeness also implies *respectful treatment* of children's "opinions, feelings, wishes and ideas as valid, even when we disagree with them". In this regard Katz (2010: 7) conclude by saying "to respect people we agree with, is not a problem; respecting those whose ideas, wishes and feelings are different from ours or troubling to us, may be a mark of wisdom in parents and of genuine professionalism in teachers" .

In confirmation of the results of the study, literature agrees that the significance of teachers acknowledging the importance of each child and altering strategies to provide *individual attention* and meet the unique needs of the children in their care, cannot be overemphasized. When teachers develop relationships with young children, they should specifically be aware of the cultural, linguistic, and individual needs of the children (Ostrosky & Jung, 2008: 142).

For mothers, *non-discrimination* and *multicultural* early learning centres, as well as the *development of children's identities* are important. Within this context, Falk (2009: 87–88) refers to the importance of relationships especially where young children's identities "are still newly in the making". Falk, in addition, explains that such relationships can help to nurture children's well-being and sense of self-efficacy or alternatively undermine the self-confidence which is needed to take control of their own learning and life. Literature also indicates that practices for supporting children on an emotional level are not culturally specific, but universal and reliant on adults being sensitive to children and their consciousness of discrimination, bias, and exclusion (Howes, 2010: 1–2).

6.3.1.5 Infrastructure

In the current study, it was evident that *safety and security* was seen as an extremely important quality indicator by teachers as well as mothers. In South Africa, where the crime rate is high and citizens are concerned about safety issues (Altbeker, 2011), it follows that this aspect scored the highest number of responses. In support of these results, existing literature indicates that safety is also no longer perceived merely as sheltering the child (Elliott, 2010: 57). Environmental care, health, being prepared for

emergencies, protecting children, and safety consciousness are also included in safety. Safety, support and supervision therefore are fundamental components of the daily early childhood programme (Decker & Decker, 2005: 302; Howes, 2010: 33, Needham, 2010: 162).

The need for a *clean, neat and hygienic* early learning centre with *spacious class rooms*, specified as quality indicators by many teachers and mothers, is supported by the literature. In this regard, Palaiologou (2010: 133) emphasises that young children's emotional, social and personal development are influenced to a large extent by the space and the quality and quantity of play materials. In early learning centres where children are constrained to a relatively small play area, and where there is not an adequate amount of toys to share, there is an increase in fights and disruptions (Palaiologou 2010: 133). According to Bullard, (2010) children's health and physical well-being are more frequently affected by the quality of the physical environment than adults.

Where mothers and teachers considered spacious classrooms as important, only teachers indicated that spacious, interesting and well-equipped playgrounds that are well-designed are indicators of quality in early learning centres. In this regard literature agrees that social interaction is promoted by planning for outdoor activities. Palaiologou (2010: 133) points out that children will develop social skills such as respect for their friends, when they participate in games that require space and free movement and where they are waiting to take turns or have to play in pairs. Bredekamp (2011: 285) notes that teaching and learning can occur in a variety of contexts such as individual interactions, but also within small and whole groups in intellectually engaging environments that provide space and opportunities to play.

6.3.1.6 Integrating insights on beneficiaries' experiences of quality in early learning centres

In conclusion, it seems that those aspects perceived by beneficiaries as indicators of a good quality early learning centre are predominantly process indicators and hard to 'measure' in a quantitative way. The following aspects were foregrounded by all

groups of beneficiaries: the children's emotional and social well-being as well as a just and normative environment. How the children are treated and the way they feel whilst being at the centre, were thus considered as foundational to 'quality' in early learning centres by all beneficiaries. All beneficiaries valued the fundamental cornerstones: love, care, morals, trust, discipline, respect and security to set the scene for quality education.

Mothers, different to other beneficiaries, also valued effective communication, individual attention and non-discrimination. In addition, mothers wanted their children to be prepared for formal schooling by means of a challenging and stimulating programme inclusive of life skills. Additionally, mothers wanted their children to have sufficient time for playing and social interaction.

For teachers, quality denoted an accountable curriculum, which allows for group work. Teachers furthermore valued the setting of the school in terms of a friendly, pleasant environment and conveniently located near a primary school. These factors did not feature in the responses of the other groups of beneficiaries.

In terms of infrastructure, mothers and teachers considered spacious, clean, neat and hygienic playrooms as evidence of quality. Teachers also valued enough outside space.

By drawing on Fromm's work (1993), I argue that focus for all the beneficiaries is placed on 'being' needs rather than on 'having' needs. According to Fromm, having and being are two fundamental modes of experiences, to different kinds of orientations towards self and the world. In the having mode of existence, one's relationship to the world is one of possession and owning which, for the purpose of this study would refer to matters such as facilities and equipment for the sake of having. In the being mode of existence, the focus is on aliveness, authentic relatedness to the world and well-being. The idea is that being also implies change – being is becoming (Fromm, 1993: 33-34).

For the beneficiaries in this study, quality apparently does not primarily concern what early learning centres *have* at their disposal in terms of funds or facilities (as

discussed in 6.2) but whether the centres promote children's well-being. This finding is noteworthy given the emphasis put on 'having' needs by a current consumer culture.

6.3.2 Results contradicting existing knowledge on quality indicators in early learning centres

In the current study, teachers (but not mothers) viewed the provision of extra and/or *extramural activities* as an indication of quality in early learning centres. In this regard, Hirsch-Pasek *et al.* (2009: 13–14) refer to "another way in which the preschool academic emphasis manifests itself in [the USA] society", namely the increase of specialised classes devoted to teaching a specific skill, for example computer science, formal reading instruction, music, and acrobatics. These classes are advertised to parents as a way to 'enrich' their children's learning and "pave the way for their academic success". These authors however do not see these activities as indicators of quality. They criticise this view which contradicts playful learning (see 2.5.5) when they say "what is needed are preschools that impact necessary content through playful learning and provide time for the spontaneous free play that is so crucial to social-emotional and academic growth" (Hirsch-Pasek *et al.*, 2009: 13–14).

6.3.3 Silences or absences in the data with regard to existing knowledge on quality in early learning centres

In this part, I refer to the absence in my data of prominent existing knowledge on early learning centres as documented in the literature (discussed in Chapter 2). I refer to those indicators that are part of the theoretical framework but which were not reported in the current study and which hence neither confirm nor contradict the results of the current study.

In terms of input indicators, the factors *heating and cooling* were not mentioned by any of the participants. South Africa is a country with mild weather without severe, long winter seasons with extensive rain or snow. In addition, the data were collected in areas known for mild temperatures during the month of January, which was a pleasant summer month and the aspects of heating and cooling were not relevant at

that time. Although heating and cooling specifications are important and relevant quality factors in many buildings located in countries known for their severe temperature conditions, most schools and other buildings in South Africa are not primarily designed and built with that in mind. In countries like Australia where extreme temperatures are experienced, the education policies require the provision of heating and cooling equipment to maintain a comfortable temperature for children (Department of Education & Children Services, 2009).

After an intensive international study, which involved empirical investigations in the United States of America, Canada and Australia, and the inputs from experts from Scandinavia, Great Britain and throughout Europe, the Children's Physical Environmental Rating Scale (CPERS) for the evaluation of *physical* environments was developed in 2003 by Australian architect, Professor Gary Moore. It was found, in this study, that only 8.8% of indicators in well-known and widely used rating scales including ECERS–R, and ITERS, pertain to the physical designed environment (Moore, Sugiyama & O'Donnell, 2003). In this CPERS, the only indicator related to heating and cooling is the indicator for air *circulation*. Another rating scale, the Go Green Rating Scale, specifically aimed at the assessment of environmental health and safe sustainable and functional early learning settings, devotes one indicator related to heating and cooling, namely *ventilation* (Boise, 2010: 51).

Another input indicator mentioned in Woodhead's framework, is *teaching resources*. In my study, although the importance of toys and equipment was emphasised by teachers, nothing was reported on resources for teachers. Literature confirms that teaching resources can enhance the quality of learning (Edwards, 2010; Entz, 2009; Good, 2009; Jackman, 2005; Redleaf, 2009; Seefeldt, 2002; Snyder Kaltman, 2009). In Davin, Orr, Marais and Meier's (2010: 224) view resources for learning and teaching ought to be used and dealt with in an appropriate way, and can then contribute towards quality in terms of the "planning, teaching, learning and assessment processes of the curriculum".

Other quality indicators from the theoretical framework that were not reported in the current study, are *wages and conditions.* Local and international literature report on early childhood teachers being ranked among the most poorly paid professionals,

together with challenging working conditions. These are the main reasons for a high turnover of staff which in turn negatively impacts on the quality of early childhood education (Awopegba, 2007: 4; Clasquin Johnson, 2011: 56; Gilliam, 2009: iii; Segal, Bardige, Bardige, Breffni & Woika, 2012: 80).

6.3.4 New insights regarding quality in early learning centres

Table 6.2 illustrates those aspects that served as quality indicators for the participants, but which were not part of my adaptation of Woodhead's framework. These aspects provide new insights regarding beneficiaries' experiences of indicators of quality in early learning centres.

Table 6.2: Additional quality indicators (New insights)

Theme 1: The daily programme in the early learning centre	***Teachers***	***Mothers***	***Students***
The programme has high religious and moral values (faith-based)	**19**	**30**	
Theme 2: Context of learning	***Teachers***	***Mothers***	***Students***
The centre is central	**10**		
The centre is close to the primary school	**7**		
The environment is in a friendly, pleasant location	**10**		
Theme 4: Requirements and expectations in terms of services and facilities	***Teachers***	***Mothers***	***Students***
There is an aftercare service (after school hours)		**11**	

One of the findings of my study is that both mothers and teachers value *faith-based activities* highly in early learning centres. Earlier, I argued that although existing international early childhood education literature is silent on this matter, South African literature foregrounds the importance of religious education to inform parents when choosing schools. According to Bray and Tladi (2010: 65), the right to freedom of religion, School Act (section 15) embodies parents' freedom to choose a religion at a public or independent school. This choice is accommodated by the establishment of educational institutions, for example private religious institutions, that make provision for such a choice (Bray & Tladi 2010: 65).

Another new insight indicated by teachers, is the setting (demographic location) of the early learning centre. In my study, the physical location, whether central, close to the primary school or situated in a friendly, pleasant area, was an indication of quality early learning centres for teachers. Studies done in Australia (Noble, 2005: 51; O'Gorman, 2007: 191–192;) found that location appeared to override educational and learning criteria when parents choose educational centres for their children. However, although mothers in my study were silent on this matter, they did indicate the availability of an aftercare service for children as significant. This finding complies with the findings in the aforementioned studies (Noble, 2005: 51;O'Gorman, 2007: 191–192)

6.4 CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I interpreted results by comparing the findings with existing literature. I reported on supportive and contradictory evidence in the literature, as well as on silences and new insights that emerged from this study in terms of the quantitative and the qualitative data in order to answer the secondary research questions *"What is offered by early learning centres?"* and *"What do beneficiaries experience as quality in early learning centres?"* .

In Chapter 7, I address the other secondary questions, "*How do beneficiaries' experiences of quality compare to what is offered at early learning centres?; "How can identified early learning centre quality factors be utilised to develop a quality assurance framework for the South African context? and "How can existing international quality assurance frameworks inform the development of a South African early learning centre quality assurance framework?"* in order to formulate an argument for my primary research question *"How can an understanding of beneficiaries' experiences of quality in early learning centres inform the development of a quality assurance framework in South Africa?*"

Chapter 7

Conclusions

7.1 INTRODUCTION

In this last thesis chapter, I present final conclusions by reflecting on the findings in terms of research questions. I also reflect on the limitations and delimitations of the study and discuss possible contributions that this study can make to knowledge on quality in early learning centres. According to ISSA (2005: 3), ensuring consistent high quality in early learning centres, "is one of the greatest challenges in early childhood educational systems worldwide". The same comment applies to South Africa (Department of Education, 2001). Thus to conclude the study, I present guidelines for a possible quality assurance framework for early learning centres, ensuing from the beneficiaries' understanding of quality in early learning centres.

7.2 REFLECTIONS ON LIMITATIONS IN MY STUDY

As I explained in Chapter 3, I chose an instrumental case study as research design where I focused on a real situation (peoples' experiences of quality in early learning centres), with real people (parents, teachers and students) in an environment familiar to myself (early learning centres). In order to answer my research question, I studied interactions of events, human relationships and other factors. I generated quantitative data (a survey with 213 pre-service early childhood education students as participants). Qualitative data (reflective journals and interviews with 235 teachers and 235 mothers) were generated by students as fieldworkers.

Although I personally collected the quantitative data (the questionnaires) with students, not collecting the raw data for the qualitative part of the research at early learning centres myself, is a limitation. In retrospect it would have been beneficial if I have collected the data myself at early learning centres with teachers and mothers. If I personally collected the data, there would have been consistency in terms of the person collecting the data, how the questions have been formulated, and how the

participants could have been invited to elaborate on their answers in the same way. If the responses were not “deep enough” immediate follow-up questions could have been asked to encourage clarification of their answers. Another advantage would be that I personally would have experienced the atmosphere in the early learning centres.

A delimitation of this instrumental case study is that the teachers and mothers who were selected by the student-researchers for interviews, were not representative of the South African population. As I explained in 3.5, I used non-probability sampling to select all participants, with the knowledge that the group did not represent the wider population, but a particular group with the same interest (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2001: 103). Teachers and mothers were selected by students (fieldworkers) through convenience sampling because they were connected to the early learning centres where the students conducted their teaching practice, and were therefore conveniently accessible to obtain data (Maree & Pietersen, 2007: 176–177).

The students completed their fieldwork in early learning centres which had to adhere to certain criteria (see Appendix D). The teachers who were interviewed were all educated, and qualified as early childhood teachers. The interviewed mothers were literate and from middle income groups (DoE, 2001). There were more urban than rural early learning centres and although all nine of the provinces of the country were presented, one province, (Gauteng, an urban area), represented the majority of the participants (see Table 3.4). All mothers and teachers were interviewed either in English or Afrikaans, which were also the languages used for teaching and learning by the students and by the children in the early learning centres.

Siraj-Blatchford and Siraj-Blatchford (2001: 156) contend that generalisation of findings of a non-probability sample cannot be done outside of the convenience sampling where the participants were selected “according to convenience of access”. Consequently findings from this study could be generalised to early learning centres of middle income, educated, English- or Afrikaans-speaking groups of teachers and parents, in urban or rural areas. However, a major delimitation of this study is that the findings cannot be generalised to the majority population in South Africa which are low socio-economic, with low educational levels, and having teachers without

relevant education qualifications (DoE, 2001). I recommend that my data collection instruments in this study could be used, or adapted, for replication in other early learning centres, in more demographically representative sectors of the population and/or in other geographical areas. Such a study would however require "attention to sample representativeness, replication of test conditions, replication of results, sample sensitisation to the research procedures, and bias in the sample of the research process" (MacNaughton *et al.,* 2001: 270).

A limitation of this study, is that I did not specify beforehand that the student-participants should interview mothers and fathers. In the assignment (Appendix D) I only stated that the student-participants had to interview parents. In 3.5.4, I explained possible reasons why the student-participants selected only mothers and not fathers for this case study. By implication findings cannot be generalised to understanding of experiences of quality in early learning centres by fathers.

Another limitation refers to the reflexive posture that is suggested by my study's metatheoretical paradigm, social constructionism (explained in 3.2.1). For Gergen (2001b:3) a reflexive posture is part of "productive self-consciousness". Although the fieldworkers' reflective journals contributed substantially to the study, the absence of my own researcher journal is a limitation, because my personal experience of the research journey has not been captured.

7.3 ADDRESSING MY RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In Chapter 6, I addressed the first two secondary research questions namely *"What is offered by early learning centres?"* (see 6.2) and *"What do beneficiaries experience as quality in early learning centres?"* (see 6.3). In this section I address the remaining research questions, namely: "*How do beneficiaries' experiences of quality compare with what is offered by early learning centres?", "How can identified early learning centre quality factors be utilised to develop a quality assurance framework for the South African context?" and "How can existing international assurance frameworks inform the development of a South African early learning centre quality assurance framework?*

7.3.1 How do beneficiaries' experiences of quality compare to what is offered by early learning centres?

It seems from answers to the first two research questions that those aspects regarded as quality in early learning centres by beneficiaries, are available in early learning centres.

The findings generated from the quantitative data (surveys) (see Chapter 4 and 6.2) indicated that most important indoor- and outdoor facilities were available and that most structured learning activities were present in the early learning centres. The findings from the qualitative data (interviews) (see Chapter 5 and 6.3) revealed that the quality indicators regarded as important by the beneficiaries can be categorised as: children's socio-emotional well-being, holistic development, normative foundation of values and respect, effective infrastructure and accountable learning.

In comparison to literature on beneficiaries' expectations about quality in early learning centres (Yuen & Griehaber, 2009) it seems from the qualitative data that the beneficiaries in my study were well-informed. Mothers and teachers were able to convey their expectations about quality in preschools. Yuen and Griehaber (2009: 263) found in their study about early learning centres in Hong Kong, that "what parents looked for in their choice of service" closely matched how they defined quality. In O'Gorman's (2007) study concerning Australian parents, there was however much discrepancy and variation in the parents' perceptions about what they regarded as important in early learning centres.

In terms of my theoretical framework, the majority of factors (captured from the *qualitative data*, the interviews) and indicated by the beneficiaries as quality factors, are process indicators. These process indicators concern children's socio-emotional well-being, holistic development, values and respect. The other two groups of quality indicators in early learning centres, infrastructure and learning (which also emerged from the *qualitative data*), are input (structural) indicators. These input indicators are evident from the *quantitative* data (What is offered by early learning centres? see 6.2).

In Table 7.1, I provide a visual comparison of the types of quality indicators captured in the different data sources.

Table 7.1: Comparing the types of quality indicators captured in the different data sources

Quantitative data (derived from questionnaires) **What the early learning centres have**	**Quality indicators**	**Qualitative data** (derived from interviews) **What beneficiaries want**	**Quality indicators**
Indoor areas	Input (structural)	Infrastructure	Input (structural)
Outdoor areas	Input (structural)		
Structured learning activities (Curriculum)	Input (structural)	Learning (Curriculum)	Input (structural)
		Holistic development	Process
		Socio-emotional well-being	Process
		Values and respect	Process

I can only answer the question *"How do beneficaries' experiences of quality compare to what is offered by early learning centres?"* by focusing on the input (structural) indicators. I can only compare the results concerning input or structural quality indicators as the questionnaire, a qualitative instrument was designed to capture structural facets (learning areas and learning activities) not for capturing process or outcome indicators. This aspect should be considered when the questionnaire is being adapted for the purpose of replicating the study.

In terms of the infrastructure, during interviews the beneficiaries did not focus on detailed features of indoor- or outdoor areas as quality indicators. However, all beneficiaries regarded safety and security, hygiene, neatness and cleanliness,

sufficient space, well-equipped playgrounds and qualified teachers as important quality factors. The open-ended responses in the questionnaires however, revealed that although facilities were available at centres, they varied in terms of variety and condition.

According to the *quantitative* findings (see Chapter 4), the centres had a larger variety of indoor than outdoor facilities. In terms of the facilities outside, the majority of centres had large static *outdoor structures* such as climbing frames, swings and slides available to promote the development of the children's gross motor skills and enhance movement opportunities. In a third of early learning centres, other important outdoor areas and open-ended materials for sand, water, block and fantasy play, as well as wheel toys, were not available (see Table 4.3). With regard to quality in early learning centres, the implication of this finding is that these other absent areas and unavailable resources may delay the development of important fine and gross motor skills and decrease sensory experiences in children.

The *quantitative* data in my study, derived from the questionnaires, also revealed information regarding other structural quality indicators, namely which *indoor learning areas* were available at early learning centres (see Table 4.1). From those findings it seems apparent the early learning centres provided the fundamental and most important indoor areas, namely book corners, display tables, art and cognitive areas, as well as fantasy play- and block play areas. Regarding quality in early learning centres, the availability of these basic indoor facilities implies that children are provided with learning experiences to develop holistically and appropriately. To an extent the better equipped indoor areas compensate for the absent outdoor facilities.

The *qualitative* data, the interviews, (see 6.3.1.2), show that beneficiaries regarded *learning* as a significant indicator of quality. The findings of the *quantitative* data revealed that the most important structured learning activities, namely stories, rhymes, art, music, theme discussion, numeracy, movement, religious stories, perception and baking activities were offered by 90% or more of the early learning centres. With regard to beneficiaries' expectations about quality in early learning centres, these activities also provide opportunities for children to develop in a holistic and appropriate way. Children's holistic development clearly manifested as an

important indicator of quality by all beneficiaries. These findings correlate with general accepted standards of quality revealed in the literature worldwide (Bullard, 2010: 3; Darragh, 2010: 107; Dombro, et al., 2002; Mayesky, 2009; Santrock, 2008: 301; Sciara & Dorsey, 2003; Stegelin, 2008: 109).

The implication of these findings for the development of a quality assurance framework is that indicators regarding facilities and learning should be included in a framework. In Tables 7.2 and 7.3, I present visual representations of the beneficiaries' understanding of quality early learning centres and also what their expectations for quality learning centres are. Table 7.2 provides the mothers' point of view, whereas Table 7.3 explains what teachers expect from quality early learning centres. I used these findings to develop an initial quality assurance framework for early learning centres in South Africa (see 7.3.3).

Table 7.2: Beneficiaries' understanding of, and expectations regarding quality early learning centres: Mothers' point of view

QUALITY CRITERIA	INDICATOR	Number of responses	Emotional & social well-being	Learning	Holistic develop ment	Values and respect	Infra structure
WHAT DO MOTHERS WANT?	**How do the mothers see that in the early learning centre?**						
PROCESS INDICATORS							
Holistic development in terms of socio-emotional well-being	• Teachers are helpful and supportive • Teachers love children, are caring & warm	40 34	●			●	
Holistic development in terms of social aspects	• There are enough opportunities for social interaction provided	35	●		●		
A faith-based programme	• The programme has religious and normative values (faith-based)	30	●			●	
Discipline and rules	• There are discipline, rules and regulations at the centre	30				●	
Children develop holistically	• There are opportunities for holistic development	21	●	●	●	●	●
Children are valued	• Every child is important and receives full individual attention • Teachers are fair • Children are the number one priority	17 15 15	●				
Love as well as discipline	• There is balance between love and discipline	14	●			●	
Parents are informed	• Good communication between staff and parents exists	14	●			●	
A respectful atmosphere	• Children are treated with respect and taught respect	13				●	
Children must be able to play	• The programme provides for enough time for play	12	●	●	●		
Children's involvement in activities	• Programme encourages learner participation	10		●			

QUALITY CRITERIA	INDICATOR	Number of responses	Emotional & social well-being	Learning	Holistic develop ment	Values and respect	Infra structure
Learning needs and challenges will be addressed	• Occupational and speech therapists available at the centre	10		●			
Positive relationships and atmosphere	• Teachers build relationships of trust with children • Caring, loving and peaceful atmosphere • Friendly and safe atmosphere	9 8 8	●			●	
Capable teachers	• Teachers are dedicated and motivated	7		●			
OUTCOME INDICATORS							
Holistic development in terms of socio-emotional well-being	• Children are happy and content and enjoy school	48	●				
Holistic development in terms of cognitive aspects (learning)	• The programme equips children to be ready for Grade 1	23		●	●		
Holistic development in terms of socio-emotional well-being	• Children's identities are developed at the centre	13	●		●	●	
INPUT (STRUCTURAL) INDICATORS							
A safe and secure environment	• The centre is safe and offers security	47					●
Capable teachers	• Teachers are qualified	34		●			
Holistic development in terms of cognitive aspects (learning)	• The educational programme has a high standard	30		●			

QUALITY CRITERIA	INDICATOR	Number of responses	Emotional & social well-being	Learning	Holistic development	Values and respect	Infra structure
A clean and hygienic environment	• The centre is clean, neat and hygienic	21					●
A spacious environment	• The classrooms are spacious	18					●
Holistic development in terms of cognitive and social aspects (learning)	• The programme is challenging and stimulating	17		●			
Holistic development in terms of cognitive and social aspects (learning)	• Life skills are addressed through the programme	13		●			
A safe and secure environment, also after hours	• There is an aftercare service	11					●
Holistic development in terms of cognitive and social aspects (learning)	• There is a small number of learners in the classes	7	●	●	●		●

Table 7.3: Beneficiaries' understanding of, and expectations regarding quality early learning centres: Teachers' point of view

QUALITY CRITERIA	INDICATOR	Number of responses	Emotional & social well-being	Learning	Holistic development	Values and respect	Infrastructure
WHAT DO TEACHERS WANT?	**How do the teachers see that in the early learning centre?**						
PROCESS INDICATORS							
That children develop holistically	• There are opportunities for holistic development	32	●	●	●	●	●
Holistic development in terms of socio-emotional well-being	• Teachers love children, are caring & warm	32	●			●	

QUALITY CRITERIA	INDICATOR	Number of responses	Emotional & social well-being	Learning	Holistic development	Values and respect	Infrastructure
A faith-based programme	• The programme has religious and normative values (faith-based)	19				●	
That children are valued	• Every child is important and receives full individual attention • Children are the number one priority	17 17	●				
Positive relationships and atmosphere	• Teachers are friendly • Friendly and safe atmosphere • Caring, loving and peaceful atmosphere	17 16 15	●			●	
Children's involvement in activities	• Programme encourages learner participation	15		●			
Discipline and rules	• There are discipline, rules and regulations at the centre	11	●			●	
That parents are informed	• Good communication between staff and parents exists	11	●				
Children's involvement in activities	• Children are exposed to group work	10		●			
Capable teachers	• Teachers act professionally	9	●			●	
A respectful atmosphere	• Children are treated with respect and taught respect	7				●	
OUTCOME INDICATORS							
Holistic development in terms of socio-emotional well-being	• Children are happy and content and enjoy school • Children can develop to their full potential	16 7	●		●		
INPUT (STRUCTURAL) INDICATORS							
A safe and secure environment	• The centre is safe and offers security	47	●				●

QUALITY CRITERIA	INDICATOR	Number of responses	Emotional & social well-being	Learning	Holistic development	Values and respect	Infrastructure
Capable teachers	• The teachers are qualified	40		●			
Holistic development in terms of cognitive and social aspects (learning)	• There is a small number of learners in the classes	38	●	●	●		●
A spacious environment	• The classrooms are spacious • The playground is big and spacious	31	●				●
A well-equipped environment	• There are sufficient and a variety of apparatus and toys	27	●	●	●	●	●
Holistic development in terms of cognitive aspects (learning)	• The educational programme has a high standard	18		●	●		
Holistic development in terms of cognitive and social aspects (learning)	• The centre provides extra (mural) activities	16	●	●	●		
A clean and hygienic environment	• The centre is clean, neat and hygienic	11					●
Convenient and positive physical location (setting)	• The centre is centrally located • The centre is located in a friendly, pleasant environment	10 10	●				●
Holistic development in terms of cognitive and social aspects (learning)	• The playground is interesting and well-designed	9	●	●	●		●
Convenient and positive physical location (setting)	• The centre is located near the primary school	9					●
Capable teachers	• The teachers are excellent	8		●			
Holistic development in terms of cognitive aspects (learning)	• The correct curriculum is being used	7		●	●		
A well-equipped environment	• The centre is fully equipped	7		●			●

7.3.2 How can identified early learning centre quality factors be utilised to develop a quality assurance framework for the South African context?

In Chapter 2, I explored the literature to capture what has been researched and documented about quality in early learning centres globally and also in South Africa. I reviewed the literature on quality and quality assurance frameworks and identified a significant gap in the literature in terms of available quality assurance measures and accreditation frameworks for the evaluation of quality in early learning centres in South Africa.

Through the literature review in Chapter 2, I identified that those factors that are considered by researchers worldwide to be the cornerstones of quality in early learning centres are namely development and learning; the necessity/centrality of play; a play-based, developmentally appropriate curriculum; and the learning environment. It is evident from the literature that these aforementioned factors should be taken into consideration when a quality assurance framework for early learning centres is developed (Casey, 2005; Dombro *et al*., 2002; Essa, 2011: 238–239; Feeny *et al.,* 2006; Gordon & Browne, 2005: 41; Hirsh-Pasek *et al.,* 2009: 67; Redleaf, 2009: 1; Rivera, 2008: 15; Santrock, 2008: 301; Schirrmacher, 2006; Trister Dodge *et al.,* 2003.

When developing a quality assurance framework, the complexity of quality needs to be considered, thus keeping in mind that an abundance of relationships of variables are connected. As a result, quality cannot be defined by only listing the components of the variables separately (Bredekamp in Golberg, 1999: 21), but by considering the interdependence and effects of the factors on each other.

In Table 7.3, I present a summary of the key characteristics and implementation strategies of the main factors contributing towards quality early childhood centres (see Chapter 2) which should inform a quality assurance framework.

Table 7.4: The key characteristics, and implementation strategies of the main factors contributing to quality in early learning centres

FACTORS	DENOTES	IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES	REFERENCES
Development and learning in children	• Children are: • Playful and naturally curious • Learning by doing • Needing exploration and free play • Eager, absorbent learners, curious and interested in the world • Keen to explore and discover • Craving stimulating, new, physical and social experiences	Children learn when they: • are physically active; • involve their senses; • exploring and playing; • having real direct experiences, • are having hands-on manipulating of a broad range of real objects	Essa, 2011: 238–239 Feeny *et al.,* 2006 Gordon & Browne, 2005: 41 Redleaf, 2009: 1 Santrock, 2008: 301
Playful learning	Playful learning: • Is the vehicle for learning in terms of problem solving, language acquisition, literacy, numeracy and social skills • Play is beneficial for all areas of development in children. • Play is important for children's sense of accomplishment and feeling competent • Is the launch pad for children to thrive academically and socially Play: • stimulates the senses • exercises the muscles • coordinates sight with movement • gains mastery over bodies • encourages children to make decisions and	Children experience playful learning when they: • are actively involved in play • get opportunities to play alone • get opportunities to play with someone • get opportunities to play in groups • explore, investigate, manipulate and interact with the environment • get opportunities to investigate, create and make discoveries • get opportunities to play and experiment and have interaction with an assortment of concrete materials and resources	Casey, 2005 Dombro *et al*., 2002 Gordon & Browne, 2005 Hirsh-Pasek *et al.,* 2009: 67 Rivera, 2008: 15 Schirrmacher, 2006 Trister Dodge *et al.,* 2003

FACTORS	DENOTES	IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES	REFERENCES
	• develops new skills • releases tension • enhances relationships with peers • motivates children to take risks • challenges children to achieve new levels of understanding of people, identities, concepts and the environment		
Developmentally appropriate curriculum	There are opportunities for: • hands-on experiences • a variety of learning activities • explorations • problem solving • using the multiple intelligences to build on children's strengths • developing cognitive as well as social, emotional and physical skills	The creation of interesting situations and opportunities for: • hands-on experiences • a variety of learning activities and explorations • problem solving • supporting learning by including the multiple intelligences to build on children's strengths • learning in socially rich and meaningful contexts • discovery, creation, experimentation, observation and sustained engagement	Feeny *et al.,* 2006 Mayesky, 2009 Santrock, 2008: 301 Wallace, 202: xiii
Developmentally appropriate learning environment	Affects the beneficiaries': • moods; • ability to form relationships; • effectiveness in work play, learning and • health The environment should: • be safe, inclusive, comfortable	Should: • be exhilarating to children, • be inspirational in generating and creating an appetite for learning • be able to arouse curiosity in children • enable children to learn as much as they can	Bullard, 2010: 3 Darragh, 2010: 107 Dombro *et al*., 2002 Mayesky, 2009 Santrock, 2008: 301 Sciara & Dorsey, 2003 Stegelin, 2008: 109

FACTORS	DENOTES	IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES	REFERENCES
	• arouse awareness and interest in the choice of resources and activities presented • be carefully planned, prepared and maintained • be purposefully created, based on how young children learn • have materials that are well-chosen with intention and purpose to enhance playful learning • offer a variety and appropriateness • encourage empathy, interest in trying new things and the development of self-confidence	• offer a variety of learning activities and explorations • encourage interaction with the environment and other children Should offer opportunities for: • hands-on manipulation of the environment	

In the development of a quality assurance framework, the principles of holistic care and development, enjoyable learning experiences for children (Myers,1997: 3) and playful learning, a stimulating learning environment, as well as a developmentally appropriate curriculum have to be considered and addressed. Learning is most effective when the curriculum is based on "theoretically sound early-childhood practices and principles of development" (explained in Chapter 2) (Carnahan & Terorde-Doyle, 2007). While the environment has a crucial role in supporting play in general, inspiring environments create opportunities for children to develop holistically through their explorations and discoveries of open-ended destinations (Casey, 2005). These components discussed are thus reflected as cornerstones of quality in both existing literature and findings in my study, therefore I will use these to inform me in developing a quality assurance framework. (see 7.3.3 and Table 7.5).

7.3.3 How can existing international assurance frameworks inform the development of a South African early learning centre quality assurance framework?

Ishmine *et al*., (2010) indicate that the development of an instrument for measuring quality is not a quick, straightforward or easy job that can be accomplished by one person. The contribution of this study is thus not to put on the table a ready-made quality tool, suitable for all early learning centres, but to provide some guidelines (in the form of a draft quality assurance framework) gained from the insight of the beneficiaries in this study, in conjunction with a sound theoretical base (see Table 7.4) and lessons learned from existing frameworks.

In 2.7, I explained that the majority of quality assurance frameworks were developed in the United States (Golberg, 1999; Halle *et al*., 2010), but that there are also several instruments available in Australia (Ishmine *et al.,* 2010); New Zealand (Podmore & Meade, 2000); Canada (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2006); the United Kingdom (Pugh & Duffy, 2006) and Europe (ISSA, 2005). As explained in Chapter 2, the Harms-Clifford ECERS rating scales (ERS) seem to be the most popular tools and have been translated and/or adapted in different countries all over the world (Sylva *et al.,* 2003: 7), which implies that the rating scales are useful for many early learning centres in various circumstances worldwide.

Although there is no consensus on exactly what quality in early learning centres entails (see 2.3.1), the San Mateo County childcare partnership council (2006: 1) is convinced that the different Harms-Clifford Environmental Rating Scales [(ERS), the ECERS, ECERS–E and ECERS–R] played a significant role in this matter. They argue that the ERS and other related specialised rating scales (addressed in 2.7.2), have contributed internationally to establishing elements of 'high quality early care and education environments' (San Mateo County childcare partnership council, 2006: 1) for research, and for assessing quality in early learning centres. However, the council points out that these ERS rating scales, are not the sole tools with which to assess quality, because of some shortfalls. Despite the high status of the ERS, the San Mateo County childcare partnership council (2006: 1) argues that the ERS does not measure children's social-emotional well-being, or the teachers' skill levels to facilitate interaction between children and adults and between children and their peers, sufficiently. These authors suggest that supplementary observation instruments should be used in conjunction with the ERS to get a full picture of quality (San Mateo County childcare partnership council, 2006: 1–2).

The aforementioned shortfalls imply that the ERS would also not be an adequate framework based on beneficiaries' views in my study. Significantly I found (see 6.3.1.1) that all beneficiaries experienced/conceptualised quality in terms of children's social and emotional well-being in early learning centres. The implication for the development of a quality assurance framework would be that the principles of the ECERS could be considered, but that they should be supplemented by insights from other quality assurance framework which address the shortfalls of the ECERS. The Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) developed by Pianta, La Paro and Hamre (2008), can be useful to complement the ECERS, especially because this instrument was developed to assess process indicators like school climate, teacher sensitivity, behaviour management, quality of feedback, productivity, instructional learning formats, concept development, language modelling, emotional support and instructional support, which are not measured by ECERS and which correspond with most of the process indicators identified by the beneficiaries in my study to be important quality indicators. In Table 7.5, I compare the CLASS with the main categories of quality indicators indicated by beneficiaries in my study.

Table 7.5: A comparison between the Classroom Assessment Scoring System and the findings of my study

Cornerstones of CLASS (Dimensions overview)	**The main categories of quality indicators indicated by beneficiaries in my study**
Classroom climate (Relationships, affect, communication, respect)	Socio-emotional well-being (Children are the number one priority and receive individual attention)
Productivity (Maximum learning time, routines, transitions, preparation)	Learning (Children are well cared for; challenging and stimulating programme)
Teacher sensitivity (Awareness, responsiveness, addresses problems, student (child) comfort)	Values and respect (Good communication between staff and parents)
Concept development (Analysing and reasoning, creating, integration, connections to the real world)	Learning and holistic development (Challenging and stimulating programme, programme encourages learner participation)
Instructional learning formats (Effective facilitation, variety of modalities and materials, student interest)	Learning (Each child is important and receives individual attention)
Quality of feedback (Scaffolding, feedback loops, prompting thought processes, providing information, encouragement and affirmation)	Values and respect (Good communication between staff and parents)
Language modelling (frequent conversations, open-ended questions, repetition and extension, self and parallel talk, advanced language)	Learning (Challenging and stimulating programme, programme encourages learner participation)
Behaviour management (Clear behaviour expectations, proactive, redirection of misbehaviour, student (child) behaviour	Values and respect (Rules and regulations, norms and values)
Regard for students' (children's) perspectives (Flexibility and student (child) focus, support for autonomy and leadership, student (child) expression, restriction of movement)	Values and respect & socio-emotional well-being (Children are the number one priority and receive individual attention

Valuable insight on the provision of quality guidelines and assurance of quality in early learning centres can also be gained from the work done by the International Step by Step Association (ISSA), a non-governmental membership organisation which combined the strengths of early childhood experts in 30 countries. This organisation operated within the context of the 'new' united Europe, transitioning to democracy (similar as South Africa), and provides an example of how core indicators for quality early childhood teaching, allowing for contextual variations have been identified and agreed upon by experts from many countries.

The intention of the ISSA Pedagogical Standards, developed by ISSA, is to provide quality guidelines for early childhood teachers "working towards providing an exemplary experience for children and their families" (ISSA, 2005: 3, 14). The seven core fields identified by ISSA as pedagogical standards and cornerstones of quality, correspond to a great extent with the findings of my study (see 6.3): Individualisation (each child is unique and important); learning environment (caring, stimulating and inclusive); family participation; teaching strategies for meaningful learning (to encourage innovation, creativity, independent inquiry, social cooperation and exploration); planning and assessment (for individual needs of children); professional development (regular evaluation of quality of effectiveness to improve programmes and practices) and social inclusion (to promote values and behaviours that support children's rights) (ISSA, 2005: 13). In Table 7.7, I compare the quality categories in my study with the seven cornerstones of the ISSA pedagogical standards.

Table 7.6: A comparison between the ISSA pedagogical standards and the findings of my study

Cornerstones in the ISSA Pedagogical Standards	**The main categories of quality indicators indicated by beneficiaries in my study**
Individualisation (Each child is unique and important)	Socio-emotional well-being (Children are the number one priority and receive individual attention)
Learning environment (Caring, stimulating and inclusive)	Learning (Children are well cared for; challenging and stimulating programme)
Family participation	Values and respect (Good communication between staff and parents)
Teaching strategies for meaningful learning (To encourage innovation, creativity, independent inquiry, social cooperation and exploration);	Learning and holistic development (Challenging and stimulating programme) (programme encourages learner participation)
Planning and assessment (For individual needs of children)	Learning (Each child is important and receives individual attention)
Professional development (Regular evaluation of quality of effectiveness to improve programmes and practices)	In my study, there was an absence on this matter
Social inclusion (To promote values and behaviours that support children's rights)	Values and respect (Children treated with respect and taught to be respectful)

Quality assurance frameworks and rating scales were developed over the past decade for a variety of reasons; for example, to assess quality in various fields of interest such as environmental factors, language development and interpersonal relationships in early learning centres (Halle *et al.,* 2010; Sylva *et al.*, 2006). Depending on the focus of interest (environmental factors, language development, interpersonal relationships), apart from ISSA and CLASS explained above, several other existing quality assurance frameworks; for example, CIS, AIS or ORCE (see 2.7) could also inform the development of a quality assurance framework(s) for the South African context. The mere existence of such a wide spectrum and variety of instruments, confirms that one single framework probably is not the best solution to determine quality in early learning centres and that using only one instrument also is not a realistic option. In South Africa, where a large variety of early learning centres in a variety of contexts exists (Clasquin-Johnson, 2010), a single quality assurance framework will not be sufficient.

I think this secondary research question could only really be answered when a representative sample of South African early learning centres have been explored. The contributions which my study can make, will be limited to a small percentage of middle class South Africans as I have explained in 7.2.

7.3.4 How can an understanding of beneficiaries' experiences of quality in early learning centres inform the development of an assurance framework in South Africa?

7.3.4.1 Linking findings related to secondary questions

As I indicated in the rationale for doing this study (see 1.2), I identified a gap in the knowledge on quality in early learning centres. I wanted to explore quality of early learning centres in South Africa and I also wanted to investigate how quality is experienced by the different beneficiaries, particularly parents, teachers and pre-service teachers.

Definitions of quality are dependent on particular societies' cultural values and constructions of childhood. The definition of high quality that a society holds, will be

framed within a view of childhood as a process of becoming involved in the preparation of children for their roles as future citizens. Quality as a concept, always "needs to be contextualised ecologically and temporally to recognise cultural and other forms of diversity" (CECDE, 2004: 19). For this reason, I included mothers, teachers and teacher-students in my study to capture their voices, opinions, experiences and understanding of quality in early learning centres in order to be able to reflect on their cultural values and constructions of childhood.

As explained earlier (see 7.3.3), a single instrument is not sufficient to satisfy the needs of all the different types of beneficiaries and different contexts for example socio-economic status, culture and level of education. My recommendation would therefore be, first to develop a draft quality assurance framework including the key characteristics and implementation strategies of the main factors contributing towards quality early childhood centres (explained in Table 7.3), and then to make alternative adaptations while keeping in mind the needs and wants of the various prospective users in terms of the instrument.

According to Yamamoto and Li (2011: 1), parents' views of high quality in early learning centres have received little attention, despite researchers' and educators' attempts to identify the critical components for high quality early learning centres. I addressed this gap by including the views of mothers in my study. From the findings in my study, it appears that mothers, teachers and student-teachers are concerned, not so much with what the centres have, but that the centres can provide a safe and secure place with a loving, trusting, caring, respectful atmosphere for children to promote learning and holistic development and to adhere to the children's emotional and social well-being. This finding is confirmed by Denham and Brown (2010: 653) who found that academic success depends on social-emotional learning. Douglas (2004: 185–186) explains that an essential quality in early childhood education is "that a focus on values and beliefs prompts recognition" of the existence of other beneficiaries "who also have a legitimate interest in quality". The knowledge gained from mothers' responses in this study is valuable to the service providers of early childhood education, because it provides insight into parents' demands for quality early learning centres (Gilliam, 2009).

Gilliam (2009: iii) further explains that early learning centres serve two primary interests in society. The first aim of early learning centres is the provision of *quality education* to develop successful learners and contributing citizens (see 6.3.1.2), and secondly the early learning centres strive to offer *safe and reliable childcare* for parents (see 6.3.1.5). As explained above, both these factors also surfaced clearly as expectations of quality by the beneficiaries in my study. Both teachers and mothers equally voiced their opinions regarding the importance of safety and security. This specific indicator received the most responses of any indicators accentuating the significance of safety in early learning centres for beneficiaries.

I posit that the quality factors, socio-emotional well-being, holistic development, normative foundation of values and respect, infrastructure and accountable learning, concerning quality factors, derived by the beneficiaries can be used to develop a quality assurance framework for South Africa. In the previous chapter (see 6.1), I integrated the results of the quality indicators (derived from the data) within the (Woodhead, 1996) theoretical framework. In this regard, I found new insights, regarding the importance of normative values and faith-based education, location (setting) of the centre and aftercare services. I also noted that features from existing international quality assurance frameworks namely social and emotional aspects (see Table 7.5 and 7.6), can contribute towards the development of a South African early learning centre quality assurance framework.

7.3.4.2 Proposing guidelines for the development of a quality assurance framework for early learning centres in South Africa

Various beneficiaries in the early childhood arena will have different reasons for requiring or using a quality measurement tool. In the case of parents, choosing a centre of quality for their children's development may be the reason (Moss & Pence, 2004: 46; O'Gorman, 2007). Teachers could use the instrument for self-evaluation, to monitor their service provision, for planning (ISSA, 2005) and even possibly to establish a system for quality assurance in early learning centres (Golberg, 1999: 41-42). Student-teachers and their trainers might find a rating scale useful when they need to find suitable early learning centres to serve as a standard of quality for teaching practice purposes as part of pre-service teacher training (ISSA, 2005).

In Table 7.7, I present a quality assurance framework based on the principles of quality early childhood education, the findings from this study in terms of beneficiaries understanding of quality in early learning centres and also input from existing quality assurance frameworks.

7.4 INTEGRATED BENEFICIARY-BASED QUALITY ASSURANCE FRAMEWORK FOR EARLY LEARNING CENTRES

In Table 7.7 below, the inputs of parents and teachers involved with early learning centres have been integrated. The quantification of inputs is based on data presented in Tables 7.2 and 7.3 above. I decided on seven main quality criteria from the data, each presented in terms of quality indicators. The quality indicators suggest how a particular quality criterion could be observable by an intended user (beneficiary). The framework also states whether a particular quality indicator is a process indicator, outcome indicator, or input indicator in order to reflect the theoretical framework on which my study was based.

In order to determine and quantify the weight assigned to a particular quality indicator, I added the number of responses of teachers to the number of responses of mothers that are relevant to that indicator. The number of responses relevant to a particular quality indicator was expressed in terms of a percentage of the total number of responses relevant to all the quality indicators. For example: 7 mothers and 38 teachers (n = 45) deem a small teacher-child ratio important. A total of 1167 responses was given by beneficiaries with regard to all the quality indicators. Expressed in terms of a percentage, 45 responses represent 3.9% of the total number of responses. With regard to scoring the proposed instrument, a scale of 1 to 5 is suggested where the number 1 represents a situation where the centre does not meet minimum standards with regard to a particular quality indicator, whereas the number 5 indicates that performance is outstanding. The scoring system can be presented as follows:

1 = Poor

2 = Below expectation

3 = According to expectation

4 = Above expectation

5 = Excellent

The proposed framework presented in Table 7.7 could serve as a draft quality measurement instrument. For example, this framework includes a quality criterion that concerns communication. This criterion is accompanied by a quality indicator called “Caring, respectful, fair and trustful relationship between teacher and child”. Pianta, La Paro and Hamre (2008: 23) suggest that respectful communication is characterised by eye contact, a warm, calm voice, respectful language, as well as cooperation and/or sharing. Such detail would be a requirement of a quality measurement instrument that emanates from my proposed integrated beneficiary-based quality assurance framework.

Table 7.7: Integrated beneficiary-based quality assurance framework for Early Learning Centres

Quality criteria	Quality indicator (How is criterion observable?)	Process indicator	Outcome indicator	Input indicator	Weight (Percentage)	Score (1-5[13])	Total
School climate (330)[14]	Warm, friendly, loving, peaceful (50+80=130)	●			11		
	Child-centred (32+34=66)	●			6		
	Happy children (engaged, smiling) (48+16=64)		●		5		
	Helpful and supportive (40+0=40)	●			3		
	Discipline and rules valued (30+0=30)	●			2		
Sub-total for criterion					28		
Infrastructure (266)	Safe and secure school — security systems (47+47=94)			●	8		
	Spacious classrooms (18+31=49)			●	5		
	Range of required apparatus and toys (0+34=34)			●	3		
	Safe and secure school — hygienic, neat, clean (21+11=32)			●	3		
	In a safe neighbourhood within close proximity to a primary school (0+29=29)			●	2		
	Spacious, well-designed and inviting playgrounds (0+28=28)			●	2		
Sub-total for criterion					23		
Curriculum (152)	Accountable curriculum aligned with DoBE policy frameworks for early child education (30+25=55)			●	5		
	Includes faith-based norms and values (33+19=52)			●	4		
	Challenging and stimulating curriculum to invite participation and optimise development (17+15=32)			●	3		
	Includes life skills development (13+0=13)			●	1		
Sub-total for criterion					13		

[13] 1 = Poor, 2 = Below expectation, 3 = According to expectation, 4 = Above expectation, 5 = Excellent

[14] The number 330 is the sum total of the applicable categories in the specific quality criteria indicator

Quality criteria	Quality indicator (How is criterion observable?)	Process indicator	Outcome indicator	Input indicator	Weight	Score (1-5)	Total
Communication (139)	Small teacher-child ratio (7+38=45)			●	4		
	Caring, respectful, fair and trustful relationship between teacher and child (37+7=44)	●			4		
	Communication between teacher and child balances discipline and care (14+11=25)	●			2		
	Frequent feedback between teachers and parents (14+11=25)	●			2		
Sub-total for criterion					12		
Teacher competence (122)	Teacher qualifications (34+40=74)			●	6		
	Teachers are dedicated and motivated (hours at work, creativity, and initiative) (7+20=27)	●			2		
	Teachers prepare for teaching (0+12=12)	●			1		
	Teachers act professionally (0+9=9)	●			1		
Sub-total for criterion					10		
Learning and development (121)	Holistic development to optimise potential of children (21+32=53)	●			5		
	Learning and development leads to school readiness 23+0=23)		●		2		
	Children's identities are developed (13+0=13)		●		1		
	Play time is integrated into the daily programme (12+0=12)	●			1		
	Curriculum includes group work (0+10=10)			●	1		
	Activities encourage participation, engagement (10+0=10)	●			1		
Sub-total for criterion					11		
Support services (37)	Extramural activities (0+16=16)			●	1		
	After-school care (11+0=11)			●	1		
	Paramedical services (occupational- and speech therapy) (10+0=10)			●	1		
Sub-total for criterion					3		
CUMULATIVE TOTAL					**100**		

7.5 FINAL THOUGHTS

Globally, teachers, parents and researchers acknowledge the importance of the early childhood years and the need for improved early childhood services for young children and families. There is general agreement that children have the right to quality education and care (Golberg, 1999: 41-42). In South Africa there is a growing demand for high-quality early learning centres (Clasquin-Johnson, 2009: 18). When choosing an early learning centre for their children, more and more parents are asking about the quality of early learning centres (O'Gorman, 2007) and "parents want assurances that their individual child's experiences will be safe, pleasant, and developmentally sound. The critical difference between the parent and professional perspectives on child care is that parents are seeking a child care arrangement that will meet the needs of their own child and family…" (Larner & Phillips, in Moss and Pence, 2004: 46)

In South Africa no formal way exists to indicate the quality of a particular early learning centre. The main purpose of my study was to explore conceptualisations of beneficiaries about quality in early learning centres which could serve as the groundwork for the development of an early learning centre quality assurance framework in South Africa. I concluded my study by presenting a quality assurance framework ensuing from the findings of my study, as well as the knowledge about quality early childhood education, and existing quality assurance frameworks gained during the research endeavour. This framework can be used for quality assurance purposes in early learning centres in South Africa.