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**The elusive nature of equity and quality in early childhood education:
policy rhetoric, meanings and local perceptions in Nepal and
Wisconsin, USA**

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Abstract

This thesis explores the meanings of the terms ‘equity’ and ‘quality’ in Early Childhood Education (ECE) and argues that they are elusive concepts. I claim that these concepts are highly influenced by personalised perceptions, values and prevalent national socio-economic in relation with cultural and spatial disparities, in addition to their intersections with other aspects of diversity such as social class, ethnicity and gender. I address two questions, which aim to illuminate how meanings of ‘equity’ and ‘quality’ in ECE are created in the local language through the perceptions of practitioners and policymakers and the extent to which the rhetoric in policy texts reflects these meanings and perceptions. The thesis converges current debates with historical and sociological literature to showcase equity and quality challenges and issues in ECE in two diverse contexts: Wisconsin, USA and Nepal, developing a background for a cross-cultural study based on focus groups, elite interviews and desk reviews. Poststructuralist perspectives, based on an interpretive methodology using qualitative methods, inform the design of the research study. Critical analysis of data using a thematic coding analytical tool revealed several themes pertaining to the terms ‘equity’ and ‘quality’. These themes clarified local meanings and perceptions assigned to these terms in the two contexts. The findings disclose some local, national and supra national issues between policy rhetoric and locally and perceived realities related to equity and quality in ECE. The recommendations are to pursue issues of equity and quality in ECE through local voices in ways that are culturally appropriate and responsive to local contexts. In addition, policy makers need to look into local and cultural attitudes, perceptions, and childhood issues before following recommendations from larger and richer nations to expand ECE services.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

We are guilty of many errors and many faults, but our worst crime is abandoning the children, neglecting the fountain of life. Many of the things we need, can wait. The child cannot. Right now is the time his bones are being formed, his blood is being made, and his senses are being developed. To him we cannot answer 'Tomorrow', his name is today.

-Gabriela Mistral

9 June 2015: The Nepal television news informs of the many thousands of people who are facing adversities in the wake of the devastating earthquakes that happened on the 25 April and 12 May 2015. I watch footage of young children in makeshift shelters, happy, smiling at the camera and playing in the debris and rubble, nonchalant about the harsh changes that they will have to bear in the coming days, months, or maybe even years. Images of dead children, and of ones who have lost their homes and families, are regular features in daily newspapers. Eyewitness accounts inform that about 18 infants and toddlers in just one village were buried under rubble whilst they took their afternoon nap. Many children have no access to any form of education, as school buildings and early childhood centres lie in ruins. News about vulnerable children being abducted by men posing as aid workers worries me. I listen to personal accounts of young infants and toddlers having been buried under rubble whilst they slept in the afternoon, their parents out in the fields. I wonder if my research regarding equity and quality in early childhood education in Nepal has any significance any more. Nevertheless, I write this thesis with hope that the darkness will dissipate and the children of Nepal will attend preschools and early childhood facilities again. I write with the hope that policy makers will understand that every child's name is 'today' and make every effort to develop provisions that are equitable and of high quality for all children. I write with hope that every early childhood teacher/facilitator will understand and strive to fulfil the needs of all children. I write with hope that each individual will understand and acknowledge that children are our future and they have the right to an

education that is equitable and of high quality. I write with hope that this research will instigate further discussions that will persuade the government to construct child friendly, gender sensitive and culturally responsive standards and environments for all the children of Nepal. I write with hope that one day I will witness Early Childhood Education (ECE) in Nepal setting an example for the world with its equitable provision and quality care.

In the first section of this chapter, I will provide an outline of the thesis and a summary of each chapter. I will then go on to present the main aims and objectives of this study, defining the purpose of this research and providing an outline of the background and context that initiated this study. Finally, I will describe the significance and scope of the research before concluding the chapter.

1.1 Outline of thesis and chapter summaries

This section outlines the structure of the thesis whilst giving a brief description of the relevant information contained in each of the five chapters. The thesis is the outcome of the research conducted to define the terms ‘equity’ and ‘quality’ in ECE in local language through the perspectives of participants. The study used a qualitative and interpretive methodology set in a theoretical framework of poststructuralist design. The data analysis was grounded in the critical paradigm and the analysis was conducted through a thematic coding analytical tool based on the model provided by Braun and Clarke (2006). The research study also aimed at conducting an in-depth analysis of policy documents concerning ECE to justify the occurrence of the terms ‘equity’ and ‘quality’ and to discern the process of implementation. The chapters were discussed with my supervisor and confirmed through a research proposal.

Chapter 1 defines the aims and objectives of the thesis and provides contextual information to justify the motivation behind this research. The chapter also considers the influence of values and beliefs on the outcome of research, acknowledging that maintaining value neutrality in qualitative research is challenging. As a poststructuralist researcher, there were several instances when fluidity had to be maintained between my

insider/outsider positions and value judgements played an integral part during this process. Gerwitz and Cribb (2006) agree that such judgements are apparent at many levels, especially when both practical and policy implications are concerned. They add that “evaluative judgements are made at every stage of the research process” and that these judgements determine the research questions, field questions, data collection, interpretations and the final analytical report (p. 142).

Besides this, Chapter 1 also discloses the purpose, scope and significance of this research study. Clough and Nutbrown (2008) inform that all social research is “purposeful, persuasive, positional and political” and methodologies must emerge from the researcher’s understanding of the epistemological and ontological implications in social contexts (Clough and Nutbrown, 2008; Thapa, 2012, p. 9). The methodology for this research originated from my epistemological knowledge relating to the ontology of the contexts in which this research was conducted. Adopting a poststructuralist position enhanced the scope for this research as my fluid insider/outsider stance enabled me to gather both circumstantial and tangible data. The persuasive and political significance of this research is also evaluated in Chapter 1, whereby I argue that social research is accompanied by a deep desire in the researcher to change current conditions. This research also aims, in the longer term, to bring changes in current policies regarding equity and quality in ECE in Nepal through the analysis of local perceptions of the two terms. The global trend for expanding ECE services to fulfil the first goal (expanding and improving comprehensive Early Childhood Care and Education, especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children) of the 2000 Dakar World Education Forum framework has no doubt raised awareness regarding the importance of ECE. It has however also given rise to substantial inequities and low quality services, especially in developing and under-developed countries. I contend that there is a significant gap in recognizing these inequities; as perceptions are multidimensional and so are social/cultural conditions and structural disparities in different contexts. Likewise, the term ‘quality’ is redefined in separate contexts, and perceptions are profoundly influenced by social/cultural/economic, and sometimes spatial, disparities. It is therefore necessary to understand contextual realities to give culturally appropriate connotations to the terms equity and quality so that policy changes adhere to local

needs. Chapter 1 concludes with reference to the post-earthquake conditions and the state of the children in Nepal.

Chapter 2 presents a literature review to highlight historical and sociological foundations concerning concepts of equity and quality in ECE and the formation of such policies in two diverse contexts. My educational qualifications were mostly obtained from Western institutions and universities, whilst my working experiences, prior to the commencement of this degree, were mostly based in Asian/Eastern contexts. Currently, I am employed as an Assistant Professor for ECE in the United States. My interest in developing a cross-cultural study for this thesis stems from personal perceptions regarding equity and quality in ECE in these two particular contexts. Relevant historical literature suggests that equity in ECE in the United States revolves around issues that are relative to disability, race, poverty, gender orientation and ethnicity. Intervention programmes such as “Head Start” and “No Child Left Behind” were proposed to alleviate poverty and provide access to ECE for all children (Kagan and Reid, 2008; Peters and Oliver, 2009). Kagan and Reid (2008) argue that segregated delivery systems in both public and private sector services have rendered deep crevasses in quality and defy “deeply held American values regarding the equal opportunity that all young children should have to thrive and learn” (p. 5). Similar concerns are evident in Nepal’s ECE sector, as public and private services are placed at two ends of the spectrum and accessibility for economically, spatially and socially marginalised children is absent. Further discussion of these issues, with reference to policy documents and historical literature of the two countries, is presented in Chapter 2. It was my desire to collect primary data through interviews in the United States, but due to time constraints and other such factors, I was unable to do so. I have however studied relevant material and have attempted to deliver a critical analysis of policy and other such documents, especially of the state of Wisconsin, in this chapter. Furthermore, I also deliver in this chapter an account of how equity and quality are perceived in these two distinctly diverse countries and present a comparative analysis of the policies relative to equity and quality in ECE.

Chapter 3 focuses on the research design and methodology implemented in this study. Utilising a qualitative and interpretive methodology, this study follows an inquiry-based method for data collection. The theoretical basis lies in the premises of critical paradigm wherein I apply a poststructuralist lens to deconstruct perceptions of the terms equity and quality through focus group and individual interviews. Besides verbatim data, an extensive review of policies pertaining to two diverse contexts (Nepal and the United States) is also critically analysed to develop a contrasting conceptual framework for this research study. Patton and Cochran (2002) inform that “qualitative research is characterized by its aims” that are related to realities in social contexts and the researcher’s need to understand these realities (p. 2). This chapter explains how qualitative methods were adapted to suit the aims and objectives of the research. The chapter also iterates the processes and stages of recruitment developed and employed to garner participants for this study. A rationale for adopting thematic coding for data analysis is also given, as is consideration of the ethical issues and dilemmas that arose during the process of this study.

The findings of the study are presented in Chapter 4. Nadeau and Camp (2006) state that data from qualitative research is often detailed and delves into the “complexity of human behaviour” meaning the findings or results may not always be immediately applicable to the “population as a whole” (p. 3). The findings of this research study are relatable to similar circumstances. I contend that policy and policy studies are always evolving, therefore results such as the ones that are documented in this research study may be subject to changes in the policies and politics of the two contexts. Likewise, participants’ views and opinions are also volatile, especially when considering recent factors that may influence changes in their thoughts. Keeping this in mind, this chapter only presents results that are relevant prior to 2015. The chapter is organised into separate sections that discuss development of analytical process, application of thematic coding and elaboration of qualitative data to define equity and quality in local language as compared to the terms occurring in policy documents.

The themes that are identified in Chapter 4 are critically discussed and analysed in Chapter 5. According to literature sources, discussions of research findings should

attach personal meanings and interpretations to the results (Annesley, 2010; Driscoll, 2011). Likewise, Annesley (2010) asserts that discussions in social research can be represented as an “inverted cone or funnel” wherein broader aspects of the findings are considered. With this view in mind, I include participants’ opinions, perceptions and my interpretations to the information gathered through verbatim data as well as through hidden messages. This chapter also refers to relevant literature and discusses equity and quality in ECE as perceived by current policy and polity heads. For example, modest teacher qualifications and lack of knowledge amongst stakeholders and policy heads was one of the primary barriers that participants expressed continuously during the interviews. It was therefore necessary to investigate current requirements and degrees offered in the country’s educational institutions and to gauge levels of understanding of policy and polity heads. Similarly, anomalies perceived in issues such as gender parity; children’s rights; social disparities and curricula content were also explicitly explored and discussed. In this chapter, I include personal reflections and opinions relative to these issues. The final section of the chapter presents ethical dilemmas and limitations of the research study, both at the structural and philosophical levels. At structural levels, I confronted bureaucratic red tape besides time scheduling and recruitment problems. On the philosophical level, I had to fight my own demons and as a poststructural researcher, had to exercise reflexive restraint as some situations belied my outsider approach, especially when I was welcomed as an *afno manchhe* (our own people) (Subedi, 2014), giving me access to personal narratives.

The final chapter concludes the thesis, summarising the journey undertaken to achieve and reaffirm the aims and objectives outlined in Chapter 1 to fulfil the scope and purpose of this research project. In this chapter, I synthesise and integrate my findings with personal judgements to comprehensively answer the research questions framed for investigation. The chapter concludes with post-earthquake reflections and several recommendations, reflecting perceptions and aspirations of participants relative to current socio-economic and socio-cultural conditions and politics, in an effort to achieve equity and quality in ECE in Nepal.

1.2 Aims and objectives: background, context and research problem

Equity and quality in ECE are globally debated issues and a consistent body of literature indicates that these issues are significantly problematic, not only in under-developed/developing countries, but also in developed regions of the world. Schleicher (2014) describes equity in education as being two dimensional and suggests that:

[e]quity in education can be seen through two dimensions: fairness and inclusion. Equity as **fairness** implies that personal or socio-economic circumstances, such as gender, ethnic origin or family background, are not obstacles to success in education. Equity as **inclusion** means ensuring that all students reach at least a basic minimum level of skills. Equitable education systems are fair and inclusive, and support their students in reaching their learning potential without either formally or informally erecting barriers or lowering expectations

(Schleicher, 2014, p. 17)

I argue however that definitions of the terms ‘equity’ and ‘quality’ are culturally influenced and meanings of these terms are socially constructed through the ontology of lived lives and realities. Humes and Bryce (2003) suggest that “the search for clarity and simplicity of meaning is seen as illusory” and “other perspectives from which to interpret the material” are imminent in different socio-cultural contexts (p. 180). In Nepal, the concept of equity could be considered ambiguous considering its hierarchical heritage based on caste, class and gender exclusivity. Similarly, the concept of quality is dependent on the conditions that these stratifications offer to each member of that particular community. For example, quality for a child from a low caste/class family may not be a classroom equipped with modern technology but simply access to a basic community centre. I also contend that perception of equity and quality at the policy level can be discursive, as they are determined mainly to suit political interests. A growing body of research identifies quality ECE as a primary factor that influences the progress of a nation. Many countries have framed policies to address issues of equity and quality in ECE, to obtain freedom from intergenerational poverty and to increase the human development index. For example, Woodhead et al (2009) confirm that ECE “isn’t just good for children’s development and consistent

with realizing their rights” but it is an “important pro-poor strategy” and an “early investment in human capital” (p. 2). Consequently, the primary aim of this research project was to uncover local meanings and perceptions relating to the terms ‘equity’ and ‘quality’ in ECE, which was achieved by the systematic collection of data.

The secondary aim of this thesis was to analyse these perceptions in an effort to justify the inclusion of equity and quality in ECE in policy papers from Nepal. In order to achieve this aim focus groups and individual interviews were conducted with local teachers/facilitators and stakeholders, as well as elite participants, to discern their perceptions regarding equity and quality in ECE. The next stage was to define these terms in local language through analysis of the primary data. Further objectives were to identify policy trends and their implementation strategies and to provide recommendations for policy reforms through further investigations in this area. To achieve these aims and objectives the following research questions were formulated:

1. What are the perceptions of quality and equity in early childhood services among practitioners and policy/polity heads in Nepal?
2. To what extent do these perceptions justify the inclusion of equity with regards to quality in policy papers for early childhood education in Nepal?

My research interest in this area of ECE stems from my experience of working with children from diverse backgrounds. I began my teaching career in 1989 after graduating from a teachers’ college in India, with my specialism in early childhood and primary education. My first year as a rookie teacher was in the convent where I had studied myself. I taught pupils at Grade 1, working with six and seven year olds who came to school dressed in uniforms, carrying big heavy bags and sat in classrooms with rows of desks and chairs reading and writing all day long. Recalling my early school years, I found I had no memory of sitting at a desk all day in order to carry out extensive reading and writing, like the children I taught were required to do. As a rookie teacher, I nonetheless had to follow the prescribed syllabus and schedule to fulfil the requirements of the curriculum. The children lapped up everything in succession and seemed to go through the schedules like little clockwork toys. I longed to take them

out, read stories to them; play with them, but there was little time for such activities between the vast amounts of work they were required to complete, and I to teach. With very few opportunities to indulge my newly acquired degree and expertise I sought greener pastures. This search resulted in myself and my family moving to Kathmandu in 1991.

Kathmandu was then a city with many traditional schools, similar to India, and my heart sank. I looked for job opportunities and eventually found a placement as a kindergarten teacher in a private high school. Most high schools in Kathmandu still have downward extensions of primary grades that focus on making children ready for grade 1. The children in such ‘nursery’ classrooms endure rigorous academic learning (Shrestha, K. 2006). I struggled to make the concerned authorities see the need for four and five year old children to indulge in physical activities, stories and fun things alongside academic learning. Following stringent routines, sitting in class all day and rote learning books from cover to cover was the norm. Very young children memorised almost every subject, only to regurgitate everything during examinations. Unable to change this situation, I looked for other jobs in independent preschools and kindergartens and was surprised to note that there were only four such facilities, all of which were privately operated, mostly by expatriates. I finally found employment in an international kindergarten that was managed by a cooperative comprising of a group of expatriate parents. The children who attended the kindergarten were from the expatriate and elite Nepali communities with parents who were aware of developmental theories and welcomed play-based methodologies. I was delighted to be able to finally put my skills to work. Every time I travelled home, however, I saw hundreds of very young middle-class children dressed in cumbersome uniforms attending traditional schools. Their parents were bent on making them learn English and memorise facts. Determined to bring change and deliver a holistic education for these children, I set out to open my own preschool in 1996 with a few like-minded people.

We struggled to make Nepali parents understand the values of play and why education in the mother tongue was an important issue. The preschool only drew children from expatriate communities and we failed to convince middle-class Nepali parents to send

their children to study with us. However, due to continuous efforts over almost eight years, we finally broke through the ice and middle and upper middle class children began to trickle in. By the year 2006 we had become one of the most sought-after preschools. In order to extend my expertise, I specialized in Montessori education and obtained a trainers' diploma from London. I conducted several training sessions based on culturally responsive early childhood education combined with Western child development philosophies, but I was unable to reach out to the hundreds of children who still attended inequitable and low quality services due to socio-economic, spatial and cultural/linguistic disparities. In an effort to seek answers to this divide I decided to reach out to the government and discovered that the ECE facilities for many far-flung districts in Nepal were actively operated by Seto Gurans, an organisation once headed by a wonderful lady who I had the privilege to interview for this research. She told me that the organisation, with the help of the Ministry of Education (MOE), had managed to establish several centres in remote villages but due to the lack of monitoring systems, implementations of policies and low budgets, those centres had been rendered useless. She further added that there are many children who are still out of school or are in poor quality centres where they are forced to sit in dull classrooms for hours, poring over reading and writing in English rather than playing and communicating in their home language.

ECE in Nepal has a very short history. Historical records show that the first Montessori School was established in 1949 as part of the laboratory school (Shrestha, P. M. 2006). There are several acronyms allocated to the early childhood sector, which creates ambiguities in definitions. For example, Shrestha, K. (2004) notes three variations: "early childhood care or ECC, early childhood care and education or ECCE [and] early childhood development or ECD" (p. 87). Further evaluations of country-specific ECE services conducted by United Nations Education Scientific and Cultural Organizations (UNESCO) and United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) still "reflect vast disparities in target ages of children" due to the various allocated acronyms. The report concluded that such "differences in definitions and target ages frequently translate into fragmented entry points", which therefore "negatively impacts underserved and disadvantaged contexts" (p. 12). However, Shrestha, K. (2004) notes

that most programmes that are offered through preschools and kindergartens use the acronym ECE; hence this thesis will also utilise the acronym ECE as the study focuses on early childhood programmes for children between the ages of birth and six years. Current research in ECE in Nepal still shows vast gaps in both policy and implementations of such policies. For example, Rajbhandari (2013) from Seto Gurans, reports that out of the “1925 centres” that were surveyed for quality, several centres in many far-flung districts are still below the minimum standard relative to quality of care and education, equity of access and trained human resources (p. 15). Likewise, one of the elite interviewees of this study believes there is still a need for national and local collaborations in order to improve the services for all children. The interviewee also commented that there is a “gap in information” regarding knowledge about the “growing child” and that “we do things without any benchmarking standard”. This led the interviewee to conclude that [Nepal] has “narrowed the value and definition of ECE to learning a couple of English rhymes” (Individual interview, 2014).

During my first few years as an ECE teacher I taught the children in English in an effort to meet the demands of parents who were familiar with the use of this language in the classroom. However, I did not abandon my values of holistic education and the belief that children needed to play. I realigned my direction and formulated a culturally responsive curriculum to be implemented in my preschool. Although there were many parents who insisted on English and rote learning, I stood strong with my values and forged ahead. As a result, the children thrived and the community began to realise the importance of enabling children to comfortably communicate in their home language and play in culturally structured, child friendly environments. With the aim of building on this successful endeavour, I decided to expand my research premises on equity in ECE regarding quality in delivery of culturally responsive services for all children. This undertaking would only be possible through expansion of my own knowledge regarding such issues. Therefore, the need to reveal socially and culturally influenced local definitions of equity and quality in ECE in Nepal led me to pursue this doctoral research.

A further purpose of this study was to research policies for ECE to unearth truths about their formation and implementation. Up until now, equity and quality have been globally located at the lowest level, especially in ECE, and thousands of children are still yet to be reached. For example, UNESCO and UNICEF report that many countries, especially in South East Asia, are “still in the process of developing or refining their policy guidelines and frameworks” that will suitably address the “needs of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children” (UNESCO-UNICEF, 2013, p. 12). In Nepal, UNICEF (2011) reports that ECE is not yet “integrated across sectors” and current policies for ECE are placed in the education sector (p. xiv). The same report states that the Nepali government “adopted the goals and strategies of the Education for All (EFA) Dakar Framework for Action as its plan for educational development” in 2000 (p. 7). From 2003 onwards, policies to support community-based centres in “collaboration with International Non-Governmental Organizations (INGOs) and Non-Government Organizations (NGOs)” were established. However, these policies still do not define ECE as “part of the national education system” (UNICEF, 2011, p. 7). Osgood (2006) informs that it is no different in developed countries, as most policy documents are formed by authorities “who represent the power elite” and they “act as regulators of the behaviours of the subordinate” (p. 6). Nevertheless, positive outcomes due to the efforts of INGOs and NGOs have been noted in several sectors across the country. For example, Akhter (2013) informs that intervention programmes organised by Save the Children helped with transitions and retention of children in different districts of Nepal. Likewise, Aryal (2013) reports that expansion efforts to provide ECE centres for children from marginalised and minority groups have gained momentum since 2004.

Despite these success stories, a growing body of research debating issues of equity and quality confirms that inequity and poor quality in ECE does persist and that millions of children are still either out of school or attend poor quality, inequitable centres. As recently as 2010, Epstein found that “disparities linked to wealth, gender, ethnicity, language and location” were prevalent in many societies globally. He further added that other disparities “linked to entrenched social structures such as caste and class” were barriers that held progress of education (p. 2). Nepali society is intrinsically based on a

paternal hierarchy and caste/class stratification is an integral part of communal values even today. Bennett (2005) argues that although many accept these hierarchies at “one level, they have been troubled and some even angered or embittered by these institutions” (p. 3). My sentiments regarding equity and quality in ECE were influenced by these exclusivities that marginalised many young children who had nothing to do with these societal and communal idiosyncrasies. In order to justify my biases and presumptions it was necessary for me to conduct a research study to discover truths regarding perceptions about equity and quality, define the terms in local language and unearth discursive influences on the formation of policies and their implementations. I therefore chose to adopt a poststructuralist stance so that I could critically view perceptions of equity and quality through both an insider and an outsider lens. The next section redefines my theoretical basis to justify my poststructuralist position in this research.

1.3 Theoretical basis: *afno manchhe* versus a poststructuralist position

The literal meaning of the Nepali phrase *afno manchhe* is “my people”. Subedi (2014) defines the phrase in more detail, believing it to mean “relationships of reciprocal nature with an implicit hierarchy” (p. 56). In this research my positionality often reflected the phrase as I was welcomed into communities and ECE centres with open arms, yet an “implicit hierarchy” was understood due to the position of power I had as the researcher over the communities, i.e. the researched. Moreover, this kind of relationship resembles my poststructuralist position as both an insider and an outsider. For example, belonging to the same community and culture as the participants endorsed my ‘insider’ stance, whilst my social status, being an educated female researcher from an upper middle-class community, reinstated me as an ‘outsider’. Insider/outsider positions have been widely discussed in global research premises and are closely related to poststructuralist and feminist research (Davies, 2005; Ganga and Scott, 2006; Chavez, 2008; Chattopadhyay, 2012). According to Ganga and Scott (2006) “insider research” involves “social interviews between researchers and participants who share a similar cultural, linguistic, ethnic, national and religious

heritage” (online). Weiner-Levy and Queder (2012) state that “local or indigenous researchers” have easy access to participants “owing to their familiarity with the local language and with written and unwritten codes” (p. 1153). However, they also add that:

[i]nteraction between researcher and participants, as well as intimacy and understanding, are clearly affected by the researcher’s cultural origins, but are also influenced by other processes and experiences affecting positioning and affinity.

(Weiner-Levy and Queder, 2012, p. 1154)

Maede (2011) also notes the significance of one’s cultural background and how it can influence and shape the research at different levels. Rabe (2003) states that insider/outsider positionality is a “fluid state” as all researchers are initially considered outsiders due to the nature of their work (p. 150). They could however become insiders once the participants begin to acknowledge the similarities between themselves and the researcher in terms of ethnicity, language, gender and heritage. The majority of respondents in this study were Nepali females and commonalities between us, such as gender, language and cultural heritage, helped establish me as an insider even though I was initially regarded as an outsider due to my westernised philosophies (acquired during my academic career). Weiner-Levy and Queder (2012) note that this hierarchy is evident in cases, such as mine, where the researcher may share cultural ethnicities but differ in ideologies due to upbringing and western education. This dichotomous insider/outsider researcher positionality influenced this research at different levels. For example, some focus group participants were aware of my affected/accented Nepali and were wary about my background, status and citizenship (outsider effect), whilst others were so overtly enthusiastic about the shared cultural affinity that they became distracted from discussions, more concerned with sharing personal stories than answering questions (insider effect). However, Dwyer and Buckle (2009) draw attention to the presence of a “subculture” that insider researchers may not be aware of and this was evident during my data collection activities, expressed in reiterative phrases, body language, mannerisms and side conversations (p. 55). In order to avoid skewing the data I had to constantly exercise rigour and reflexivity, note down hidden messages conveyed through body language and maintain balance between objectivity

and subjectivity. A more detailed discussion of this is given in Chapter 3 in connection with the limitations of this research.

Besides these concerns, other impediments emerged as a result of my poststructuralist position in relation to researching policy. Humes and Bryce (2003) agree that poststructuralist research on policy issues poses many challenges, as policy-making is a discursive process subjected to “backtracking and redirections” at various levels (p. 182). They further inform that if research is to make any impact, “researchers need to move beyond the physical uncertainties” (p. 182). Over the last two decades, Nepal has undergone a phenomenal change in both political and physical conditions. Political trends in Nepal have remained uncertain for many years since the decade long ‘People’s War’ (Basnett, 2009). Although the country has been declared a ‘federal democratic republic’ since 2007, the ruling government/s failed to frame the national constitution until the earthquakes of April and May 2015 urged immediate reforms (Sharp et al., 2009; Upreti, 2014; UN News Centre, 2015). According to the UN News centre (2015), political leaders reached a consensus on the 8 June 2015 and agreed to work on the remaining issues and proceed with the promulgation of the new constitution. I argue however that reforms in ECE will remain challenging in the aftermath of the devastating earthquakes that have rendered thousands of children either orphaned or homeless. The data for this research was collected in 2014, when communities were optimistic about political progress and had hopes about changes that would happen in ECE through the proclamation of the new constitution. These hopes, now shattered by the natural disaster, will influence and adjudicate the outcome of this research.

In 2013 I was offered the position of Assistant Professor at the University of Wisconsin-Stout, a polytechnic university excelling in teacher education. Hoping to gain international experience and knowledge about equity and quality in ECE in Wisconsin, I accepted the offer and travelled to the United States. The university offered a Bachelor of Science degree in Early Childhood Education with pre-service teachers obtaining first-hand knowledge about child development, lesson planning and other relevant subject matters due to the carefully designed curricula and practicum

classes in sophisticated laboratory schools. I questioned my students regarding their perspectives about equity and quality in ECE and I was surprised to note that many of them were unaware of these issues. Equity, as perceived by some of them, was related to diversity of race, culture and language and how teachers practiced equality through inclusivity in the classroom. Perceptions of quality were parallel to the same definitions as that of equity with high quality teaching methods, availability of resources, funds and skilled teachers/teaching taking precedence. I visited many preschools and kindergartens in certain counties of Wisconsin during supervision of my pre-service teachers. In most of the centres white children were the majority, with the few exceptions being largely children of Latino, Asian, and African-American origins. I wondered how equity was practiced and what quality entailed in these centres. I hence began to investigate the policies of equity and quality in ECE in the United States, more specifically the policies in the State of Wisconsin, to define the perspectives held by the public and policy heads regarding these issues. This investigation allowed me to develop a cross-cultural definition for equity and quality in ECE through a comparative analysis. Further discussion regarding this analysis, through consideration of historical data, current trends and policies of equity and quality in ECE in the United States and Nepal between the years 1950 and 2014, is presented in Chapter 2.

Arriving in Nepal in late May 2015 from the United States to visit family, I found the devastating aftermath of the earthquakes both shocking and depressing. I tried to reach out to some of the communities where I had collected my data from, but was unable to access much information. Through newspaper bulletins and other such sources, I discovered that some of the schools and centres where my participants had worked had been destroyed and consequently children had lost their homes, families and some even their lives. My intention as a poststructuralist researcher to ‘voice’ the ‘truths’ regarding the realities of equity and quality in ECE was severely compromised due to the destruction of ECE centres. Several seemingly unanswerable questions ran through my mind: If there are no such facilities any more, how do I validate my data? How will the research outcomes impact current policy? What significance do ‘equity’ and ‘quality’ hold for the children in communities that are struggling just to survive this disaster? While collecting the data for this research, my insider position enabled me to

live the realities of the participants and to obtain an “emic” view (local people’s perceptions and thoughts) and to understand “what it feels like for the people” (Davies, 2005, p. 2). In the aftermath of the natural disasters my insider position reiterated these personalised experiences and led me to wonder how ECE in Nepal would be restored, how equity and quality would now be perceived by local people and policy heads, and how policy would be reformed and implemented to reach every individual child. My outsider position struggled to understand immediate responses while I witnessed children under makeshift shelters with no homes, let alone ECE centres, to go to. To deconstruct the literal meanings of equity and quality seemed like an insurmountable task considering the current circumstances. Just as Choi (2006) states that “poststructuralists offer a paradigmatic critique of the assumptions concerning self, subject and subjectivity” and that researcher positions are “unstable, shifting, multiply situated and situationally contingent, rather than determined by social categories” my positional values were riddled with instability and constantly underpinned by the shifting ontologies presented through experiences of participants (p. 436). Poststructuralists, according to Choi (2006), utilise their positionality as an instrument to deconstruct ‘local conditions in relation to structural constraints’ (p. 445). My intention to deconstruct the terms ‘equity’ and ‘quality’ in ECE was contingent upon my own subjectivities, relevant power relationships and how I interpreted and described my participants’ social realities. This led me to reinvestigate and interrogate the premises of my own bias and value judgements in order to critically appraise the purpose, scope and significance of this research.

1.4 Value judgements: purpose, scope and significance of research

According to Greenbank (2003), interpretive methodologies “accept the influence of their values, rather than falsely assuming that they are able to depersonalize their research” (p. 793). Implementing unstructured/semi-structured interviews for data collection is therefore the primary tool most qualitative researchers adopt. These techniques, Greenbank (2003) states, make no “attempt to separate the researcher from the researched” and objectivity may be compromised (p. 793). Besides, other sources

of literature state that educational researchers researching policy are especially bound by their conscious biases and beliefs that affect the outcomes of the research. Yee and Andrews (2006) argue that contextual and situational premises are other factors that stimulate “ethical, emotional and methodological issues” that researchers may be unprepared to deal with (p. 401). Objectivity, according to Basit (2012), is “depersonalization of human participants” (p. 2). I argue however that extreme objectivity dehumanises participants and compromises causal data that can be obtained through empathetic approaches applied in qualitative/interpretive methodologies. Causal data also affects the consequences of educational research, especially when the researcher shares cultural beliefs and values with the participants. Localised realities can only be understood and unearthed when the researcher is fully immersed in personal experiences embedded within shared cultures. These realities, therefore, are contingent on the way the researcher describes them as representations of the ontology based on context and bound by time. I do understand, however, that there is a need for reflection and reflexivity when such situations arise so as not to skew data.

I contend that reflecting on our experiences, and making judgements based on these, are natural consequences that qualitative researchers fail to acknowledge, at times resulting in extreme subjectivity. Extreme subjectivity exposes personal biases, thus swamping actual realities with emotional expressions and inequity. Self-reflections, as Ortlipp (2008) argues, are useful in “creating transparency in the research process”, making researchers aware of their role and boundaries (p. 696). Visiting ECE centres in some semi-urban districts provoked an emotional reaction in me and I was in danger of bias, empathising with the locals by living and experiencing their difficulties. Self-reflections urged reflexivity and prevented me from idealising the data. Clough and Nutbrown (2008) insist on exercising “criticality” to ensure rationality when articulating both “personal” and “public” knowledge (p. 85). Likewise, Lambert et al. (2010) argue that reflexivity encourages researchers to identify underlying issues present in the data by relating one’s position and personal experiences to the subject matter under study. This, they add, is a “pragmatic approach” that allows personal bias to surface at the onset of the study, therefore eliminating misrepresentation of data (p.324). My personal biases regarding equity and quality in ECE were obvious, being

highly influenced by my Westernised ideologies on child development and teacher education. Prior to developing this research agenda, I expected all ECE centres to be well equipped with educational and fun toys, books and other such resources to exhibit quality. Similarly, I expected teachers and facilitators to be well versed in developmental theories, play theories, child-friendly and equitable methodologies. Working in this field for many years I experienced stark differences between my ideologies and that of local ECE faculties, policy level heads and parents. I was compelled to come to terms with the cultural, social and economic circumstances that influenced local ECE. My idealistic assumptions had to be abandoned while I prepared to investigate equity and quality through local perceptions in a number of ethnically diverse local contexts.

During this investigation I learned that besides cultural, social and economic influences, situational and circumstantial contexts play an integral role in shaping local perceptions regarding equity and quality in ECE. For example, some respondents in this research were satisfied with a one room centre where 30 children of varying ages learned to chant the national anthem, read both Nepali and English words, do maths using stones and play in the dirt field with balls made out of rolled up plastic bags. They agreed that it kept them busy, they learned English and that it gave parents time to work and earn money. However, other respondents expressed a desire for more English, bigger and better classrooms, trained teachers and uniforms. Some participants wanted their children to be punished, given homework and disciplined, whilst some wanted their child to be loved, respected and taught through play. These emerging local meanings of equity and quality in ECE signified a dichotomous dilemma. I revisited the premises of local policy of ECE centres to determine the extent of knowledge possessed by local heads, centre heads and practitioners regarding basic child developmental philosophies, and discovered that most of the policies were based on dated Westernised ideologies and had little or no relation to developmental philosophies or cultural and ethnic affinities. For example, one of the centres had “no speaking in Nepali” signs in every corner of every classroom. Young children wore cumbersome uniforms and sat in rows, chanting ABCs and English nursery rhymes on the orders of the teacher yielding a yardstick. When respondents were asked about their

thoughts on quality, they said that discipline, rules and regulations were a priority to maintain quality of ECE.

Through these encounters and investigations, I recognised the need to fully uncover local perceptions on equity and quality in ECE so that new policies could be formed, or older ones reformed, to reflect cultural, local and ethnic views. The purpose of this research is to highlight local issues surrounding equity and quality in ECE and to assign local meaning and broad definitions to the terms ‘equity’ and ‘quality’. I argue that culture and ethnicity are relevant discourses that arise when issues of equity and quality are concerned, especially with the global debates on race, social class, gender, culture and economy continuously on the forefront. Hence it is of utmost importance to study cultural and ethnic sentiments, idiolects of expression and mandatory societal norms that influence perceptions of equity and quality in ECE in order to develop a clear picture of how policy implementation becomes a local affair as it cascades down different ecological levels. Nepal being a multilingual, economically, spatially and ethnically diverse nation, the opportunity to research these issues became straightforward and significant (Bhattarai and Gautam, 2007). Likewise, due to the trend of shifting politics over the past two decades, the country is hopeful for the proclamation of the new constitution under the current leadership. Through this research I aim to provide insights into local realities that would assist in the materialisation of a culturally, ethnically and socially responsive ECE policy with relevant reference to equitable and high quality services.

1.5 Conclusion

22 June 2015: Kathmandu was rocked again by a 4.7M earthquake on 21 June at approximately 7.46 pm. I observed my water jar shudder a little, displacing the water a few millimetres. These gentle shudders and shakes have become a common phenomenon and most city dwellers have become accustomed to these tremors. Resilience exudes and resonates through the humour, jokes and stories about earthquake evacuation gaffes. The newspapers still carry news of earthquake victims,

and pockets of the city still have tent dwellers; people who have either lost their homes or are too frightened to venture back. My husband and I are in the library of my preschool, converted into a one-room apartment, living out of a suitcase as we too lost our home in the recent disaster. Every morning I wake up to the call of the crows outside my window and wonder if they are harbingers of further calamities. From my second storey window I watch the preschool children play ‘earthquake’, building structures out of wooden blocks and knocking them down and then running to the sand box to take ‘shelter’ under the tin roofing. One child ‘fights’ the earthquake, he says it is a “tall monster, with sharp teeth and very big hands”, and another child becomes the “Hulk” who can stop earthquakes. My hopes are renewed as I observe this resilience and strength amongst the youngest of our citizens. My resolution to bring awareness regarding culturally responsive equity and quality in ECE through this research is strengthened. I know that all children who have survived the destruction can bring about change, but only if we begin to appreciate their tenacity for life and reform policies for an equitable and high quality ECE. And only if we remember that the child’s name is ‘Today’.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

The aims of this chapter are: to consolidate historical and sociological facts, to identify significant research, current issues and political constructs that are relevant to equity and quality in Early Childhood Education (ECE). Constructions of equity and quality will be explored specifically between the years 1950 and 2014, as policies and practices in ECE evolved dramatically during this period. I chose to investigate equity and quality between these particular years as historical data and documents confer several interesting changes occurring in both the contexts during those times. For example, during the 1950s, society in the United States underwent several changes due to narratives documented in the “Brown vs. the Education Board” incident highlighting racial prejudices (Jones, 2002; Hall, 2005, p. 1234). Likewise, Nepal was undergoing historical and political changes during the 1950s due to public uprisings against the autocratic Rana rulers (Shaha, 2001). Historical and political influences are highly relevant when researching equity in education and exploring such evidence is a necessary prerequisite, as it sheds light on the “ideals and interests of successive ages” as well as providing a reliable foundation on which to expound social and educational thoughts and objectives considered over a relevant timeline (Woodward, 1906, p. 2).

I also acknowledge however that the educational history between the years mentioned above is a vast territory, therefore the chapter will only elaborate on areas that are relevant to the subjects of equity and quality in ECE. The first two sections of the chapter will contain reviews of literature pertaining to the historical initiation of ECE and its place in the educational systems of the United States and Nepal. I argue that history is created through constructions of reality and that educational reforms/changes, policies and implementations of such policies, are highly influenced by constructivist ideologies, in particular political contexts. For example, the concept of ECE is predominantly a Western dogma that has been rampantly adopted in developing

countries following the upsurge in doctrines that suggest economic growth through human development. In the United States, for instance, ECE became popularised in the 1960s as an economy booster for the future (Cascio and Schanzenbach, 2013; Barnett, 2013). Likewise, Nepali public policies pertaining to education and early education went through notable changes based on similar economist propaganda that bludgeoned traditional/cultural child-rearing practices native only to Nepal. I am not negating these reforms and ideologies; however, it is important to note that history evolves, therefore influences such as the ones mentioned above are integral in discovering/uncovering issues of equity and quality of ECE. I therefore assert that reiterating the historical significance of the development of ECE in the two countries is essential for conceptualising and contextualising this research. The third section of this chapter refers to relevant research to provide evidence of the origin and meaning of equity and quality in education with reference to reforms/policies in the current educational systems of the two countries. Consecutive sections of the chapter will present interpretations of the terms ‘equity’ and ‘quality’ as presented in relevant studies conducted in cross-cultural contexts. In the final section of this chapter I will highlight the implications garnered from the literature review to further develop the conceptual/contextual framework for this research study.

2.2 Initiation of ECE in the United States and Nepal: a brief history

According to Kagan (2009), the family was recognised as the “basic unit of society” by the American government, therefore policies for ECE were based on a “dual value” approach (p. 4). This approach proposed that families had a right to privacy and governmental interventions were necessitated only when the “family could not help themselves” (p. 4). Kagan states that the first “comprehensive family policy”, framed in 1935 as the Social Security Act, had provisions for “widows and orphans” and such untraditional families were given a status of “primacy” to alleviate risks that children growing up within such units may face (p. 4). These reforms suggest that the importance of early childhood experience was advocated for children through government-funded initiatives, hence creating equitable services mostly for vulnerable

and disadvantaged families. Likewise, Kamerman (2006) further suggests that the historical roots of equitable education in ECE in the United States can be traced back to the 1800s with the development of charitable institutions called “day nurseries” and “nursery schools”. These supportive units were “designed to care for the unfortunate children of working mothers” (p. 13). According to Kamerman, these auspices rapidly expanded due to “industrialization and massive immigration” during the late 1800s (p. 13). She adds that:

[k]indergartens and nursery schools expanded slowly during the 19th century and experienced a significant increase only during the 1920s as a form of enriched experience for middle class children. Little public support developed in the country for either program until the mid 1960s and early 1970s when a confluence of factors led to the significant expansion of both program types. (Kamerman, 2006, p. 14)

Unlike the United States during the 1930s and 1940s, when the government was actively supporting families (especially working mothers) as a precursor for future economic prosperity, Nepal was reeling from the feudal rule of the Ranas, during which the general public were denied any form of education (Bennett, 2005; Caddell, 2009). Due to exclusionary policies of the Rana feudal lords, policies that demarcated the general public based on gender, caste and class were coded in the “Muluki-Ain” (or the law of the land) (Shields and Rappleye, 2008). The policies explicitly disallowed “education to anyone outside of the palace elite” as “education was seen as a threat to the power of the rulers” (p. 267). Stash and Hannum (2001) inform that education in Nepal was stratified according to caste, class and gender even after the downfall of the Ranas. According to them, “broad-based development of popular education began only in the latter half of the 20th century”, when the ruling Shah government established the Ministry of Education in 1951 and made “education a right for every Nepali citizen” (p. 28). Children and women still bore the brunt of exclusionary factors based on Hindu ideologies, and according to Bennett (2005), “the patriarchal gender systems of the dominant group were supported and reinforced by the state” (p. 6).

With the hope of providing ECE services, the government of Nepal established a Montessori School in 1950 for children between the ages of three and five (Shrestha, P. M., 2006; Pande, 2009). However, it “lost its separate identity” due to a merger with the laboratory school under the college of education (p. 48). Eventually, the preschool was transformed into “LKG (lower kindergarten) and UKG (upper kindergarten)” providing a downward extension of the primary school with rigid discipline and stringent academically positioned curricula content intended to ready children for school (p. 48). Nepal, being a country rife with disparities in socio-economy, geography and ethnic designations, participation of marginalised groups in child services was negligible or non-existent during the early 1960s (Groot, 2007; Bennett, 2008; Upreti, 2010). With the formation of the National Children’s Organisation in 1964, the government began imparting early childhood education to other parts of the country (Pande, 2009). P. M. Shrestha (2006) states that:

[i]n 1965 Nepal Children’s Organization (NCO) introduced pre-school classes as an innovative ECD program by the name of Bal Mandir (Children’s Home). NCO established one Bal Mandir in the headquarters of each district. Bal Mandir was innovative in the sense that it was outside the formal school system and worked for the holistic development of early-age children. Bal Mandir consists of two sections; Nursery and Pre-school

(Shrestha, P. M., 2006, p. 48)

In the meantime, ECE in America was replicating the European model that valued “rigid discipline” to “counteract the sinful tendencies of young children” (Miesels, and Shonkoff, 2000, p. 4). The tradition of amalgamating kindergartens in public schools became highly prevalent, particularly with the support of philanthropists, who campaigned for disadvantaged children of immigrant families through proclamations of the benefits of early education. However, according to Miesels and Shonkoff (2000), the movement to include vulnerable children in ECE faced numerous obstructions both in pedagogical philosophy and political bureaucracy. They inform that many “traditionalists remained loyal to the philosophy of Froebel and defended their value-driven educational practices” while reformers supported the liberalisation of ECE based

on the “emerging discipline of child psychology” (p. 5). These contradictory philosophies gave rise to pragmatic reformers and developmental psychologists, who emphasised the importance of child development and the “functional purpose” of education (Miesels and Shonkoff, 2000, p.5). The need for child-care services reached its peak during World War II which resulted in federally funded Emergency Nursery Schools (ENS) being established to support victims of the conflict. Ranck (2013) notes that funding was discontinued after the war, as government agencies once again placed ECE and care as a low policy priority, hence suggesting ignorance of, or lack of concern with, issues of equity by the government.

Similarly, Kamerman and Gatenio-Gabel (2007) note that there was little or no support from the general public for nurseries and kindergartens until the 1960s and 1970s when such services showed a significant expansion owing to mass industrialisation that compelled women to join the labour force. This eventually led to a significant metamorphosis of the concept of family privacy and child rearing practices, whereby most middle class families preferred to send even very young children to school (Vinovskis, 1987). The expansion of child-care services, comprising of both nurseries and kindergartens, gave credence to the development of comprehensive public policies such as the Economic Opportunity Act (1964) to support the sustenance of such centres and provide equitable solutions to deprived families (Ranck, 2013). Kagan (2009) informs that, unlike pre-war centres, post-war child-care facilities focused on early academic enrichment drawing more prosperous parents to enrol young children into such centres. She further suggests that this dichotomous objective of rehabilitating deprived children and families, as opposed to providing enrichment programmes for prosperous families, paved the path towards consolidating inequitable agendas in early education in the United States. Furthermore, the great influx of post-war immigrants owing to the “1965 amendments to U.S. immigration law compounded diversity issues leading towards divided economy and social structures” (James et al., 1998, p. 171; Martin and Midgley, 1999). This resulted in several public policies undergoing significant modifications and, as Kagan and Reid (2008) suggest, “federal early education policies can be understood as a series of responses to shifting social, economic, and political phenomena” of those troubled years (p. 6).

Likewise, in Nepal during the late 1960s and 1970s the private sector began to infiltrate educational premises and many private institutions offered preschool classes. This initiative provided equity of access to ECE services to a large number of children in the country (UNESCO, 2008). However, according to the UNESCO (2008) report, many of these programmes were “downward extensions or primary schools” largely dependent on revenue through “fees charged to the children” and concentrated in urban areas. These factors made it inaccessible to children from lower socio-economic and spatially marginalised contexts (UNESCO, 2008). In order to maintain uniformity and to ensure equitable services, the government of Nepal introduced the Education Act and stated that the term “pre-primary school” would be designated to “schools that provide one year’s pre-primary education” to children above the age of four (MOE, 1971, p. 2). The act went through several amendments between the years 1971 and 1992 during which “community participation in the development of ECD” became part of the strategic plan of the government in its seventh amendment (UNESCO, 2011, p. 14). According to numerous studies, there were no government-operated services for children under the age of four until 1979. From the year 1979 ‘Seto Gurans’ (White Rhododendron), a non-governmental organisation, actively participated in advocacy for children between the ages of two and four and began delivering ECE services to marginalised groups of children from far-flung districts of Nepal. Today, the organisation offers training packages to parents and teachers and according to their website “has produced independent child development centres in 59 districts out of 75 with the support of Save the Children” (Seto Gurans, 2015).

With support from Save the Children and UNICEF, Seto Gurans actively participated with the Ministry of Education (MOE)/Department of Education (DOE) to support the Early Childhood Development (ECD) programme from the late 1970s onwards (UNESCO, 2008). Prior to this there is no data confirming the presence of ECE services besides the ones being operated as “pre-primary” sections for children under the age of four in regular schools (MOE, 1971). According to the Centre for Educational Research, Innovation and Development (CERID) (2004), in 1963 the government launched the Free and Compulsory Primary Education Programme (FCPEP) in 109 villages “on an experimental basis” (p. 5). The objectives outlined in

the document included provisions and expansions of inclusive, informal and quality education to all children between the ages of six and ten, whilst education and care of children between the ages of three and five was the responsibility of the community. Local committees were formed to oversee the functionality and evaluate the outcomes of this programme among the locals of the community and officials from the ministries. By this time, several International Non-Government Organizations and Non-Government Organizations were involved in a variety of developmental programmes and education was one of the sectors where outside agencies played an integral role in shaping the government plans (Tamang, 2002). Tamang (2002) states that these international/external forces were key players which “alter[ed] and shape[d] domestic political discourse”, which, in turn brought “domestic issues” such as education to the forefront (p. 312). During the late 1970s Nepal was undergoing a significant political change. The general public protested against “an autocratic party-less Panchayat system” (a village council system) and urged the authoritarian government to accept the “multi-party democratic system” (Khanal et al., 2005, p. 2). Moreover, Khanal et al. (2005) add that during the 1970s “multilateral donor agencies” participated in development procedures that were “aimed at economic stabilization and structural adjustment” (p. iii). Acharya (2003) argues that the presence of donor agencies has proliferated over the years, and “their support for particular causes” such as “the right of education in the mother tongue, where there are more than 60 language, many of them without scripts” are “totally out of context” (p. 2). Following the democratic ordinances, the newly formed democratic government forged ahead to develop the National Education Plan based on the outcomes of the previously piloted FCPEP (CERID, 2004). According to the same research report, the Seventh Plan, framed in 1985, “recognized primary education as one of the basic needs”, but ECE/ECD was not mentioned as an educational priority (CERID, p. 9).

ECE in the United States meanwhile went through two major “national crises” that evolved due to the “bifurcated delivery system” during the 1960s. These crises “segregated children by income - and often by program quality” (Kagan and Reid, 2008, p. 4). Disparity in the quality and delivery of such services arose mainly due to the lack of knowledge in the psychosocial aspects of child development and “due to

unclear delineations of federal-agency aegis and confusion between federal and state roles” (Kagan and Reid, 2008, p. 4). Concepts and ideologies of early childhood care and education continued to evolve through several decades and a diverse set of “delivery systems” were adapted until the emergence of the “kindergarten” (Kagan and Reid, 2008, p. 5). Kagan and Reid (2008) add that:

[m]any kindergartens, however, like services for even younger children, were distributed among numerous sponsors, including churches, labour unions, temperance groups, private businesses, and settlement houses; this again fortified the mixed delivery system that has become a permanent characteristic of American early education. These diverse delivery vehicles gave way to diverse ideologies, often consistent with the host organization, but left in their wake pedagogical inconsistencies that persist today. Finally, in the emergence of the kindergarten movement, the seeds of governmental responses to early education were manifest— reactive, partial, and responsive to social needs external to the child.

(Kagan and Reid, 2008, p. 5)

In response to these problems, a significant intervention was launched, which was backed by unprecedented government funding. The “Head Start” programme was the foremost comprehensive and federally funded childcare/kindergarten facility that was initiated in 1965, when President Johnson proposed a “War on Poverty” (Pasachoff, 2003, p. 250; Barnett and Hustedt, 2005; Hale, 2012). I acknowledge that there is a significant amount of literature on other childcare facilities, such as the Perry School Project, the Abecedarian Project, State Pre-K and Even Start, all of which were just as successful as the Head Start facility. However, Head Start, as Hale (2012) suggests, was a carefully engineered “democratic tool” that proceeded to collaborate with the community to provide “access to education” in order to eliminate poverty (p. 507). According to Barnett and Hustedt (2005), Head Start has been highly successful in providing access to an all-inclusive child development educational programme to “more than 21 million children” of “low income parents” since 1965. Besides educational services, the Head Start programme also integrated “social, health and nutritional services” for participating children and families (p. 16). The “two-

generational” approach of Head Start programmes considered “parent involvement in a child’s education” as a vital link to establish success in both academic and socio-emotional development of the child and sought to “empower” families “by handing them local control” of the service (Koppelman, 2003, p. 8)

By 1994, the federally funded Head Start service expanded their functions to create provisions for “even younger children” (from birth to age three) and over 910,000 children and families were able to access educational and developmental programmes by the year 2002 (Barnett and Hustedt, 2005, p. 17). Pasachoff (2003) shows that both Community Action Agencies (CAA) and Head Start services have been successful in implementing a “variety of anti-poverty programs” in extensive urban and rural areas across the country. The anti-poverty ethos therefore suggested elements of equity-based early childhood services, as the main objective of such programmes was to eradicate socio-economic barriers by providing accessibility to such services. The lasting benefits for children who attended Head Start programmes during the 20th century have been cited in numerous studies, implying that accessibility (as part of the equity equation and the anti-poverty ethos) was successfully improved and implemented by the federal government. For example, Currie and Thomas (1995) identify the significant improvement in test scores of children aged between eight and ten who had participated in the programme as three year olds. Likewise, Ludwig and Miller (2005) note that Head Start programmes improved “immunization rates for all children”, therefore positively impacting not just on the educational development of a large number of children but also on their physical health, whilst reducing the mortality rate nationwide (p. 3).

In 1990, advancements in the early childhood sector in Nepal became globally highlighted due to the ratification of the “Convention of the Rights of the Child 1989” and its participation in the World Conference for Education for All (EFA) in Jomtien (Arnold et al.,2000). The outcome of this ratification was the production of a key policy document entitled “The Children’s Act 1992” and a commitment to achieving the goals outlined in the EFA framework (Tripathee, 2004; Gapany, 2009, Thapa, 2013). According to Tripathee (2004), the rights of the child, as mentioned in the

“Convention of the Rights of the Child, 1989”, include “survival care, growth, protection against violence, trafficking, exploitation, and discrimination” (p. 75). Taking these as a basis, “The Children’s Act 1992” of Nepal forecloses the “identity; non-discrimination; non-exploitation; protection; education and development” as well as the safety, security and wellbeing of all individuals below the age of 16 (Gajurel, 2007, p. 34; Thapa, 2013). However, despite all these proclamations in policy documents, several sources cite issues related to child labour, trafficking of very young children, sacralising of young children, gender biases, socio-economic disparities and other such discriminatory factors as having affected many children in Nepal throughout the course of history. For example, the global report filed by the United States Department of Labour (USDOL) regarding international labour statistics discloses that many Nepali children as young as three have been employed in a variety of enterprises such as brick factories, agriculture, restaurants, transport and the sex trade (USDOL, 2011). More recent reports from USDOL (2013) inform that the Nepali government has taken moderate steps towards eliminating child labour and some policy levers are being readdressed to curb these issues.

By 1991, Nepal had “fully endorsed the Jomtien Declaration for EFA” and initial planning proceeded to fulfil the goals outlined in the EFA core document. The first goal was to expand and improve early childhood programmes to provide access and quality care for all children by the year 2004 (UNESCO, 2000; MOES, 2003). In order to achieve this goal, Nepal signed an agreement with UNICEF to launch community-based ECE in several districts of Nepal. The “Master Plan of operations 1992 – 1996” was an immediate outcome of this agreement (UNICEF, 1992). Likewise, 1992 also saw the implementation of the first Basic and Primary Education Project (BPEP-1) in order to “increase access and equity, enhance quality and relevance and management” of primary education. The BPEP-I recognized ECE as an important “non-formal” education for children between the ages of three and five (Bhatta, 2000, p. 202). Bhatta (2000) further informs that by the year 1997 the BPEP-1 had undergone considerable changes due to the Ministry of Education’s adoption of it. The MOE re-designed the project (now BPEP-II) establishing a series of programmes to be implemented in all 75 districts of the country as per the ninth educational reform plan. According to

UNESCO (2000), the inclusion of services for children below the age of five were planned as community based programmes and the Curriculum Development Centre (CDC) developed curricula content in 1997. Owing to this intervention, several models of childcare centres began operation both in urban and rural areas, such as ‘Balmandirs’ (temples for children), school initiated provisions, ‘Shishu Kakshya’ (child classroom), community based centres and private nurseries, kindergartens and preschools along with “welfare programmes” (p. 21). The document further informs that:

[t]hrough this strategy of community-based ECD, the government aims to build up partnership with the communities in management as well as in cost sharing. Under the provisions of BPEP II, in order for a community to run a Shishu Kakshya (SK, child-care centre), it should first of all form a management committee to work out the details of running an ECD centre, and then formally apply to the District Education Office for permission to run the centre. The community must provide rooms and other physical facilities necessary for running the SK, as well as provide a salary for the SK teacher. BPEP responsibility is limited to providing training to the SK facilitators and making some of the teaching/learning support materials and facilitator guidebooks available.

(UNESCO, 2000, p. 8)

The government of Nepal undertook further initiatives to enhance ECE. In 1999, the Department of Education (DEO) was given the responsibility to supervise, monitor and enhance this sector (UNESCO, 2000). Meanwhile, on the political front, Nepal was overwhelmed with the ‘People’s War’, an insurgent movement that gave rise to severe disparities between urban and rural economies, impacting numerous children (Hart, 2001). In the 21st century, global drivers based on economist ideologies urged developing countries to create policies for equitable provisions for young children. Nepali policy makers and politicians also surged forward to fulfil the six goals outlined in the EFA. Likewise, developed countries heightened their awareness amongst stakeholders, regarding the positive outcomes of ECE, and continued to evaluate current policies and enhance them to create equity and quality in ECE (UNESCO, 2000; Kagan, 2009). Research studies however increasingly mention structural, vertical and horizontal disparities that are not being addressed to balance the equity/quality

equation (Wood et al., 2011). For example, structural barriers such as “inequalities” relative to family income, location, ethnicity/language and the ‘level of parental education’ have been proven to have adverse effects on children’s lives, with previous research suggesting that this is evident in both the countries under focus in this study (Woodhead et al., 2012, p. 7). According to Brown (2006), “horizontal equity” is mainly achieved when governments aim to provide equality through access to similar provisions for all whilst vertical equity is the “unequal, but equitable treatment of unequals...” (p. 515). Whilst there is evidence to signify that both countries have achieved ‘horizontal equity’ through expansion of and accessibility to ECE services, deeper vertical inequities are still apparent, particularly in the quality of services and certain inequalities in societies/communities (Brown, 2006). In the next section, I will therefore discuss supervening issues during the 21st century that reinstated and heightened disparities due to disorders in politics and policies of the two nations.

2.3. 21st Century dilemmas: equity and quality for all children

In the United States the success story of Head Start, in providing access to education for all children, has not been without controversies. By providing access to a large number of low-income children and families the Head Start programme failed to ensure and retain the quality and equality of services it provided (Garces et al., 2002; Pasachoff, 2003; Barnett and Hustedt, 2005; Currie and Neidell, 2007; Deming, 2009; Hale, 2012). Several researchers have discussed the “fade out” phenomenon, where the benefits of high quality pre-school education are not sustained into later academic performance. A number of research studies revealed inconsistencies owing to biases in enrolment and maintenance of quality (Kagan and Reid, 2008; Deming, 2009, p. 113). According to Deming (2009), the fade out was more prominently associated with African-American children and “relatively disadvantaged” families (p. 129). This therefore indicates the presence of long-established racial and socio-economic ideologies in socio-cultural constructs that were not always amenable to such interventions. According to Koppelman (2002), these ideologies played an important

role in equity issues, as disadvantaged children, although much in need of such services, were unable to access the programmes due to the high costs of childcare. She adds that issues of access to child-care were (and still are) deeply rooted in discrepancies found in funding policies of the federal government and “researchers estimate that only about one in seven eligible children” will “receive any federal child care support” in the years to come (p. 2).

On the same note, Hale (2012) expounds that although early education in Head Start was based on a “tradition of liberation”, significant differences arose in ideologies and assumptions regarding race and socio-cultural-economic structures, especially of those from African-American descent. Hale also identifies initiatives taken by the federal government during the mid-1960s to locate the “origins of poverty” and adds that:

[a]t the federal level, Head Start was very much comprised by federal policy makers and “experts” in the field of education that held racist assumptions of the black family, which was evident in their analysis of poverty. The African-American home, they concluded, was culturally deprived of values that led to educationally, socially, and economically successful lives.

(Hale, 2012, p. 532 & 533)

In other words, Head Start and other such programmes were high level, politically influenced concepts that were vital in creating segregated socio-cultural and socio-economic constructs. These constructs remain noticeable in several parts of the country and the issue of equity in ECE systems in the United States is still hotly debated (Koppelman, 2003; Magnuson et al., 2004; Kagan, 2009). Besides the dilemmas of socio-economic segregation, issues of quality in childcare services was and still is a formidable barrier that estranges implementable equity from policy in a large number of contexts in the United States (Koppelman, 2003; Kagan, 2009). By the end of the 20th century globalisation and intensive urbanisation increased childcare and comprehensive early childhood educational needs at different ecological levels of society. Several private ‘pre kindergartens’ and other state funded interventional childcare services, such as the Perry Preschool Project, were established during the 1960s in Michigan. The Perry Preschool Project supplemented the Head Start

programmes by providing care and education for “disadvantaged children who had low IQ scores and a low index of family socioeconomic status” (Heckman et al., 2010, p. 2). From the examples mentioned, it can be noted that the United States has been considerably successful in providing access for a large number of children to early childhood care and education since the early 1900s. Edie et al (2004) confirm that “the number of preschool children in organized early care and education facilities” has grown exponentially in the “last two decades” to reach “4.1 million in 1999” (p. 1). However, the global discourse on equity is subject not only to access but also to quality, and is continuously debated by researchers, policy makers and reformers alike. For example, discourses based on differences of political ideologies, and ones that focus on perceivable inequities in socio-economies and socio-culture of ecologies, argue and state that equity is a two-pronged process involving access and quality. Likewise, public policies are often formed, reformed and modified to satisfy these two key aspects. By the 21st century, issues of quality in the largely accessible ECE and care of the United States had become one of the most pertinent debates that is yet to be resolved. Similarly, the most recent “Preschool for All” initiative presented by the Obama government is not without its share of problems. Although the idea is a replication of what was introduced in 2006, commitment by the president himself gave the initiative, and concerned people, renewed hopes (Armor and Sousa, 2014). According to Armor and Sousa (2014), this initiative emphasises the need for high quality programmes, therefore “implying that Head Start” fails to meet the quality standards. However, they argue that there is not enough evidence to suggest that the new programmes will succeed “where Head Start has failed” (p. 37, 48). They further suggest that prior to implementation such projects should “examine” whether such programmes will narrow “achievement gaps between rich and poor” (p. 48).

Likewise, at the turn of the century, Nepali ECE was not without its share of problems. ECE was placed on a moderate priority scale and termed ‘basic’ education with the launch of the “Ratnanagar Compulsory Primary Education Programme” in 1995 with support and “guidance from BPEP and Danish International Development Agencies (DANIDA)” (UNESCO; 2000; CERID, 2004, p. 6). However, lack of knowledge amongst policy makers and a dearth of trained facilitators skewed approaches of

teaching and methodologies, resulting in a diluted form of primary curricula content for application in such centres (Shrestha, K., 2006). The National Plan of Action (NPA) of Nepal, developed in 1992, outlined several initiatives to augment ECE services and the “early childhood development section was established under the Department of Education (DEO)” to monitor the ECE needs of the country (UNESCO, 2000, p. 22). By 2001 Nepal had committed to fulfil the six goals outlined in the EFA campaign by the year 2015 (Tripathee, 2004; Shrestha, K., 2006). Interventions by international aid agencies such as UNICEF, Save the Children, and PLAN International, intensified measures to support development of ECE centres in several remote districts of Nepal through “interactive radio programmes” (UNESCO, 2000, p. 22; Shrestha, K., 2006). In 2004, the Ministry Of Education and Sports (MOES) of Nepal initiated rapid changes in the ECE sector by introducing a “Strategy paper for ECD Nepal” (MOES, 2004). This document outlined visions and goals to be achieved by the year 2015 through implementation of several strategic plans. Decentralisation, by providing local authorities with the responsibility to ensure “sustainability” and access to ECE centres, was one of the key reforms enforced through this document. To intensify implementation of these reforms there was a “mapping of services” to create rosters documenting “expertise, resources and capacities” (p. 13). The document also announced requirements for trainers and training through local agencies to develop extensive networking with partners involved in ECE. Furthermore, the document emphasised other laudable implementations such as parent education, community involvement, integration of health services, curricula changes and resource management, seeing them as essential components for providing equitable and high quality ECE services.

However, early setbacks, such as absence of quality indicators, limited access for vulnerable groups and marginalisation due to spatial, economic and social disparities, disallowed comprehensive success for equitable provisions (NORAD, 2009). For example, the NORAD (2009) report informs that:

[c]ertainly observations made during the district study visits, as well as the comments of stakeholders, suggest that a great many ECD centres offer little more than some rote teaching of the alphabet and

counting. Despite the claimed emphasis on ‘holistic development’, some do not provide toys, play space or food. Many of the local women taken on as facilitators are minimally trained with low status and minimal salaries, (around 1800 NPR per month seemed to be the standard). As also reported in the TRSE (2006) many communities can offer only very minimal support. In many school-based centres, it appears that no separate space has been provided, so the ECD children occupy a corner of Grade 1 classrooms, in which case it is all the more likely that the ECD experience is (as one NGO member from Jhapa termed it) ‘merely a rehearsal of Grade 1’. In such situations it can be asked whether the apparent ‘efficiency’ of ECD in terms of reducing Grade 1 repetition is illusionary, as the ECD itself is providing the ‘repeat’ year.

(NORAD, 2009, p. 39)

Systemic exclusionary attitudes/beliefs due to the People’s War and Maoist ideologies have plagued access opportunities for marginalised groups (Hart, 2001). For example, Maoist ideologies such as the destruction of imperialism and feudalism followed by “proletariat dictatorship” and a “multiparty democracy” through violent assaults on the ruling government were detrimental for ECD centres to thrive (Crisis Group, 2005, p. 3). These exclusions, Hart (2001) suggests, normally transpire in communities due to “economy, caste-ethnicity, gender and security” (p. 27). The World Bank report (2001) suggests that there is considerable work to be done in order to achieve equity and to cultivate quality in ECE services of Nepal. The report states that “getting poor children into school is not the only task” as there is monumental evidence to signify that holistic and integrated programmes in ECE “promote learning readiness” (p. 20). In 2009, the Nepal-School Sector Reform Plan (SSRP) was developed with a mandate for imparting early education through its ECE policy. According to the document, the primary aim of this initiative was to ‘foster children’s all-round development, laying a firm foundation for basic education’ with an objective to “expand access to quality Early Childhood Education and Development (ECED) services for children of four years of age” (MOES, 2009, p. 6). Challenges in implementation, recruiting and retaining qualified teachers and securing quality relative to the aims and objectives, are also mentioned in the same document. Several policy recommendations and directions include identifying

funding sources, expansion with a focus on quality, prioritisation of access for marginalised groups and non-discriminatory practices (MOE, 2009). Despite these policy drivers the mid-term evaluation of the amended reform states that there is still a large number of discrepancies in the ECE sector. According to the report, there are approximately 33,202 private and public child service centres in the country. Private ECE services are mainly situated in urban areas and mostly accessed by children from the higher economic strata, although some are downward extensions of primary schools. Community based/public services are generally in rural areas and access is limited to children from nearby communities (MOE/Department of Education (DOE), 2012). On issues of equity, the report highlights that participation of children from ethnically marginalised groups such as the Dalit and Janajati have shown little or no increment, mainly due to spatial and economic disparities (MOE/DOE, 2012). The report also informs that since the provision of ECE is a “demand based” service, there is a clear demarcation between the “haves and the have-nots” in terms of accessibility and quality of such services. Moreover, implementation processes were further affected due to changes brought about by the decade long insurgency in social, economic and political fronts (MOES, 2014). Integration of holistic approaches, teacher qualifications and funding resources were therefore considered important components for improvement and to balance the equity/quality equation (MOE/DOE, 2012). Following the restoration of peace in 2006 and the abolishment of monarchy two years later, an “extension plan” to rectify the SSRP of 2004 was approved by the Government of Nepal and MOES (MOES, 2014, p. 1). The plan incorporates recommendations and future initiatives provided by ‘18 different organisations’ comprising of INGOs and NGOs involved in the ECE sector (MOES, 2014, p. 1). Based on the mid-term evaluations, the extension plan identifies partial success in achieving horizontal equity but future challenges need to be addressed to achieve vertical equity relative to the overarching goals for ECE outlined by MOES and the EFA initiative. According to the document, challenges such as recruiting and retaining qualified ECE facilitators and expanding services to inaccessible areas are inevitable vertical inequities, and need to be addressed in depth in order to achieve success in all areas such as access, equity and quality.

The primary aim of this extension is to foster “children’s all round development, laying a firm foundation for basic education” (p. 9), whilst the objectives are to expand access to quality ECE services for 4 year olds and to integrate ministries and outside agencies, in the hope that the ECE sector is enhanced in “marginalized pockets” where there are no child services. Other objectives relating to improving the “quality and capacity of ECE facilitators” through specialized training and empowering parents and strengthening inter-sectoral approach for the implementation of policies are also mentioned in the extension plan of the SSRP (MOES, 2014, p. 10). Laudable targets to be achieved by the end of 2016 include quality provisions for at least “82% of four year olds” in the entire country and institutionalisation of teacher education (p. 11). The recent devastation by the two earthquakes has however rendered extensive damage to infrastructures, as well as to the efforts by agencies and governments involved in ECE. I argue therefore that in such trying times policy reforms will definitely undergo tremendous change. Policy levers and drivers will be influenced by the heightened disparities (due to the destruction) in socio-economic conditions, instability in socio-politics and ramifications due to the vulnerability of children and their families. Besides, prior determined and globally directed policy levers and drivers, such as the EFA and SSRP, could lead current policy reforms down a discursive path due to the fact that Nepali politics is facing yet another challenge with the proclamation of the new constitution. In the following section, I will discuss equity and quality in ECE with reference to current statuses of children and families in Nepal and Wisconsin in order to develop the comparative/conceptual framework for this research study.

2.4 Equity and quality of ECE in Nepal and Wisconsin: a comparative analysis

Before I commence my comparison of equity and quality in ECE in the two countries, it is important to disclose certain terminology discovered through an analysis of policy documents of both the Nepali and United States/Wisconsin ECE sector. According to Ochshorn (2015), the ECE system in the United States is flawed, as [certain?]

individual states and local communities have more power over “policy action” than others (p. 97). Policy documents of Wisconsin identify early childhood services with specific acronyms such as 4K (4 year kindergarten), 5K (5 year kindergarten), ECE (early care and education) ECEC (early childhood education and care), CC (child-care), and ECSE (early childhood special education). The Department of Public Instruction (DPI) and the Department of Children and Families (DCF) are the two state agencies responsible for all policies relative to children and families. While the DCF’s mission statement is “to improve the economic and social well-being of children, youth and families” the DPI is primarily concerned with increasing educational opportunities for children through networking and providing instructional guidelines through ECE standards and frameworks. Both these organisations are funded through federal sources, such as the Department of Health and Human Services and the US Department of Education, as well as through state revenue (DPI, Early Childhood, 1970). I contend that these straightforward strategies of management, funding and policymaking, allows for operational fluidity and uniformity in state wide childcare services. Recent literature suggests however that there are other anomalies associated with these. For example, Ochshorn (2015) points out the discrepancies in system building, noting that what began as a framework for “birth to five” apparently changed, by definition provided by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), to a framework of “birth to eight” (p. 99). She further argues that such philosophical battles often eliminate the best interests of children, who are supposedly at the centre of such issues. On the contrary, Nepal has separate governing bodies in charge of pre and post-natal health, care and development of young children and ECE. Therefore the acronyms “ECD (early childhood development), ECCD (early childhood care and development) or ECDC (early childhood development and care)” are allocated to the varying services relating to health, nutrition and development for children under the age of three (Tripathee, 2004; Shrestha, K. 2004). It was not until the late 1940s and early 1950s that the term ‘education’ in early childhood began to permeate these documents and a notion of preschool education captured the minds of policy makers (Shrestha, P., 2006). This resulted in the development of yet another set of acronyms such as ECED (early childhood education and development), ECCE (early childhood care and education)

and ECEC (early childhood education and care). K. Shrestha (2004) informs that acronyms such as “ECC-SGD (early childhood care for survival, growth and development), DCC (day care centres) and CCC (child care centres)” are allocated to organisations that serve children in different areas (p. 87). The government enterprise for children under the age of three currently runs under the acronym ECD (early childhood development); the term ‘education’ is omitted for political purposes since the education sector falls under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education and Sports. The ECD sector is supervised by the Ministry of Women, Children and Social Welfares, managed and operated by the Department of Women and Children (DOWC) (MOWCSW, 2015). “Early care and education”, or ECCE, is available for children “aged 36 – 59 months and is overseen by the MOES and DOE but is not mandatory...”

(The World Bank/SABER Country Report, 2013, p. 5).

The World Bank report draws attention to the fact that the Education Act of 1971 identifies two forms of early childhood care and education (p. 5). One form offers pre-school classes for children between the ages of four and five through fee paying private and free public sectors, whilst the other is targeted at children below the age of four and is usually “community based” and free. The centres “receive technical support from the DOE, the executive department of the MOES and the District Education Offices (DEOs)” (p. 5). In the recent SSRP extension plan (2014/15), early childhood education relating to children above the age of four has been furnished with yet another acronym: ECED or “early childhood education and development” (MOE, 2014, p. 2). These multitudinous acronyms and designations exude ambiguity and result in a lack of uniformity in services for children. The acronyms segregate children between the birth and the age of five or six into different categories, making it extremely challenging to develop appropriate early childhood educational policies. Besides, the acronyms could also lead to misperceptions and misinterpretation, as well as fragmentation of the terms care, development and education, especially when the literature suggests that all these areas are principally intertwined and integrated features of a holistic early childhood developmental programme (Shrestha, K., 2004; Woodhead, 2006). Groot (2009) informs that there are “gaps in the provisions” as services for three and four year-olds

emphasise academic content with little in “terms of health and nutrition”, whilst services for younger children lack “early stimulation” (p. 59). I argue that before universalising the contents and features of ECE in developing or developed countries, it is important to consider cultural aspects of the active nature of young children and their immediate environments and relationships in respective ecosystems.

Despite the broad consensus that development and learning for most children below the age of six is inadvertently tied to universal theories and philosophies that reiterate high quality provisions for education and care through play and other active methodologies, I argue that cultural, social, economic and political values and variations in many other contexts do not share similar premises. For example, many Nepali families still live in extended households where child-rearing is a shared responsibility and many young children often learn several skills from such families (Arnold et al., (2000). For example, Arnold et al. (2000) state that:

[i]n all the villages some parents pointed to indicators routinely used for discussing early development in the formal ECD world their children’s physical growth and capacities, their progress in language, their interactions with other people and their growth in understanding, generally with an emphasis on the development of work related skills.

(Arnold et al., 2000, p. 41)

Likewise, if approaches are to encompass social, emotional, cognitive and physical aspects of development within a carefully designed curricula and environments, there has to be uniformity in delivery systems as well as access to resources and funding (Diamond et al., 2013). I agree, however, that the term “early childhood education” (ECE) should be all-inclusive and educational approaches/methodologies for young children should be based on theoretical and empirical research in ECE, child development and pedagogical content that assimilates assessment and objectives within the curriculum. I therefore emphasise that some of the acronyms assigned in Nepali policies dilute the value of such assimilated approaches because they compartmentalise ‘development and care’ and often exclude ‘education’ as a primary component. Similarly, in my personal experience, many parents, misunderstood/misinterpreted the terms ‘early’ and ‘education’ in acronyms such as ECE and ECEC assuming that

‘early’ in education signified “educating children before time” (Thapa, 2010, p. 4). With ambiguities such as these, the ECE sector in Nepal faces numerous problematic issues with regards to equity and quality.

The discussion above denotes that ECE, in the two contexts of Nepal and the United States, is certainly diverse relative to histories, ideologies, attitudes, beliefs and policymaking. Both these contexts are striving however for the same end product, boosting human development and increasing economic proficiency through ECE policies that often productise or commoditise children. Achieving equity and quality in child services is one of the primary goals in both these contexts. Surprisingly, many of the issues that these two very diverse contexts face are, in some respects, comparable. For example, ECE in the United States is a high level political strategy to improve outcomes for children and families, and the overall economy of the nation. Several federally funded institutions strive to narrow the intergenerational poverty gap by providing childcare services to impoverished families. However, these services often face numerous controversies with regards to quality and accessibility. Affordability and sustainability of services remain problematic as increasing demands are made in times of escalating levels of poverty. Other sources cite shortage of funds as an impending crisis plaguing ECE in the United States (Barnett and Hustedt, 2011). According to Barnett and Hustedt (2011) funding provided by federal and state governments is insufficient and “reaches barely half of young children in poverty” (p. 1). Watkins (2013) further confirms these inequalities, stating the “rise in wealth inequality” as compounding the issue of funding, hence compromising access and quality of childcare services (p. 4). Barnett and Hustedt (2011) also note that:

[t]axpayer-funded early care and education has grown dramatically in recent years, resulting in a multiplicity of programs and funding streams at the federal, state, and local levels. Each has its own mission, regulatory requirements, and constituency. Taken together, they form what has been called a “patchwork quilt” or “non-system” of early care and education. They are seldom coordinated with each other, the result being that opportunities to broadly raise program quality and access, work collaboratively to gain efficiencies, and otherwise maximize the public’s investment are invariably lost.

(Barnett and Hustedt, 2011, p. 3)

Likewise, Nepali ECE is severely affected due to the lack of proper funding bodies. As mentioned earlier, the MOES and DOE are the two government agencies that administer, manage and fund ECE services in the country with assistance from donor entities such as UNICEF and UNESCO. According to Groot (2009) “wealth is what determines access” for children in Nepal. Due to lack of funding, facilitators/teachers are underpaid and therefore quality in services remains insurmountable. For example, Groot states that “even a modest monthly salary of 3000 NRS is often not reached” (p. 24). Several other issues surround ECE services due to shortage of funds from the government such as absence of infrastructure and play facilities, minimal resources, and little or no training and professional development for teachers. Shiwakoti (2008) states that the funding trend for education in Nepal is “inadequate” when compared to revenues or the “gross national product” (p. 84). Likewise, the UNESCO report (2011) states that the budget allocation for ECE between the years 2005 and 2010 “represented one per cent of the education budget” (p. 16). Aryal (2013) additionally informs that some village committees utilise *muthi dan* (donations) from visitors and ask locals to collect funds for ECE services, but these practices are limited and often not sustainable. I therefore argue that structural and systemic issues such as lack of funding for ECE sectors results in failure to provide equitable and high quality services therefore aggravating inequalities.

Wood et al. (2011), citing Brown (2006), states that equity issues should be tackled using two separate approaches; horizontal and vertical. According to them, horizontal equity ensures “equal treatment of those who are equal”, whilst vertical equity could be “unequal but equitable treatment of those who are not equal” (p. 10). Application of horizontal equity levers could start the process by distributing ECE services to all children, whilst vertical equity levers would prioritise need, especially for children from vulnerable contexts. Drawing on the theoretical premises of vertical equity, Vesely and Crampton (2004) further highlight issues that create concurrent inequalities. They suggest that most governments are “focused on measuring the more straightforward concept of horizontal equity” or in other words “equal treatment for

equals” rather than considering vertical equity and creating need-based funding for “differently situated children” (p. 114). Their analysis of the funding conundrum includes a comparative study of four diversely situated states in the United States, namely: Wisconsin, New York, California and Texas. Their findings suggest that Wisconsin provides “categorical aid for students in poverty” through early childhood education and extended day kindergartens (p. 122). Wisconsin was the only state that had “state-funded preschool or pre-kindergarten programs beginning as early as 1898”, and today it comprises of Head Start agencies, childcare programmes, County Birth to 3 programmes, kindergartens (4-K), special needs programmes and food programmes (Gilliam and Zigler, 2001, p. 442). Comprehensive care for young children and support for families is provided by the Department of Children and Families (DCF) through programmes such as Young Star that aims to “improve the quality of child care for Wisconsin children”, besides other accredited and private institutions (DCF, 2014). Vesely and Crampton (2004) also confirm that in recent years the state agencies of Wisconsin appear to be geared towards achieving vertical equity as well. For example, several governmental departments related to children and families conduct state-wide studies to discern perceptual quality in early childhood services in separate counties, and regularly devise projects to resolve equity issues related to quality and access (Riley, 2002; Roach, 2004; The Annie E. Casey foundation, 2014). Likewise, other documents validate implementation of monitoring and evaluation projects at regular intervals to assess the quality of childcare and early education services. The government has proposed several initiatives to counter adverse effects of inequality across the state. For example, Wisconsin’s Early Childhood Excellence Initiative provides “technical assistance” and “public grants” across the state to “centres serving predominantly low-income families” (Roach, 2007, p. 3). Roach (2007) confirms the success of the initiative after just 15 months of implementation, and reports that “classroom environments became increasingly supportive of children’s learning” (p. 3).

I assert that the Nepali government is also more concerned with horizontal than vertical equity. For example, expansion of ECE services to remote areas of the country was one such initiative to overcome horizontal inequities and to increase accessibility for marginalised groups of children. However, simply providing access does not fulfil

equity needs, nor does it justify quality criteria. UNICEF (2011) states that uniformity of ECE services is lacking and that there is neither systematic data to inform quality levels of such services nor any studies to examine the success of such centres. Indicators such as enrolment statistics relative to diversity/ethnicity, gender, disability and socio-economy are not recorded methodically therefore “provides little useful information about equity as it does not take into account the total population” of children under the age of four from diverse groups (UNICEF, 2011, p. 27). The evaluation report adds that:

[d]espite the policy emphasis on extending services to disadvantaged groups and the availability of some education statistics disaggregated by social group (Dalit, Janajati, or other) no specific strategies have been adopted for tracking and targeting these groups, or the communities in which they live, with funds for ECD services. Funding allocated to ECD through the SSRP is provided to districts according to a quota system, by which the district may distribute funds to VDCs and municipalities at its discretion for the establishment of ECD centers in those areas. Although some districts may make efforts to target these funds toward VDCs/municipalities categorized as disadvantaged, others do not.

(UNICEF, 2011, p. 27)

Besides funding abnormalities and challenges, many Nepali children suffer from endemic poverty that is transmitted through intergenerational socio-economy of families (UNICEF, 2010). It has been estimated that “more than a third” of Nepali children live below the national poverty line (UNICEF, 2010, p. 1). According to a number of studies, inclusion of poor and ethnically marginalised children in ECE services is virtually absent, therefore escalating vertical inequities (Khanal, 2015). Likewise, the National Campaign for Education-Nepal (NCE, 2013) states that children belonging to “migrating communities, slum dwellers, street children, third gender and children of seasonal labourers” are not accounted for, highlighting the necessity to address such vertical inequities (p. 11). I argue that exclusionary practices are apposite to equity and quality since equitable and high quality ECE comprises of equal access and education through culturally and developmentally appropriate and child

friendly/holistic approaches. As previously mentioned, widespread disparities and hierarchies are akin to Nepali contexts and although public policies are prepared to militate against these inconsistencies, socio-cultural/political dogmas still threaten implementation at different levels of the ecological system. For example, exclusions occur at micro-levels in many ethnic families owing to cultural/traditional values and beliefs, which are unaccounted for (Shields and Rappleye, 2010). Similarly, inclusion of children with disabilities in childcare services is rare due to parental unawareness and lack of special education facilitators/trainings. Literature sources from UNICEF (2003) inform that a Special Education Council was set up in 1973 followed by the formation of a Social Welfare Council in 1977 to supervise and co-ordinate programmes for disabled children and people (p. 13). However, lack of funds, extreme poverty, proper training and idiosyncratic beliefs surrounding disability in many cultural/societal contexts, prevent children from accessing childcare facilities even to this day. For example, there are several centres in the country (and I have visited some) where children with mild to moderate cerebral palsy or similar conditions are detained. These children are ostracised from family and communities due to falsified beliefs that turn these children into demonised beings. I argue that despite commendable targets and policy plans, Nepali ECE still remains riddled with gaps at various levels. Although expansion efforts of ECE may have quelled horizontal inequities to a certain degree, maintaining quality through curricula content and teacher education and creating inclusive approaches for marginalised children, are still inadequate in several districts of Nepal (Aryal, 2013; Rajbhandari, 2013). Therefore, I assert that equity can only be achieved if both vertical and horizontal inequities are systematically addressed by providing sufficient funding and redefining policies to fulfil immediate and long-term quality needs of the ECE sector.

Concerns of equity and quality are globally debated issues. I argue however that perceptions of both these issues are socially/culturally constructed and highly influenced by socio-economy and politics. As discussed above, the Nepali government's effort to curb horizontal inequity resulted in expansions of ECE services without much interest vested on quality. On the other hand, the Wisconsin state agency also opted for expansion but at the same time also proposed creating a task force to

tackle quality issues (Roach, 2007). The primary goals of the task force were to “improve the quality of childcare in Wisconsin, particularly for children from low-income families” and to bring awareness amongst parents so they could make “informed child care choices” (p. 4). One of the major findings of the task force indicated that “Wisconsin was paying the same amount of money to programmes that provided high and low quality care for children from low-income families”. This discovery urged the task force to take action in order to eliminate the apparent inequity (p. 68). The initiatives taken by the task force resulted in the formation of several projects that strived to uplift quality in childcare services. For example, the Grow in Quality project, conducted in collaboration with the Wisconsin childcare, was one such study funded by the Wisconsin department of workforce development. The primary objective of Grow in Quality was to develop a state-wide rating system for childcare services and to ascertain the impact on quality when funding was reduced (Roach, 2007). However, several research studies concur that equity issues are not resolved by simply infusing quality services, as equity is achieved only if the delicate balance between access, opportunity and quality are continuously maintained (Espinoza, 2007; Sparks and Edwards, 2010; Britto et al., 2011). Furthermore, issues of access and quality have become the subject of contemporary global debates due to the fact that most developed and developing nations have included equity as an essential agenda in policies for young children’s early education. Despite these initiatives, reports suggest that several developed nations have documented poor progress on grounds of equity with Fiske and O’Grady (2000) noting that the United States were no exception. They report that:

[d]espite relatively strong overall numbers on the six target dimensions, the U.S. educational system is still characterized by continuing, and in some cases growing, disparities among various subsets of students in the distribution of educational resources and in student persistence and achievement. As in virtually every other country, academic achievement in the United States correlates closely with socioeconomic status. Other inequities relate to the racial and ethnic background of students, gender, geography, mother tongue, and immigrant status.

(Fiske and O'Grady, 2000, p. 35)

Likewise, Kagan and Reid (2008) suggest that the current discrepancies with regard to equity are primarily due to the “desire to expand access” to “high-quality programs for all children” as this requires standardisation and uniformity in the services. They further comment that the system of early education appears to be a “collection of fragmented policies and programs” formed to thwart economic challenge (p. 43). This therefore automatically eliminates children from different ethnicities and cultural backgrounds. Recent reports by the Organisation for Economic Development (OECD) place the United States much “below the mean with regards to equity” (OECD, 2012, p. 6). Reports of several different pro-equity acts being filed to address such issues have also surfaced in current research. I argue that the intentions behind national policies can be varied in content and desired outcomes. For example, the primary intention of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001, created by President Bush, was to “narrow the achievement gap between minority and nonminority children, especially between disadvantaged students and their more affluent classmates” (Fusarelli, 2004, p. 73). This act met with several hurdles, in particular from early childhood educators who despised the “NCLB-initiated focus on academic skills” that coerced younger children to be tested for readiness earlier than necessary (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, 2006). In contrast, equity on the socio-cultural level is being sought through “multiculturalism and anti-bias curriculum frameworks” that aim to “address issues of culture and diversity” (Ponciano and Shabazian, 2012, p. 23). This highlights ongoing tensions between “one size fits all” approaches to policy making and the more culturally nuanced programmes that are responsive to families and communities.

In conclusion, it can be noted that direct and precise implementation of public policies and the periodic formulation of strategic plans to strengthen quality services, have continuously shaped and transformed the landscape of ECE all over the world. Further plans to address both horizontal and vertical inequities should be prioritised, especially in developing nations such as Nepal. It was noted that the Early Childhood Advisory Council of Wisconsin is committed to supporting children and families by

implementing several strategic systems to assess ECE, as well as generating funds and resources and providing professional development opportunities to facilitators. Therefore, if developing countries were to follow similar approaches there may be hope for achieving both vertical and horizontal equity. I argue that these reformative policies and practices have reconfirmed the importance of addressing structural inequities that exist within and beyond education. However, confronting perceivable horizontal and vertical inequities requires not only propaganda and public awareness, but also emancipation from supra-national/international power lords. Sometimes policies that aim to resolve issues of equity and inequities are inadvertently responsible for creating deeper chasms in socio-political constructs as they resonate with an undeniable presence of differences in an array of conditions such as gender, race, socio-economy, caste, creed and colour. Resolving such issues (with regards to ECE and care) may therefore not be as straightforward as uplifting poverty through public policy reforms. Shields and Rappleye (2008) argue that endorsing agendas for development within the “narrow vision of national identity” could create other challenges, since “issues of equity” are often pushed to the margins in developing countries (p. 271). Other factors such as a sluggish economy, political unrest and widespread doctrines of cultural segregations, all influence educational and public policies, sometimes rendering them inadequate or inappropriate. Since equity, inequity and poverty are terms that identify the social, political and cultural climate of one particular context, these terms exemplify and reiterate the preconceived state ideology that is predominantly developed through superficial and perceived realities in developed as well as developing countries. Unless the terms are defined, compared and contrasted through comprehensive, culturally and socio-politically situated dialogues, policy analysis and radical investigations, the clarity of development agendas, policy documents, and implementation processes to curb inequities may remain ambiguous. These issues are explored further in the following chapters, focusing specifically on Nepal.

Chapter 3

Methodology and Methods

3.1 Introduction

This chapter describes the design and methodology adopted for this research to achieve the aims and objectives stated in Chapter 1. The first section of this chapter discusses the methodological pathways and research design used in the study. This section will describe stages by which the methodology was implemented and provide justifications for how the research design was developed. The second section will specify details of the context and participants recruited for the study. In the third section, I will list all the instruments and tools that were applied in the study and rationalise their usage in gathering the desired data. The fourth section will outline the procedure or methods that were applied for data collection. Section 5 will discuss how the data were analysed with details relative to the use of systems and tools for the analysis. In the final section, I will discuss the ethical considerations and detail a few problems and limitations that ensued during the research process of this study. I will also provide a timeline to present the completion of each stage of the study.

3.2 Methodological pathways and research design

I argue that the research design and methodology for any social research is embedded in ideologies relating to values, biases and nuances of perceived social phenomena, social realities and narratives of lived experiences. This research will present the personal values, perceived and lived realities of local stakeholders, policymakers and practitioners of early childhood education in Nepal. The principal aim of this study is to deconstruct and critically analyse two distinct terms (equity and quality), continuously echoed in global discourses of policy and polity related to early childhood education. The research aims to present varied meanings of these two terms occurring in local language at different ecological levels of urban and semi-urban contexts of Kathmandu,

Nepal. The research design follows a qualitative and interpretive social inquiry from a post-structuralist position. Research tools consist of participant interviews (semi-structured), in-context focus groups and elite interviews. Based on critical theory, the data analysis will utilise thematic coding. This will align data to identify occurrences in local language and to deconstruct the concepts of ‘equity’ and ‘quality’ that appear in current policy texts for early childhood education. Analysis through thematic coding was adopted to organise, reduce and define the recurring themes through verbal data transcriptions. Critical theory was adopted on the basis of the ontology of current situations relative to policies and their implementation and to suit the nature of the research questions that were framed. The epistemological basis of this research study is to define meanings of the terms ‘equity and quality’ in local language through a process of deconstruction. Further explanations for utilising critical theory and thematic coding analysis are incorporated in the following sections. The following section describes the methodology and the design chosen for the research study.

3.2 a. Prologue: The ubiquity of value-laden methodology in social research

The research design follows a qualitative and interpretive social inquiry through a poststructural position. I assert that values affect positionality, especially that of a poststructuralist researcher. Exercising rigour is therefore an expected disposition when conducting poststructuralist research projects. I will relate to the value-laden nature of social research to defend my choice of positionality as that of a poststructuralist. According to Sikes (2004) methodology is related to the “theory of getting knowledge” through “methods or procedures” best suited to collecting data that will “provide the evidence basis for the construction of knowledge” (p. 16). She further remarks that:

Methodology is concerned with the description and analysis of research methods rather than with the actual, practical use of those methods. Methodological work is, therefore, philosophical, thinking, work. A slight complication is introduced by the way in which the word, methodology, is also used to denote the overall approach to a particular research project, to the overarching strategy that is adopted. (Sikes, 2004, p. 16)

Likewise, Clough and Nutbrown (2008) suggest that methodology is “to explain and justify the particular methods used in a given study” (p. 18). They further define that methodology is the research itself, as it validates the research study regarding its purpose and researcher positionality. Clough and Nutbrown (2008) also state that methodology in any social research can be “pervasive and persuasive” by nature especially when the study is grounded in politically influenced positionalities (p. 162). For example, Ang (2014) refers to current policy trends in early education being largely driven by a “productivity agenda” suggesting societal values based on perceived economic gains. These perspectives urge researchers to revisit personal values to study these policy contradictions for the benefit of children, and suggest that societal norms and values are also integral influences that affect the design of any given social or educational research.

Clough and Nutbrown (2008) inform that researcher positionality is a justification for adopting methodologies as it is “rooted in our own personal values” (p. 80), which then inform our “ethical and moral responses to problems and challenges” that plague our societies (Clough and Nutbrown, 2008, p. 80). Gewirtz and Cribb (2006) citing Hammersley (2000) also expound the relationship of values within social research as being inescapable as “the goal of producing knowledge is itself a value commitment” (p. 144). They further add that “a researcher’s personal values, including their beliefs about what is of benefit to society should influence their selection of topics and questions”. They suggest that all researchers should “protect the interests and welfare” of participants which leads towards making “value judgements” and ethical considerations in the methodology (p. 144). In view of this statement, I argue that value positions are not fixed and are culturally situated, therefore need to be understood from different cultural perspectives as well. Wilson (1992) argues that explaining “educational phenomena without using the language of value” is a challenging task and “perhaps impossible” (p. 352). Furthermore, there is broad agreement that social research, especially involving education, originates from values adopted by different cultural and social constructs (Meglino and Ravlin, 1998; Greenbank, 2003; Gewirtz and Cribb, 2006). For example, this particular research study stems from my personal values and assumptions regarding equity and quality in ECE and how these concepts

are understood from within different cultural contexts. My observations of distinctly similar issues of incoherence and dissonance relative to policy texts incorporating these terms, as opposed to the lived experiences of participants in two diverse social contexts, are some of the key features that underpin the critical aspect of the qualitative methodology chosen for this poststructuralist, interpretive social inquiry. I further assert that methodology is in itself a value judgement, especially when the research is designed to answer questions relative to perceived societal discord. For example, the questions this research asks (Box 1) are based on my notions of equity and quality in early childhood education and policy and the value-based worthiness of early childhood education in current times. The questions were designed to deduce perceptual and local meanings to these terms and to develop a justifiable argument relative to the inclusion of equity and quality in early childhood educational policies in Nepali contexts. The questions reflect my personal values as well as values that reflected through societal norms and ideologies.

Box 1 – Research Questions

1. What are the perceptions of quality and equity in early childhood services among practitioners and policy/polity heads in Nepal?
2. To what extent do these perceptions justify the inclusion of equity regarding quality in policy papers for early childhood education in Nepal?

I also argue that research naturally begins with an epistemological quest to know or to learn more about situations and ideologies that resonate or persist in our minds as anomalous. This research project reflects my personal mission to reveal meanings through perceptions of teachers and policy heads regarding equity and quality in early childhood education in Nepal. Since my primary objective is to pursue meaning through perceptions and expressions in language, it was inevitable that I would take a poststructuralist stance, since my role in this research project is that of a “producer, rather than a finder of knowledge” (Lee, 1992, p.3). In the following sub-section, I will extrapolate definitions and rationalizations for adopting this positionality and how it is inextricably linked to social inquiry.

3.2 b. Poststructuralist research and social inquiry

The theoretical orientation for this research study is poststructuralism and the focus is on the process of a “social enquiry” in the premises of critical theory (King et al., 1995). This research project aims to understand and allocate local meaning to the terms equity and quality in early childhood education through the lived experiences of participants. Furthermore, this study aspires to deconstruct contextual languages and social realities to attach culturally situated meaning to the terms that appear in policy documents relating to early childhood education in Nepal. These aims and objectives therefore suggest the need for a research design comprising of both fieldwork and secondary data collection activities, which, according to Whitehead (2005), are the two essential components of poststructural research within a framework of social enquiry.

Poststructuralist research is defined “through the theory of knowledge and language” (Agger, 1991, p. 112). Poststructuralist methodologies aspire to deconstruct qualitative data through historical and perceptual local language and meaning-making. Thompson (2007) asserts that poststructuralist research is an enabling process, especially for under-represented groups “at a practical level, while disrupting the hierarchies and binaries that go unquestioned at a theoretical level” (p. 6). Likewise, Norris (2004) suggests that “deconstruction is avowedly poststructuralist” and social inquiry refuses to “accept the idea of structure” (Norris, 2004, p. 3). Hence this study adopts a process of poststructuralism and aspires to deconstruct data relative to the state of equity in early childhood education policies through a qualitative study of perceptions and meaning-making in local languages. According to Saussure (1857) “the state of the language” is continuously evolving and final meanings are never consistent nor are they ever constant (Saussure, cited by Radford and Radford, 2005, p. 67) hence “meaning is generated through differences rather than through identity” (Adams St. Pierre, 2000, p. 481). Norris (2004), citing Saussure, further exemplifies this notion and states that:

Meanings are bound up, according to Saussure, in a system of relationship and difference that effectively determines our habits of thought and perception. Far from providing a ‘window’ on reality or

(to vary the metaphor) a faithfully reflecting mirror, language brings along with it a whole intricate network of established significations. In his view, our knowledge of things is insensibly structured by the systems of code and convention which alone enable us to classify and organize the chaotic flux of experience. There is simply no access to knowledge except by way of language and other, related orders of representation

(Norris, 2004, p. 5)

Similarly, Derrida's thoughts on language, as cited by Adams St. Pierre (2000) suggest "language works not because there is an identity between a sign and a thing, not because of presence, but because there is a difference, an absence" (p. 482). Nepal is a multilingual country, with more than 126 languages actively being spoken even today. Yadava (2007) informs that Nepali, the official language, holds the "power, recognition and prestige while, as corollary, the remaining minority languages are impoverished and marginalized" (p. 2). This research study aims at deconstructing some of these local languages and meaning making through social inquiry, therefore, attempting to centralise participant perspectives and to "give voice to those whose opinions are rarely heard" (Alldred, 1998, p. 150). Humes and Bryce (2003) suggest that policy research in education and poststructuralist positions could pose challenges that require "both theoretical sophistication and robust engagement with issues that matter..." since "policy makers operate at different levels and bring a range of perspectives" to solve problems presented to them. These perspectives are influenced by the level of "their own education and training" while practitioners have their own agendas to resolve educational issues (p. 175, 183). I assert that languages could also influence perspectives and meaning making as multiple intricacies within languages are capable of producing "sameness and differences" that represent reality (Norris, 2004, p. 5).

Poststructuralist research is deeply intertwined with studying idiosyncrasies that are related to language and its role in socio-cultural arenas. Adams St. Pierre (2000) states that deconstruction in poststructuralist research makes evident "how language operates to produce very real material, and damaging structures in the world" (p. 481) and it "serves as a powerful tool for critiquing any structure" (p. 483). She further argues that

meaning can be deferred therefore “we can never know exactly what something means” hence “philosophy can never be the same” and through poststructuralist research we are able to “examine our own complicity in the maintenance of social justice” (p. 484). This research study aims to use interview techniques to collect data. The transcripts of these interviews would produce recognisable and subjective views of the participants in their local language, therefore allocating local meaning to the terms ‘equity’ and ‘quality’ in early childhood. Therefore applying a poststructuralist lens for this research study is imperative to validate and fulfil the objectives stated in Chapter 1.

I further argue that social inquiry and poststructuralist research go hand in hand, as both stances attempt to move beyond just scratching the surface of social realities and human phenomena. Greene (2006) suggests that methodologies that incorporate social inquiry actively appoint “philosophical assumptions and stances, inquiry logics, guidelines for practice and socio-political commitments” (p. 93). Greene (2006) further states that social inquiry “espouses a realist view of the social world”. Social inquiry allows for interpretive questioning and methodology relative to “effects or outcomes” and “experience or social intervention” (p. 94). She also expounds that social inquiry allows researchers to “recognize the intrinsic complexity of human phenomena” and social inquirers aim to empirically conceptualize these complexities through methodological pathways (p. 758). Greene (2012) further states that:

This empirical stance seeks understanding of as much of the whole as is possible, with a focus on the contextual dynamics of experience, toward key conceptual and (for some) actionable insights for the contexts studied, with possible applicability to other spaces and places. The language of this stance is lived experience, contextuality, understanding, particularity, and meaningfulness

(Greene, 2012, p. 759)

Likewise, King et al., (1995) suggest that social inquiry is a “dynamic process” that “occurs within a stable structure of rules” (p. 12). Similarly, Whitehead (2005) argues that social inquiry helps researchers better “understand the cultural system in which he or she is studying” (p. 2). He further states that social inquiry is highly valuable in the

study of “socio-cultural contexts, processes, and meanings within cultural systems” and the methodology would entail an “interpretive, reflexive, and a constructivist process” (p. 4). Reeves, Kupur and Hodges (2008) further define that social inquiry usually brings about “rich, holistic insights into people’s views and actions” as the researcher aims to “get inside the way each group of people sees the world” (p. 512). Wood (2013) suggests that social inquiry includes “exploration and analysis of people’s values and perspectives” as well as “consideration of the ways in which people make decisions and participate in social action” (p. 22). Dunning (2010) further expounds that such designs urge investigators to examine the “natural variation in social and political processes” in an attempt to “identify and analyse real world situations” (p. 277, 281). I assert that these are necessary components in poststructuralist social research as they inform and enable narratives that draw out “complex relations between knowledge about people and systems of power” (Biggs and Powell, 2001, p. 7). In the following sub-section, I will highlight the qualitative and interpretive nature of this research project and present a justification for adopting this particular methodology.

3.2 c. Qualitative and interpretive research

Cohen et al., (2009) suggest that methodology describes the process of how the approach to methods is applied in the inquiry. Likewise, Babbie (2007) proposes that methodology is closely related to epistemology and is basically about “finding out” (p. 16). Denzin and Lincoln, (2007) suggest qualitative studies help researchers acknowledge the “humanistic virtues of their subjective, interpretive approach” when studying about social realities and human life (p. 2). They further add that:

Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world. They turn the world into a series of representations, including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and memos to the self. At this level, qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret phenomenon in terms of the meanings people bring to them.

(Denzin and Lincoln, 2007, p. 6)

The term 'interpretive' therefore implies critical inquiry to investigate politically bound policy terms through perceptions and meaning-making in local languages. Qualitative methods also allow researchers to "understand enduring challenges and issues that are multifaceted and complex" (Leko, 2014, p. 276). This particular research study aims to address issues relating to equity and quality in early childhood education in a culturally diverse society. According to recent research, equity in early education occurs when all children have access to an environment where they are able to be successful "academically, linguistically, culturally, socially and psychologically" (Rios et al., 2009, p. 3). The policy documents for early childhood education in Nepal mention 'equity' and 'quality' as two of the indicators of national wealth, especially if they are applied in education from the earliest level (Ministry of Education and Sports, Nepal, 2003/09). I argue that the presence of these concepts in policy texts determines governmental awareness of the plurality in the current socio-economic condition of the country and the urgent need to address social inequities. In order to further understand the significance of equity and quality as indicators in a country that is rife with social inequities as well as social inequalities, I therefore adopted the interpretive research design. The need to critically examine current and local ideologies regarding social realities amidst social inequities and social inequalities, especially in early childhood education, is a primary focus of this study.

Sallee and Flood (2012) argue that qualitative research is context-centered, allowing close interaction between researcher and participants. These interactions therefore help "to develop a more holistic understanding of the setting" (p. 139), and "allow researchers to respond to changes on the ground to capture meaningful data" (p. 140). Policy texts are continually on shifting grounds and so are perceptive lens applied by citizens in micro-societies. These perceptions are repeatedly influenced by personal values, ideals and beliefs as well as by ideological shifts in political scenarios. A qualitative methodology is therefore appropriate for this particular research study, since the main purpose is to develop "rich descriptive narratives of everyday experiences" of

what the participants see, hear and feel regarding implementation of equity and quality in early childhood education and their representation in policy texts. These narratives would then inform what normally “remains hidden in numerical anonymity” in quantitative studies (Sallee and Flood, 2012, p. 140). Furthermore, the use of qualitative approaches would not only inform on the presence of relevant issues, but could be used “to help narrow the gap between the research and practice/policy” as well as provide “suggestions for speaking to multiple audiences” (Sallee and Flood, 2012, p. 138).

3.2 d. Critical theory, social inquiry and poststructuralist research

Embracing the premises of a “critical perspective” this social inquiry aims to “crystallize around an interest in two related questions: ‘what is really going on?’ and ‘how come?’” (Troyna, 1994, p.72; Thapa, 2013). Cohen et al., (2009) describe the purpose of critical theory as a process of understanding “situations and phenomena” in order to change them. They further express that research studies based on critical theory are mostly “emancipatory” and aim to “redress inequality and to promote individual freedoms within a democratic society” (p. 26). This particular research study focuses on the perceptions of participants who represent a diverse democratic society to discern meanings assigned to the terms ‘equity’ and ‘quality’ in policy texts relating to early childhood education. In this sub-section, I will provide a rationale for adopting this particular theory and how it is closely associated with the premises of social inquiry and poststructuralist research so as to validate the chosen research methodology, design and positionality.

Kincheloe (1995) suggests that “to be critical is to assume that humans are active agents” of a social construct. He further adds that discernment of the self with the “knowledge of the world leads to action” (p. 75). This research study considers that participants are active agents in their particular social contexts and that they have considerable knowledge of the world, as well as being aware of constitutional rights and privileges of both adults and children. Policy texts confirm provisions for equitable and high quality services for all children (UNICEF, 2012). Past and current research in

equity and quality in early childhood education, however, points towards lack of services at different levels, therefore implying the presence of inequities. For example, Nepali early childhood services appear to suffer from inequities relative to access, resources, pedagogical instruction/content and teacher quality (Shrestha, 2006; Ravens, 2009; Gautam, 2013). The presence of such inequities validates either the “existence of oppression” (Kincheloe, 1995, p. 74) or as expressed by Sultana (1995) “an empty absence that, in a matter of time, could and should become full of words” (p. 114). As mentioned earlier, this research study aims to deconstruct concepts formed when defining the words ‘equity’ and ‘quality’ in the language of policy texts through the perceptions of participants. Critical examination of gaps and absences in meaning-making of policy texts, especially of the words equity and quality in local languages, is therefore of utmost importance for authenticating this research. Sultana (1995) explains that the application of a critical lens almost always tends to magnify the “silences or gaps” thus the task of a critique is “not to cure or complete; but to explain why it is as it is” (Sultana, 1995, p. 114). Commenting further on the absence or the silence in social narratives, Sultana adds that:

To privilege silence is to realize that text is ideology inasmuch as it attempts to reflect the world in a coherent and totalizing manner. It is to admit, in the spirit of modern philosophy, the limits of reason and thus to open the way for the valuing of silence, unknown and unrespected by idealist and positivist philosophy alike. The privileging of silence is a strategy for recognizing the status of the ethnographic text as a construct, and hence to render it immediately a candidate for deconstruction. (Sultana, 1995, p. 115)

I argue that these silences or gaps consist of hegemonic nuances and are present due to historical and situated circumstances at meta-levels of societies. These are “governed by hidden underlying structures” underpinning the ontology of socio-politics in most democratic societies (Neuman, 2006, p. 105). Leonardo (2004) states that critical social theory “begins with the premise that criticism targets systematic and institutional arrangements” that eventually would enable such data to emerge. Likewise, McLaren and Giarelli (1995) inform that critical theory positions knowledge as being “socially constructed, contextual and dependent on interpretation” (p. 2). Issues of equity and

quality relative to early childhood education therefore become hegemonically problematised through socially constructed knowledge, hence becoming the “core of inquiry” (p. 2). I argue that socially constructed knowledge becomes more visible through the use of language and meaning-making and terms such as ‘equity’ and ‘quality’ are often misunderstood and paralleled with ‘equality’, due to the idiosyncratic anomalies present in cultural/linguistic artefacts. For example, my data revealed that many participants had little or no knowledge of a direct meaning for ‘equity’ in Nepali. Some of the discussions led to creating meaning through use of phrases that reflected social justice, equality and empathy. This example highlights the nuances that occur in local language and how meaning can be misinterpreted and therefore how terms in policy texts may become ambiguous. Giroux (1995) suggests that in many instances, the use of language “demystifies how meanings are mobilized in the interests of maintaining economic relations of domination” (p. 26). He further states that “language is assigned the role of critically mediating between the determining force of the economy and the ideological interests” in most capitalistic societies (p. 25). I argue that a critical approach towards delineating hidden meanings will validate the qualitative data collected for this research project, since the primary focus (as stated above) is to deconstruct the meanings of the terms ‘equity’ and ‘quality’ as they appear in policy texts and are interpreted in local languages. In the next section I will present a description of the context and participants chosen for this research project.

3.3 Context and Participants

In this section I will broadly describe the contexts and participants chosen for this research study. The research is based in urban and rural settlements in Kathmandu, Nepal. These settlements were chosen with regards to the diversity offered relative to socio-economic, socio-political systems, and social constructs. The fundamental reason for situating the study in these settings arose from the need to understand discourses relative to equity and quality in early childhood education through the voices of local participants, who live different lives, but have been subjected to the same drivers

through policymaking and implementations. The following section describes the national context (Nepal) in which this research and most of the live data collection is situated.

3.3 a. Urban contexts and participants within Kathmandu Valley

Since this research aims to deconstruct concepts of equity and quality in early childhood education by utilising a poststructuralist lens, it is important to identify local contexts. Specifically, these are comprised of ethnic diversity in languages spoken in the valley, besides the geographical, socio-economic, cultural and political conditions under which ECE has developed. This is because policy and its mediation and implementation are highly influenced by local meaning-making and interpretations pertaining to cultural, social, economic and political conditions. In the sub-sections I will present brief descriptions of the geographical, socio-political/economic background of urban and semi-urban Kathmandu. Subsequently, I will concentrate on developing the background of the chosen contexts based primarily on cultural diversity, ethnic languages and cultural artefacts.

Kathmandu Valley is the capital of Nepal. Nepal is a landlocked country sandwiched between the two Asian superpowers of India and China. Kathmandu city has been vastly transformed into a globalised urban milieu during the past 20 years, despite political unrest and a shifting economy (Pyakuryal and Suvedi, 2000; Subedi, 2010;). According to Subedi (2010) the urban population of the city has “grown more than five times over the past five decades” with the dominant age distribution being 15–59 (p. 186). He further informs that since “1769 Kathmandu has reinforced its political, economic and social power” as the capital of unified Nepal, and to date continues to draw people from places beyond the valley (p. 187). Ethnic diversity is another prominent feature that is relevant to the metropolitan context. Subedi (2010) states that:

Of all the municipalities of the country, Kathmandu is most complex in terms of caste/ethnic composition. Census 2001 enumerated 67 castes/ethnic and/or religious group with significant population living within the metropolitan.

(Subedi, 2010, p. 187)

Shrestha B. K. (2011) describes how medieval Kathmandu was transformed during the rule of the Malla kings, when tiny villages were “connected by roads and fortified by gates and walls” (p. 108). The autocratic Ranas, who ruled the country for an approximate period of 104 years, added further developments. By 1951, the Rana dictators were overthrown by the Shah Kings who established and ruled modern Kathmandu until 2008 when the last king was dethroned during the “second people’s movement” that gained Nepal its democratic federal republic status (Chitrakar et al., 2014, p. 3). Chitrakar et al., (2014) states that Kathmandu is “one of the fastest growing urban regions in South Asia” owing mostly to migration that began during the 10-year Maoist insurgency. Continuous growth in the population has replaced homogeneity in cultural, social and political practices and a multicultural trend with specks of “Westernised” modernity among the “educated middle class” (Toffin, 2010, p. 154). Toffin (2010) also adds that the mixture of “people from different geographical origins” conspicuously stands out, in contrast to the “previous pre-industrial territories based mainly on kinship, ethnic groups and caste hierarchy” (p. 151). He further states that:

A new social fabric is emerging from these settlements, characterized by new collective identities; an achieved status as far as leaders are concerned; social bonds based on a common neighbourhood and shared impoverished economic conditions; and lastly a vital role played by associative life.

Villages are gradually being swallowed up by cities and the construction of houses in the peri-urban areas along new and old roads has already joined up with former separate settlements. Wealthier peasants are progressively abandoning farming to take up other non-manual activities, for instance trade or government employment. All these changes have prompted major sociological breaks and a major decline in the local rural economy.

(Toffin, 2010, p. 151/154)

Lietchy (2003) states that urbanisation impacts are felt massively in education, as socio-economy is continuously shifting, creating huge gaps and disparities among communities in different social contexts. B. M. Acharya (2010) further notes that rapid

urbanisation of the valley has given rise to urban poverty, which forces a large number of city dwellers to live below the poverty line in squalid conditions in areas known as “squatter settlements” or slums. Tanaka (2009) further remarks that numerous children are part of these settlements adding to the heterogeneousness not only in “terms of ethnicity or caste but also in terms of their places of origin, present occupation and income, family structure...” (p. 146). Since the notions of ‘equity’ and ‘quality’ in early childhood education were ambiguous in these contexts, it was necessary to situate the study and data collection in different corners of urban Kathmandu. The contexts identified for this research hence include areas where government and non-government funded early childhood centres operate, as well as areas where privately-funded centres are established for children of middle class families and for daily wage-workers and labourers. Since these areas proved to provide a rich tapestry of ethnicity and diversity in socio-economy, culture and local politics besides languages, I decided to collect most of my data in these contexts.

Participants from urban Kathmandu were randomly chosen based on an initial survey of areas or localities that had existing governmental, non-governmental and private early childhood services. Participants from these areas consisted of early childhood practitioners, heads/principals of centres and local stakeholders, such as parents and members of school management committees. Participants from the Department of Education (DOE) were recruited to represent political establishments and participants from the Centre for Educational Research, Innovation and Development (CERID) and a few INGOs and NGOs were selected to represent educational institutions and aid agencies respectively. Participants from these establishments were requested for individual appointments and focus group meetings. Table 1 in the next page represents the contexts and participants. More details regarding the identification of contexts, recruitment of participants, research tools applied and methods for collecting data are mentioned in the following sections.

Table 3.1

Category	Semi-Urban	Urban	Total
Total number of sites surveyed	6	8	14
Total number of boys attending	103	300	403
Total number of girls attending	52	200	252
Total number of ethnicities and sub-castes among children	5	11	16
Range of age of children	1.5 - 12	2 - 10	
Total number of staff	46 (out of which 18 admin /SMC)	65 (out of which 18 admin)	111
Total number of ethnicities and sub-castes among staff	3	4	7
Level of qualification of Staff	4 – High (MA) 35-medium (BA/BSc) 7-low (High School +)	12 – High 40 – Medium 13 - Low	13 82 16
Range of age of staff	22 – 50+	24 – 46+	NA
Gender of staff	32 female 14 male	59 female 6 male	111

3.3 b. Semi-urban contexts in the outskirts of Kathmandu valley

Although Kathmandu city has expanded and almost outgrown its surface area, there are several small settlements in the outskirts of the bustling city but within the valley that remain untouched. Kathmandu Valley consists of three distinct districts and the

Kathmandu metropolis is considered to be the “urban centre of Nepal” (Pant and Dongol, 2009, p.1). Sparsely populated areas that appear to be rural farming and agricultural land surround each district. According to Pant and Dongol (2009), these settlements mainly consist of families who are unable to purchase land in the city areas due to the escalating costs of real estate and high inflation rates. I identified three such areas in which to collect data for this particular research, approximately an hour’s drive from the city limits, where government-funded early childhood centres were operating. Through the initial survey, it was observed and noted that many families in these areas survived by farming, running small shops and making pottery. Each area was dominated largely by one caste/ethnicity depending on their occupation. For example, most farmers were from the Chhettri or Brahmin caste/class and most potters were from the aboriginal Newari caste. Likewise, there were areas with a large concentration of Tamangs, who also had similar livelihoods. I also observed signs in English and Nepali at the entrances of early childhood centres established by the government and many children greeted me in the English language rather than follow traditional Nepali greetings. The overbearing presence of both English and Nepali (the official language) in most centres was a dominant feature. These led me to reflect on hegemonic practices, which were particularly noticeable in centres supported by outside agencies.

I argue that perceptions of equity and quality in early childhood education are subjective and largely influenced not only by socio-economic conditions, culture and ethnicity among city dwellers, but also by conditions that occur due to spatial disparities. It was therefore imperative to collect valuable insights and data from populations residing in such settlements. Participants from these areas were also randomly selected through the initial survey. Participants consisted of early childhood practitioners, principals/heads of centres, representatives of NGOs and INGOs responsible for funding some of the centres, and local heads of the Village Development Committees (VDC). More information on the recruitment process, research tools and other relevant information is detailed in subsequent sections.

3.3 c. Participants: Recruitment process and methods applied for data collection

As mentioned above, participants for this research consisted of members from both urban and semi-urban communities who were involved in early childhood education. The recruitment process was developed by using an initial sampling survey in different geographical areas that had early childhood facilities in and around the Kathmandu Valley. Neuman (2006) suggests that “purposive sampling” allows the researcher to “collect specific cases” for in-depth study (p. 219, 222) in order to fulfil the requirements of obtaining the representative participants. The sampling survey was utilised to identify localities and participants for focus groups and individual interviews. Patton and Cochran (2002) argue that focus group interviews and discussions are one of the most efficient ways to generate large amounts of qualitative data. Focus groups allow participants to support, discuss, agree or disagree with each other, hence creating a rich tapestry of reciprocal knowledge and topics. The sampling survey was physically administered with the assistance of three graduate students from various colleges in Kathmandu, who visited approximately 14 different areas where early childhood services were provided (private, government and outside agency-funded) to collect data. The form (Appendix 1) entailed details that provided general information about the locality and the early childhood facility for the primary investigator regarding the following:

- Name of the local area
- General population
- Predominant means of livelihood
- Predominant ethnicity of community
- Socio-economic conditions (low/middle/upper middle/affluent)
- Names of the centres visited
- Proximity of the centre from the city (for semi-urban centres)
- Number of children
- Gender, approximate range in age, ethnicities of children attending
- Number of staff,
- Gender and ethnicities of staff,

- Staff training and qualifications (low/high/advanced)
- Parent involvement
- Funding initiatives and
- Specific pedagogy/curriculum (if any).

Request letters for admission into early childhood centres and schools and permission to undertake the survey were developed prior to the survey and sent out to approximately 50 centres within the valley (Appendix 2), 16 of which responded positively. The graduate assistants were instructed to survey seven of the semi-urban localities and seven of the urban localities from the list of 16. The localities were primarily selected because of their diverse geographical, socio-economic and ethnic backgrounds. The research assistants were instructed to hand out the information sheet, in the translated version where required (Appendix 3), to relevant members of the centres to inform them of the upcoming focus groups and individual interviews. The data from the survey was applied to identify three semi-urban and three urban localities with early childhood facilities/centres for recruitment of focus group and individual interview participants. A total of 46 participants from the semi-urban areas and a total of 65 participants from urban areas were handed information sheets. 27 of those from the semi-urban areas signed the consent form and agreed to participate. 44 participants from the urban areas signed the consent form and agreed to participate. These participants were then carefully selected to form the core focus group. The selection was made based on homogeneity regarding their profession as early childhood educators and/or affiliations to early childhood development. I also tried to select members according to gender, but this was very difficult due to the larger number of female participants, as reflected in Table 1. The final focus groups of 14 participants (containing 2 males) from semi-urban areas and 13 participants (also containing 2 males) from urban areas mainly consisted of early childhood teachers/facilitators, administrators and School Management Committee (SMC) personnel. Two heads of centres and two SMC personnel from each locality (a total of 12 members from both the semi-urban and urban areas) were requested for individual interviews, out of which five agreed to be interviewed individually. The individual interviewees consisted of

three heads of the SMC (one from semi-urban and two from urban areas) and two principals/directors (one from the semi-urban and one from the urban areas). Applicable questions (translated into Nepali) for the individual interviews and focus groups were sent as hard copies (Appendix 4) to each participant.

This research study also focused on obtaining information through elite studies, hence participants representing local governance, the Department of Education (DEO), Central Child Welfare Board (CCWB), aid agencies (UNICEF and Child Workers in Nepal - CWIN) and members of the Research Centre for Educational Innovation and Development (CERID) were also recruited. These participants were primarily recruited to ensure that the policy texts pertaining to equity and quality were formulated and currently being implemented at different levels. Individual interviews were conducted to collect data about the perceptions of policy heads regarding these terms. These also had the aim of gaining knowledge about the process of policy formation and implementation, as well as gauging their level of awareness regarding such issues. The elite participants were identified with the help of local heads of centres and the SMC. Request letters and emails were sent to 20 identified participants (Appendix 5) along with the information sheet and relevant questions for the interview (in English and Nepali). The letter stated the purpose of the research and invited participants for an individual interview session at their convenience. Three participants responded positively and agreed to sign the consent form. In the following section, I will broadly describe the research methods used to collect the data along with the research questions and field questions asked during both focus groups and individual interviews.

3.4 Methods: Tools applied, research questions and field questions

In this section, I will describe the research methods that were used to obtain the qualitative data consistently with the theoretical alignment of this research study that entails social inquiry to obtain qualitative data through focus groups, individual interviews, desk research and elite studies. Desk research consisted of manually searching for and analysing relevant and existing literature through documents that

contained information related to early childhood education, equity and quality in the contexts chosen for this research. This was carried out through Internet searches of databases on the sites of ministries such as the Ministry of Education, the Department of Education and the law commission of Nepal and organizations such as Department of Public Instruction of Wisconsin. The desk review also consisted of visiting library archives of the National Planning Commission, the Ministry of Education and the Department of Education of Nepal and seeking information through hard copy articles and journals available. Each article (both electronic and hard copies) obtained from these searches were scanned for the words ‘equity, quality and early childhood education’ as the criteria for relevance towards this research and to reduce the data. This process helped to bring existing literature, research, policy and practices with regards to equity and quality in early childhood education to the forefront. The analysed data was eventually applied to triangulate information, develop a contextual framework and inform the literature review for this research study. A desk research was considered to be a necessary tool to situate the study ‘within the context of existing evidence’ as there are no separate policies for early childhood education in Nepal (Rickinson and May, 2009, p. 8). The table (3.2) below shows the documents that were selected for further analysis and where they were obtained from and the information they contained.

Table 3.2

Name of Document	Obtained from	Relevance of Information
Muluki Ain – (General Code) 1970 Muluki Ain – (General Code) second amendment 1970 - 2006	Nepali hard copies from Book store	Contains relevant codes and laws regarding children and childhoods
Education Act 1971 - 2006 School Sector	Ministry of Education and Sports– Nepal	Contains literature related to ECE, policy directives related to equity, inclusion

reform programme 2009 - 15		and quality
School Sector reform programme – extension 2014 - 16	Ministry of Education and Sports - Nepal	Contains outcomes of previous policies, objectives and identifies vulnerable issues and outlines strategies for interventions.
Children’s Act 1992 Status of Child Rights in Nepal Annual Report - 2008-2013	National Human rights commission office, Kathmandu	Contains updates on child rights and efforts being made by the government
Status reports of the following documents: 2010 - 2013 School Sector reform programme Education for all – Shishu Vikash Karyakram (Child Development Programme) Community school capacity development programme	Ministry of Education and Sports – Nepal Department of Education - Nepal	Contains updates on above.
Strategy paper for ECE in Nepal	Ministry of Education and Sports - Nepal	Contains vision for ECE. Legal and policy

(2004)		framework and action plan.
Education for All (EFA)– Nepal perspective (2009 – 2014)	Online: http://www.raonline.ch/pages/np/pdf/ia_eduallrep0606.pdf	Action plan for ECE as a sub section of document.
EFA Monitoring Reports (2010 – 2015)	Hard copies obtained from local UNESCO office.	Global Update on EFA

According to Gill et al., (2008) focus groups bring “collective views” that help to generate hidden meanings through the lived experiences of participants (p. 293). Both the focus groups were segmented and aligned based on their professional allegiances towards early childhood education. Morgan (1997) suggests that segmentation is a necessary process when choosing participants for focus groups as it determines homogeneity and “allows for more free-flowing conversations”. Segmentation also allows the researcher to “examine differences in perspectives” within the group or between groups and individuals (p. 36). The focus group participants were supplied with a list of questions two weeks prior to the meeting to aid the flow of the actual discussions. The focus group interviews were held for approximately three hours each and were tape-recorded with prior permission. These recordings were transcribed verbatim and sent to all participants for validation and clarification.

Semi-structured methods were used during the focus group interviews and all the participants contributed towards answering the questions that were sent two weeks prior to the scheduled interview date. Semi-structured methodology was adopted as it allowed for a divergent and richer exploration of the perceptions through gentle probing, guidance and expansions on the ideas that were expressed. According to Liamputtong (2011) focus groups “allow group dynamics” that “capture shared lived experiences” that prove beneficial in uncovering hidden aspects (p. 4). Likewise Barriball and While (1994), citing Treece and Treece (1986), suggest that the semi-structured interview “acknowledges that not every word has the same meaning to every

respondent and not every respondent uses the same vocabulary” (p. 330). A semi-structured interview therefore allows appropriate probing, which is necessary to remove ambiguity in words, phrases and meanings. The semi-structured interview allows participants to discuss sensitive issues, voice their concerns and vent their feelings within the safe confines of the focus group. Focus groups do however have disadvantages, especially when dominant voices emerge due to the dynamics of the group, which could remain unchallenged. There is also a possibility that some members’ opinions may remain unheard and therefore be ignored (Smithson, 2000). Smithson (2000) suggests creating a focus group that is “homogenous” in terms of “age, experience, education and sex” (p. 108). Since there were more women than men present in the focus groups, I considered this a limitation in developing homogeneity with regards to sexual orientation or gender. I argue that perspectives are also influenced by gender and the gender roles that participants take up in society. Collecting experiential narratives from male participants could therefore have amplified and broadened my research objectives and provided a balance in the voices being heard at the societal level. More detail on how these limitations were overcome will be presented in other chapters.

Hammond and Wellington (2013) inform that interviews are valuable methods that allow researchers to achieve a deeper examination of “thoughts, values, feelings and perspectives” (p. 91). According to DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree (2006), individual in-depth interviews reveal profound “social and personal matters” through direct questioning to produce “detailed narratives and stories” (pp. 315-317). Individual interviews allowed me as the researcher to understand personal perceptions, values, and beliefs regarding policies of equity and quality in early childhood education. They also enabled me to obtain information regarding each individual interviewee’s position within the different ecological systems of society to gauge the level of mediation and/or negotiation they encounter when such policies are implemented. All individual interviewees were provided with the questions one week prior to the meeting. Each interviewee was invited for an hour-long semi-structured interview at a convenient location of their choice. All interviews were tape recorded for safekeeping with prior permission, transcribed verbatim and transcriptions sent for validation and clarification.

As mentioned previously, a thorough desk research study analysing relevant policy documents was also considered, in order to collect secondary data and to contextualise information during the elite interviews for this research study. This desk research was necessary to confirm issues of equity and quality occurring in policy documents in Nepal. The desk research helped to triangulate information while conducting elite interviews, as this research project also incorporated elite studies as part of the data collection process. Individual in-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with members of the government, research institutes and prominent aid agencies. The goal of these interviews was to contextualise the information obtained through the desk research, as well as to gain insight into their perceptions regarding issues of equity and quality in early childhood education. I argue that the influences of the politics and political of any given state on policy issues is generally tangible; however, premeditations and political negotiations are primarily obscure and ambiguous. Tansey (2007) suggests that elite interviews highlight “hidden elements of political action” and through such interviews it is possible to acquire informational data regarding the “political debates and deliberations that preceded decision-making and action taking, and supplement official accounts with first-hand testimony” (p. 7). The necessity of conducting elite interviews was therefore relevant. Table 3.3 below represents the organisations and individuals selected and approached for elite interviews. In the following paragraphs, I will outline the development of the research questions and field questions for this research study.

Table 3.3

Organisation	Gender
UNICEF	2 Males
CERID (Research Centre for education)	3 Males
CHILD WELFARE	2 Males
SETO GURANS (Government funded)	2 Females

ECE)	
MOE (Ministry of Education)	1 Female and 5 Males
DOE (Department of Education)	4 Males
Save the Children	1 Male

Considering the qualitative and interpretive nature of this research, I had to develop appropriate research questions that would allow this study to move ahead despite shifting scenarios in the politics and social agendas of the two countries chosen for the study. Agee (2009) suggests that developing a set of good research questions requires reflexivity and often refinement is necessary at different stages to confirm the “intentions and perspectives of those involved in social interactions” (p. 432). She also adds that developing research questions is a reflective process that keeps researchers building on what they really want to know as they gain more knowledge about the subject matter. Clough and Nutbrown (2008) suggest applying the “Russian doll principle” and the “Goldilocks test” when framing research questions, so as to develop core concepts required for an in-depth study. According to Clough and Nutbrown, applying these principles and tests allows researchers to develop questions that are focused, straight forward and “just right” for the investigation (pp. 37-38). Neuman (2006) further suggests that research questions arise from personal experiences, values and the need to solve a problem. My research questions stem from personal experiences that reflect my values concerning the state of children around the world who are denied equitable and high quality early childhood education provision despite nations continuously creating policies for equity. It was a difficult task to cut the numerous questions that arose in my mind into two specific ones. Relying on the interpretive stance of this research, I therefore developed the research questions that would allow me to probe into the relevant perceptions and meaning-making of terminology used in policy texts through a poststructuralist lens. The following are the questions developed for this particular research project:

Research Questions

1. What are the perceptions/concepts of equity and quality in early childhood services among practitioners and administrators of early childhood education?
2. To what extent do these perceptions/concepts reflect the inclusion of equity and quality in policy papers?

Most research questions, according to Flick (2012), generate new ones that “stimulate the line of investigation” (p. 102). To take my research and data collection towards a fruitful path, I had to design a number of smaller questions to accompany the overarching research questions as part of the data collection process. The questions (Table 3.4) were linked to Research Questions 1 and 2. These were sent out to the focus group participants, individual interviewees and elite interviewees respectively; to define the path of this research. Preparing the participants prior to conducting the focus groups and interviews allowed me to collect specific data to align with the research questions.

Table 3.4

<i>Questions linked to question 1</i>
--

- | |
|--|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none">a. What are the concepts held by practitioners and local heads of equity and quality in early childhood education?b. What meanings are ascribed to equity and quality through local language and meaning-making?c. How do you as a practitioner reflect the inclusion of equity and quality in your early childhood environment? |
|--|

<i>Questions linked to question 2</i>
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- | |
|---|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none">a. What are the attitudes of policy/polity heads towards the inclusion of equity and quality in early childhood education policy? |
|---|

- b. What is the level of awareness/understanding among policy heads regarding quality in early childhood education?
- c. What is the status of the policy of equity and quality at grass-root level implementation?
- d. What levers and drivers in the state polity influence the policy for early education?
- e. Has the policy been subject to mediation as it cascades down through the different ecological systems?
- f. Is the policy of equity and quality actually working at different ecological levels?

In the next section, I will give an overview of the data analysis to explain the process involved and to justify the choices made to analyse the data.

3.5 Data Analysis: tools and process applied

Data for this research study was primarily collected through three methods. Initial data was collected through a sampling survey. This data was analysed to identify specific localities and centres for visits and recruitment of participants for focus groups and individual interviews. Primary data relating to research questions was collected through two focus groups of ten members each (from semi-urban and urban areas), five individual interviews with practitioners and administrators and three elite interview participants. The discussions and interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed verbatim for analysis. Secondary data was collected through an extensive desk research of policy documents, articles, and other such relevant manuscripts from Nepal. Documentation of relevant data was maintained in my research journal under specific coded themes.

According to Neuman (2006), the descriptions and/or evidence ensuing from qualitative data is considered to be either “highly unlikely or plausible”, suggesting that researchers maintain rigour in analysing such data. Qualitative data comprises of words that produce narratives or discourses that relate to understanding social phenomena

through “experiences and attitudes” of participants and aims to answer ‘how’ and ‘why’ rather than “how much or how many” questions (Patton and Cochran, 2002, p. 3). This research study aimed to understand the perceptions of participants regarding the terms ‘equity’ and ‘quality’ in early childhood education. These terms are present in policy texts and the objective of the data collection was to be able to develop descriptive documentations that would reveal the meanings assigned to these terms in local languages. Analysis of the qualitative data was considered through a thematic coding system using emergent themes (Patton and Cochran, 2002). I refer to thematic coding as a rigorous reading and writing of interpretations of concepts that result from the data and arranging them into coherent topics. Clough and Nutbrown (2008) suggest that “radical reading” is essential to serve the purpose of the study and to justify the positionality of the researcher as well as the participants. Radical reading during the process of analysis requires rigour and reflexivity so as not to infiltrate the research agenda with personal subjectivity, as researcher positionality, values and interests all impact the research process at varying stages (Pillow, 2010).

Thematic coding was an appropriate tool choice for data analysis for this research as it allowed me to identify and describe embedded ambiguous ideas as well as ideas that were clear and overt. Boyatzis (1998) suggests that a good thematic coding “captures the qualitative richness” of the data (p. 31). Flick (2012) informs that thematic structures result after several crosschecks that deepen the interpretations to produce emerging conceptual themes or ideas. Coding allowed me to group the data into conceptual emergent themes during different stages of analysis, which led to the production of rich descriptions and narratives to support the results. The coding process also allowed the large amount of data that was collected through the focus groups and interviews to be categorised and reduced. The desk review was previously utilised as a background when conducting elite interviews. The data was eventually analysed using the same themes that emerged during the focus groups and interviews as corroboration to justify the results. Thematic coding analysis for this research is based on the critical paradigm. I argue that the current nature of the discourses in early childhood education are products of power and knowledge, as nations strive to provide access to such services for all children to ensure future economic prosperity in terms of increased

productivity. Inequitable policies such as mandatory standardised testing of young children is an example of a relevant discursive practice, besides lack of funding that denies accessibility for a large number of children across the globe. Discourse also offers a way to present an interpretative analysis that contracts texts to reflect inequalities and clarify ambiguities that may be a direct result of discursive social practices (Huckin et al., 2012). Further details regarding the analysis of data and the application of thematic coding will be outlined in Chapter 4. In the following section, I will present the ethical process undertaken for this research study.

3.6 Ethical process

In the following section, I will describe the ethical pathways that were undertaken to gain access to proceed with data collection and analysis for this research project. I argue that ethics is inevitable in educational and social research, since no such research is free from everyday value judgements and tacit monopoly. Research is influenced at different levels by our values, our beliefs and culture, as well as our own concepts of who we are and why we are thus. I further argue that in order to remain the researcher and to avoid misconceptions or misinterpretations of data and tacit knowledge, it is important to be aware of the code of ethics in educational and social research. This research study is an extension of the sixth assignment that was submitted as the research proposal to undertake the study as part of the doctoral course (Thapa, 2013). The proposal extensively outlined potential ethical issues concerning the study. Some of the issues discussed in the proposal were based on the theoretical and methodological stance of the research. For example, I mentioned ethical concerns that could arise relative to adopting critical theory since it could negate “culturally acceptable subordinations and sublimations” in the patriarchal and socio-economically stratified context of Nepal (Gurung, 2007; Bennet, 2008; Thapa, 2013, p. 16). Likewise, I also defined ethical issues encountered in insider/outsider research and how such studies could involve over “imposition of ‘values, beliefs and perceptions on the lives of participants” influencing data interpretations. Insider research may possibly

become “overly positive or negligent” especially if the researcher shares cultural backgrounds with participants (Chavez, 2008 p. 475; Thapa, 2013, p. 17). Considering these dilemmas and ethical concerns, I submitted an application for ethical review to the University of Sheffield School of Education’s Ethics Committee prior to beginning this project. The application was awarded ethical approval in February 2014.

Neuman (2006) defines ethics as an articulation of the balance between values such as “the pursuit of knowledge and the rights of those being studied” (p. 129). Ethics involve a number of prohibitions and codes that outline principles of protection, respect and confidentiality of participants (Neuman, 2006; Flick, 2012). The application contained specific details regarding these codes and detailed explanations of the methodological and theoretical approach adopted for the research, in addition to the steps being taken for recruitment purposes. The application also confirmed the absence of risk of any potential physical or psychological harm or distress for both participants and researcher. Flick (2012) explains that the welfare of research participants relates to “weighing the risks and benefits” of discovering truths or unveiling new knowledge that may exacerbate current situations or problems (p. 40). It is therefore important to obtain informed consent from participants to avoid such issues. The research participants for this study were initially identified through a sampling survey, as mentioned above. Members of the surveyed local communities were presented with the information sheet (Appendix 5) outlining the project. The members (27 from semi-urban and 44 from urban areas) who volunteered to be part of the project were then invited to participate in the focus groups. They were provided with the list of questions two weeks prior and invited to a debriefing session, where they were given more information about the project and how the information would be utilised. The debriefing was held at a centre that was convenient for all participants, where they were provided with refreshments and travel expenses. Explicit choice to either remain or leave at will any time during the process was emphasised throughout the debriefing session. Although a total of 71 participants signed the consent form, only 36 volunteers remained after the debriefing. These participants were requested to reconsider the proposal and respond within three days to confirm their participation. A total of 27 responded (14 semi-urban and 13 from urban areas).

Individual interviews were conducted at convenient locations, dates and times expressed by the five participants. These interviews lasted for approximately an hour each and were focused on an in-depth conversation in relation to the same questions that were offered to the focus groups. The interviewees were requested to sign the consent form and agree to be tape-recorded. They were also debriefed before the actual interview began and were given the option of withdrawing their participation. Likewise, the elite interviews were conducted at the convenience of the interviewees. Each interviewee was provided with a list of questions (Appendix 6) to determine the flow of the semi-structured conversation. These interviews had to undergo a minor amendment during the process. I will discuss these issues further in later chapters when I describe the limitations faced by this research study.

In terms of analysing the raw data, Knight (2000) rightfully questions researchers (who are also members of the community) regarding the representation of the results. Although she conveys this message through a feminist/activist lens, I share her dilemma, since my research could produce results that address problematic issues surrounding inequities in early childhood education and would highlight probable inconsistencies in current policies. The ethics application urged me to be aware of the need to maintain strict privacy and confidentiality of all participants, as well as to safeguard data to avoid confrontation. There may have been instances where some of the participants would request the results of my research. Issues that may arise after the results are obtained were however beyond the scope of this dissertation, as this research was conducted to fulfil the requirements of a degree programme. By signing the ethics form, I understood that pledging to uphold the code of conduct is a necessary part of the doctoral programme and I have taken every possible step to my knowledge to ensure that I have honoured this. The next section outlines the proposed timeline submitted with the research proposal and ethics form. The timeline in the following page represents the research project between the project start and completion of first draft.

Timeline- Proposed Time Scale

<i>Year</i>	<i>Month</i>	<i>Activity</i>	<i>Goal</i>	<i>Deadlines</i>
2013	October - December	Identify potential literature/theory Policy Text analysis etc. Recruit research assistants	Complete text review/prepare outline of thesis/begin literature review, create bibliography	End of December
2014	January-March	Writing and Reading	Begin draft of literature review. Prepare sampling survey tools	End of March
2014	April	Writing and Reading Meet with research assistants	Finalize draft. Send out sampling survey tools with the help of research assistants	Mid-April
2014	May-August	Sampling Survey analysis Data collection and transcription	Identify potential contexts and participants	End of August
2014	August-October	Data Analysis	Complete analysis	End of October
2014	October-Dec	Writing	Draft methodology Results and Introduction chapter/s	End of Dec
2015	Jan- June	Writing	Draft discussion, recommendation, conclusion Complete draft thesis and submit to	End of May

			supervisor	
2015	July- Sept	Edit/revise	Complete final thesis	Mid-Sept

3.7 Conclusions

This chapter has focused on the theoretical and methodological premises for this research study and has extensively described the processes and methods undertaken to recruit participants and obtain data. The justification of the usage of research methods and the grounding of the study in the critical paradigm have been discussed, along with potential ethical concerns and dilemmas that were encountered during this research journey. In conclusion, I reiterate some of the key principles discussed above to support my arguments and my justifications. My most significant need was to understand the feelings, views and emotions of the participants regarding the current conditions of early childhood education in Nepal. The other apparent need was to find out how the Nepali government was working towards developing policies to incorporate equity and quality in early childhood education that also reflected children’s rights. Both these needs were primarily subjective and concerned with meanings or assigned and perceptive meanings in local language. Both the needs were politically situated and required critical examinations through a subjective lens. Adopting a poststructuralist methodological pathway and relying on critical theory as the theoretical basis was therefore considered appropriate. I argue that the essence of poststructural methodology is to be able to deconstruct ecologies, events and social experiences as they continuously evolve. We live in a constructivist society where knowledge is co-constructed and “perspectives have equal value” but these perspectives are also subject to change due to cultural, spatial and economic factors (Tzuo et al., 2011). Clough and Nutbrown (2008) argue that educational research happens because there are people who recognise issues and want to know more about them so as to bring them up to the surface and, if at all possible, strategise changes. Finally, the option to embrace critical theory as the theoretical basis is also based on my values and bias in relation to the education systems in developing countries today. Leonardo (2004) defines critical

theory as “an intellectual form that puts criticism at the centre of its knowledge production” (p. 12). This stance allows me, as a researcher, to develop a critique of the current policy on equity and quality in early childhood education. This critical aspect would assist in deconstructing, questioning and reconstructing knowledge for emancipatory purposes, especially for children, who are the focus and hopefully the beneficiaries of the plans and policies we create for them.

Chapter 4 Results

4.1 Introduction

This chapter will present the results and the findings of the research project. This research was undertaken as part of my doctoral studies and aimed to analyse perceptions of equity and quality in early childhood services among policy/polity heads and practitioners in Nepal through a systemised data collection. Participants for the research were identified through a sampling survey that produced quantitative data for recruitment purposes, while primary qualitative data was collected through focus groups and individual interviews with general and elite participants. The research study also collected secondary data through extensive desk reviews to develop rationales for the use and application of such terminology in current policy texts in Nepal. In the first section of the chapter I will discuss the development of the analytical process utilised and present the results of the quantitative data procured by the sampling survey. The second section will present an elaborate analysis of the qualitative data to demonstrate definitions of ‘equity’ and ‘quality’ in local languages as perceived by participants of the focus groups and individual interviews. The third section will present similar definitions, as perceived by the elite participants. The fourth section of the chapter will demonstrate the results of the desk review to discern the effectiveness of such policies in Nepal. The final section of the chapter will contain excerpts of transcribed interviews and desk research that will highlight recurring themes to consolidate the findings. As the entire analytical process is based on the transcripts and desk reviews, there will be references to certain verbatim quotes in all sections whenever there is a requirement to be explicit regarding the relation of the data to the argument presented.

4.2 Development of the analytical process

As mentioned in previous chapters and above, this research began with two pressing questions that were framed because of my personal background and need for

knowledge. The questions revolve around global issues relating to equity and quality in early childhood education. Nepal, along with over 180 other countries around the world, ratified the Education for All (EFA) framework in 1990, which was subsequently amended in 2000 as the “Dakar framework for action: Education for All”. The framework clearly defines “expanding and improving” early childhood education as one of the goals, with equity and quality the main indicators to measure the goal (UNESCO, 2000, p. 8). Recent reports point out however that many children from “marginalized groups are still denied access due to lack of funds, structural inequity and lack of attention to issues of quality” (UNESCO, 2015, p. 73). According to the same document, Nepal was highly successful in expanding early childhood services, but issues of equity and quality remain unattended and often ignored. Wood, et al., (2011) indicate similar trends in other countries and state that “international drivers for improving quality focus on technical characteristics” but there is limited attention towards “equity as an ethical dimension of policy and practice” (p. 16). They further define some of the global challenges, such as “reduced resources, privatisation and existing progress in conditions of service for specific groups of children” faced by many countries similar to Nepal, indicating failure to achieve the goals of the EFA (Wood et al., 2011, p. 14). The need to unearth why and how these trends are in place and what are the perceptions of local participants regarding the ontology of equity and quality in early childhood education and policies of the state of Nepal is therefore one of the fundamental epistemological needs of this research. In view of the primary quest for this particular knowledge, the following research questions were framed to proceed with the study.

Research Questions

1. What are the perceptions of quality and equity in early childhood services among policy/polity heads and practitioners?
2. To what extent do these perceptions justify the inclusion of equity regarding quality in policy papers for early childhood education in Nepal?

I sought answers to these questions by conducting a systemised data collection through focus groups and individual interviews. To ensure the recruitment of homogeneous participants for the focus groups, I developed a survey for sampling purposes. The survey was administered with the help of three research assistants, who were hired through acquaintances and were offered the position with minimal remuneration. The assistants were hired for an approximate period of two and a half months. Prior to the survey, I identified 50 centres through a desk review and contacted the heads for permission to allow the research assistants to conduct the survey. 16 centres responded positively; assistants were then advised to administer the survey in six centres situated in semi-urban localities and eight situated in urban localities. Two of the centres were omitted from the list due to reasons of accessibility and time. The assistants were briefed regarding the nature of the research and requested to use respectful language and conduct while on the premises. They were also instructed to hand out the information sheet to potential participants to warrant participation in focus groups. The sampling survey procured quantitative data that was analysed using a Microsoft Excel spread sheet and categorised to demonstrate basic dynamics regarding the gender, age and ethnicity of children attending the centres and the gender, ethnicity and qualifications of staff working in the centres. All other information was culled to reduce the data and to categorise the results into the following:

Table 4.1- Dynamics of surveyed localities and probable participants

Category	Semi-Urban	Urban	Total
Total number of sites surveyed	6	8	14
Total number of boys attending	103	300	403
Total number of girls attending	52	200	252

(Children) Total number of ethnicities/sub-castes	5	11	16
Range of age of children	1.5 - 12	2 - 10	
Total number of staff	46 (18 admin + SMC)	65 (18 admin)	111
(Staff) Total number of ethnicities/sub-castes	3	4	7
Qualification of Staff	4 – High (MA) 35-medium (BA/BSc) 7-low (High School +)	12 – High 40 – Medium 13 - Low	13 82 16
Range of ages of staff	22 – 50+	24 – 46+	NA
Gender of staff	32 female 14 male	59 female 6 male	111

A total of 46 participants from the semi-urban areas and 65 from the urban areas were handed information sheets after segmentation. Segmentation was necessary to orientate the dynamics of the group relative to gender, age, ethnicity, qualifications, designation and the age groups they were involved with, since this research was primarily directed at practitioners working with children under the age of six. The segmentation was carried out after the quantitative data was thoroughly analysed. 27 participants from the semi-urban areas and 44 from the urban areas were then requested to sign the consent form to confirm their participation and were provided with the questions two weeks prior to the actual interview. They were also invited for a briefing session one week prior to the scheduled interview. After the briefing session, two groups of 14 participants from the semi-urban areas and 13 from the urban areas, comprising of early childhood teachers/facilitators, administrators and, School Management Committee (SMC) personnel, were chosen as the core participants for the focus groups. These

participants were diverse in gender, age, qualifications, ethnicities as well as their current designations in their respective institutions.

The field questions provided to the participants reflected the requirements suited to the two research questions stated above. In order for the discussion to follow the protocols required for this research project, it was vital for participants to be prepared and somewhat knowledgeable about certain issues. The discussion was opened casually through introductions and a brief overview of the project. I encouraged participants to voluntarily recount personal experiences to create rapport and a relaxed atmosphere concerning confidentiality, support, discretion, value and ownership of their opinions. This was crucial to level collegiality and to eliminate implicit hierarchical nuances especially when there were participants whose identities were compromised due to their designated assignments in their respective institutions. I assured them that there would be no negative consequences or repercussions for any of them were they to speak their minds on the subject matter. The interview commenced thereafter and the following questions (which had been translated into Nepali, see Appendix 6) were utilised to guide the discussions. The participants were provided with refreshments and travel expenses and thanked for their participation.

Questions

What does equity in early childhood education mean in local language?

What does quality in early childhood education mean in local language?

What do you personally think or what concepts do you as a practitioner/working with children, have about equity and quality in early childhood education?

How do you as a practitioner reflect the inclusion of equity and quality in your early childhood environment, can you give me some examples?

What, in your opinion, are the attitudes of policy/polity heads towards the subject of equity and quality in early childhood education in Nepal?

What, in your opinion, is the level of awareness/understanding among policy heads regarding quality in early childhood education today?

What is the status of the policy of equity and quality at your centres or in public today?

What do you think influences policy heads when making such policies for early education? Do you think the policy is mediated/negotiated at the different ecological levels and systems? If so, how and by who? Why do you think this happens?

In your opinion, do you think the policy of equity and quality is relevant in early childhood education of Nepal today? Give reasons for your answer.

These questions drew large amounts of raw data that was tape recorded. Tacit cues such as side-conversations, body language and the general atmospheric mood of the participants as well as the whole group were noted as much as possible and recorded in my research journal. The recordings were transcribed verbatim and triangulated with each of the participants to eliminate errors occurring through misinterpretations or misconceptions. This was achieved with the help of research assistants, who followed up with each participant of the focus groups with the transcriptions. The corrected transcriptions were translated into English and preserved for analysis.

As mentioned in previous chapter/s, this research study also collected data through individual and elite interviews. In this paragraph, I will briefly describe the process that was undertaken and the questions that were asked to collect data through these tools. Individual semi-structured interviews, according to Flick (2012), is a powerful method to “reconstruct subjective knowledge” of participants to give “structure” to the research (p. 156). Furthermore, Hammond and Wellington (2013) state that interviews are “interactive” and semi-structured interviews are “more manageable” even though they may seem like “unnatural” conversations (pp. 91-92). I conducted five individual interviews with heads of centres and members of the School Management Committee (SMC) and three elite interviews with heads of government, research and aid agencies. The interviews were designed to be semi-structured and based on confirming the validity of policy texts and the terminology of equity and quality occurring in such texts. More structure was required during the elite interviews due to time constraints

and the high profiles of the participants. Through these interviews, I also aimed to collect data that would determine their perceptions regarding equity and quality in current early childhood education in Nepal. The interviewees were provided with the questions (both in English and Nepali) along with the consent form two weeks prior to scheduled interviews. Each interview lasted no more than 30 – 35 minutes and transcriptions were sent back for corrections/amendments. None were returned. In the following section I will describe the analytical tools that were formulated to process the data collected through focus group and individual interviews.

4.3 Thematic coding and the critical paradigm: an argument

In Chapter 3, I mentioned thematic coding as the primary choice of analytical tool for this research study. Before I go on to present the analysis, it is imperative that I explain my choice of the analytical tool to provide a rationale for adopting this particular tool. This section will broadly describe thematic coding and why it was employed to analyse the raw data collected for this study. A large volume of literature informs the legitimacy of applying grounded theory when developing a thematic analysis. I argue however that thematic coding could also be based on critical theory. Before I present the rationale for the analytical tool, I will make justifications for tying thematic coding with critical theory to argue how this research is situated in the critical paradigm. This research aims to deconstruct meanings of words ('equity' and 'quality') occurring in policy documents, as well as to critique current issues that have arisen in relation to those words based on realities. I therefore insist that a critical framework is necessary. Braun and Clarke (2006) contend that "thematic analysis is not wedded to any pre-existing theoretical framework" therefore can be applied into any framework that matches the epistemological requirement of the research (p. 81). Likewise Leonardo (2004) confirms that critical theory relates to "quality education" and begins with a "language of critique" and the process to "expose the contradictions of social life" (p. 12). Since quality is an essential component of equity in education, a key aim of this research is to evaluate prescribed policy and perceived meanings of these words as they cascade down at different levels of the ecosystem. I contend therefore that without a

critical lens, this research would be unable to meet these objectives, as both the terms ‘equity’ and ‘quality’ are highly ambiguous, especially when related to policy and ECE. Applying a critical framework hence assists in evaluating the legitimacy of such policies and gaining knowledge as to whether these policies are fulfilling the requirements of equity and quality, or are simply romanticised political jargon. Likewise, a critical framework also helps to identify power struggles and political and societal influences that silence the voices of minorities and marginalised groups. Applying a thematic analysis based on critical theory is therefore a highly suitable analytical framework for this research.

Hammond and Wellington (2013) agree that thematic coding or merely coding is an apt analytical tool for qualitative data collected through semi-structured interviews. Similarly, Braun and Clarke (2006) observe thematic coding as an independent analytical tool that is capable of producing rich descriptions of the data by organising them into “patterns” or “themes” (p. 79). They further add that:

Thematic analysis can be an essentialist or realist method, which reports experiences, meanings and the reality of participants, or it can be a constructionist method, which examines the ways in which events, realities, meanings, experiences and so on are the effects of a range of discourses operating within society. It can also be a ‘contextualist’ method, sitting between the two poles of essentialism and constructionism, and characterized by theories, such as critical realism, which acknowledge the ways individuals make meaning of their experience, and, in turn, the ways the broader social context impinges on those meanings, while retaining focus on the material and other limits of ‘reality’.

(Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 81)

The quote above clearly states that pragmatism is part of a thematic coding analysis and supports constructionist/constructivist theories. I argue that constructionist/constructivist theories are closely related to the critical paradigm. Raskin (2002) argues that knowledge that humans create is “negotiated and defined within specific interpersonal relationships and cultural contexts” (p. 19). Hay and Barab (2001) also suggest that constructionism and/or constructivism relates to creating

meaning through experiences and how these meanings are mediated due to influences of lived realities and the politics of the state (Thapa, 2013). Price and Reus-Smit (1998) confirm the link by adding how “constructivists have sought to engage the mainstream on issues of interpretation and evidence” and employed “ontological propositions” of critical and social theory to “illuminate many aspects of world politics, particularly those pertaining to the parameters and dynamics of moral community” (pp. 260-264). They argue that “critical theory broadens the praxeological question” to bring about change, while constructivism “explores the dynamics of change”, which they argue, are essentially “critical” (pp. 285-288). The thematic coding analysis applied in this research study aims to identify human actions through perceptions while exploring undercurrents for the needed change through recurring themes presented by the data. As has been reiterated continuously, the main objective of thematic coding analysis is to highlight perceptions of equity and quality in early childhood education by considering opinions expressed by participants. The other objective is to determine the extent of policy documents and political influences on them. I therefore suggest that thematic coding analysis can be based on the critical paradigm, as the data reveals that many of the participant voices are based on constructivist attitudes and depict the ontology of such policies. The narratives presented through the transcripts also portray critiques of the epistemological truths, recounting what is really going on and how power manifests among different groups of people, communities and societies in the political context. In the following section, I will present the steps implemented during the process of analysis using thematic coding.

4.4 Analysis of Data using thematic coding: step-by-step process

Thematic coding analysis for this research study was adapted from the model provided by Braun and Clarke (2006) who suggest following a series of steps illustrated in the table in the following page:

Table 4.2 – Phases of thematic coding analysis

Step	Phases	Description of phases
1	Getting to know the data	Transcribing, reading and re-reading data. Noting down interesting ideas/information
2	Creating initial codes	Ascribing systemised codes to similar and interesting data and grouping them according to the codes.
3	Identifying emerging themes	Organizing codes into emerging themes and placing data into relevant themes
4	Reviewing/reassessing themes	Checking themes against coded pieces
5	Naming themes	Refining the themes through further analysis to generate clear narratives and names for themes
6	Writing analytical report	Creating final analysis related to research questions and theory

(Adapted from Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 87)

This research study produced large amounts of verbal data through focus group interviews and individual interviews with participants. The raw data was transcribed verbatim and compared with notes taken during the interviews. The notes highlighted body language, side conversations and other such relevant information that could be used for analysis. In order to simplify the analysis and reduce the data, I collated the transcriptions in relation to the field questions stated above and organised the data into relevant codes in different colours. The data was condensed to produce initial ideas that reflected the information sought from the field question. The ideas and information were coded accordingly throughout the data. An example of the representative coded data is included in Table 4.3 in the next few pages. The table contains verbatim transcriptions organised in relation to the developing initial ideas pertaining to field questions. The translations have adopted a naturalistic approach to remain as close as possible to the original meanings in local languages.

Table 4.3 – Example of collated colour codes during Phase 2

Initial ideas	Coloured Codes	Organisation of Phrases/words according to ideas
Perception - equity	pe1	<p>I think that we should educate them in simple and easy way through playing methods and in a fun way, so that children understand things easily.</p> <p>I think we have to bring equality among boys and girls in this matter as well</p> <p>You can ask any principal – are all children the same, do you treat them equally? They will say yes but as you watch them work you will begin to notice the biases.</p> <p>The law stipulates anti-bias but it is not implemented.</p> <p>Geography also influences language and culture. Food and agriculture are also diverse in different geographical areas.</p> <p>What about special needs? There is no inclusive actions in the curriculum for children with disabilities. Just 3 – 4 lines on special needs. There is some provision but we still need to address this so that it becomes holistic.</p> <p>Big age gap in children, we face challenges to deliver same curriculum for diverse age group/ language groups</p> <p>They look down upon others calling them poor and of low caste. So we try to stop the social judgements by giving them difference between social helpers and social evils. (<i>Ke garney, estai cha</i> – what to do, it is like that, the rule is like that)¹</p>
Perception-quality	pq1	<p>Quality in community based programs is not up to the mark/huge gap between private sector and public</p> <p>Quality is based on school performance at high school</p>

¹ This is a reiterative phrase that Nepalis use when confronted with unresolvable issues or issues that are dictated through societal, cultural and/or religious values, customs and traditions.

		<p>level in private centres.</p> <p>Teachers are valuable so are the children and parents and there will be quality when goals are clear/teachers should facilitate/learn and work together with children parents and community</p> <p>There is big debate – what is meant by quality – results – 90% pass example to make people rise? What does quality mean? How to make a child friendly environment in the schools?</p> <p>The other issues – big problem about child labour. Education and child labour – quality is directly related to child labour. Drop out from schools and they are more likely to join child labour.</p>
Meaning equity	me1	<p>What is that? What is the Nepali word for that? Can you look up in the dictionary?</p> <p>I don't think I know the definition. I worked in an all girls' school for many years and I always looked out of the window and I saw this young child (from lower caste) sweeping. I wondered where she went to school.</p> <p>There is no 'conceptual clarity' regarding equity in early childhood development. Accessibility is poor due to spatial disparity.</p>
Meaning quality	mql	<p>Quality is not showing off, how children are enjoying everyday, are they happy? Do they want to stay? Come to school? Happiness is the main indicator of quality. Fun is the element in teaching.</p> <p>Quality is student discipline, more extra-curricular activities, friendship, creative education, rules, teacher education, interactions..so many things.</p> <p>Quality is also goals for teacher...teacher can work together with children and children's parents and community.</p>
Inclusion of equity and	ieq1	I learn from children, I want to make a difference

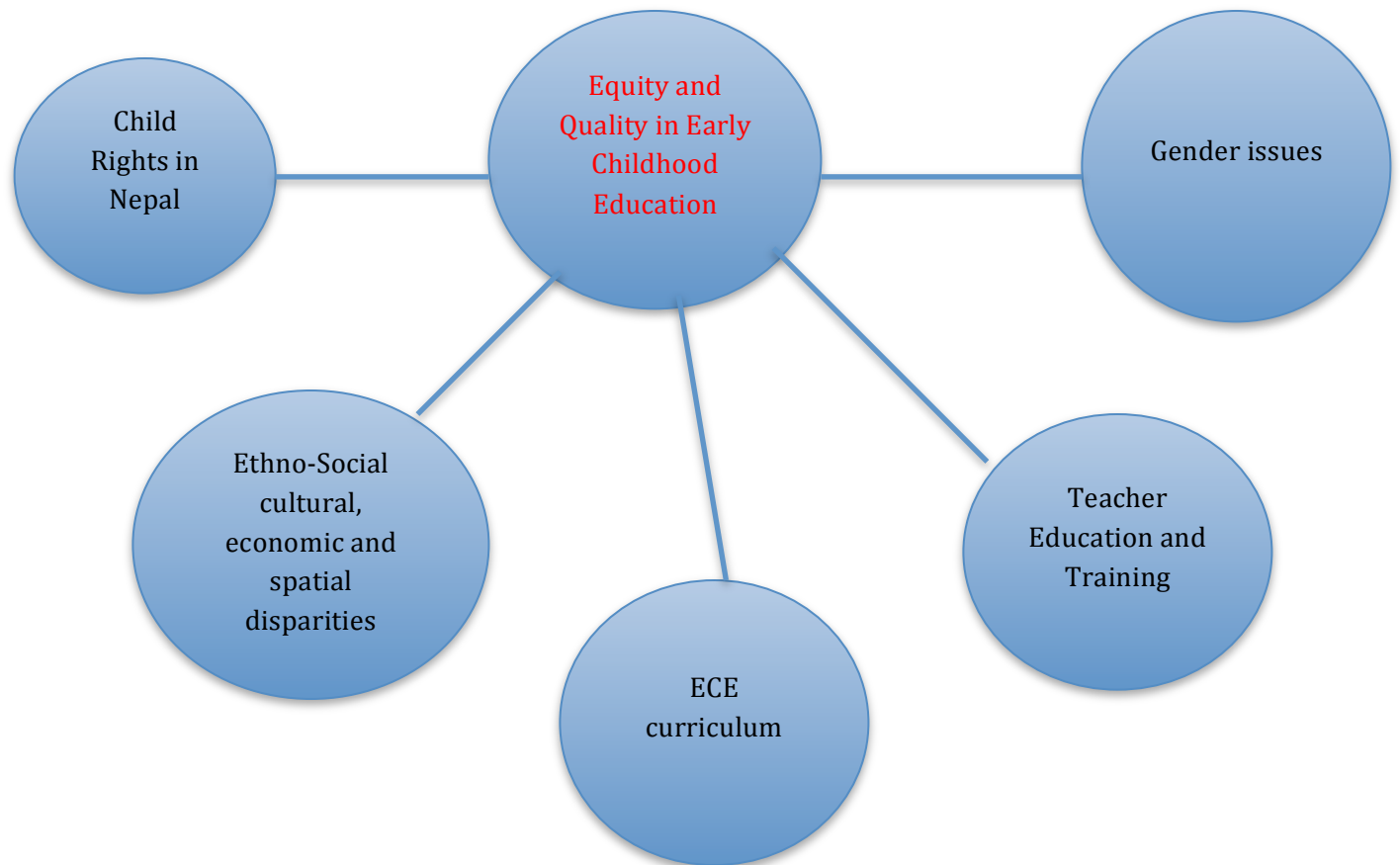
<p>quality</p>		<p>Some children leave without notice – we look for them</p> <p>Children don't know the difference between wrong and right; they will do whatever they find is fun.</p> <p>Share with the children good things in life – a helper more than a teacher – when I am teaching them I use my good manners, I can change a little bit in their life - - I want to help make a good human being</p> <p>We have many languages in the classroom and sometimes children do not understand Nepali also so it is difficult but if it was English, everyone would benefit</p> <p>We took training and learned to make schedule but it is sometimes difficult because the children and we are rushed to do this and that on time. When we were doing our own way it was more relaxed.</p> <p>Parents belong to labour groups/daily wage, we should end at 1 pm but most children remain until 4 pm because parents cannot pick them up</p> <p>Children like to touch toys, play in groups or alone. They want to discover with toys and outside.</p> <p>We don't have much inequality regarding the family status. There is little problem of inequality between girls and boys. Our students are helpful; they ask us to give if some student needs something. Sometimes we ask them to wear their own clothes in programs and if they don't have, another will come and bring for them. Our students have feeling of sharing and we don't see much difference among them besides the gender difference.</p>
<p>Opinion on attitudes and level of awareness among policy makers and the relevance/status of policies of equity and</p>	<p>oal</p>	<p>Our political leaders promise them everything during elections and after election they don't even remember what they promised earlier.</p> <p>Government schools are not funded enough and teachers are not responsible for resources</p> <p>If you go to the motorcycle workshop in Kathmandu, you can see a boy working there. If you go to the houses, you can see children working as servants and</p>

<p>quality in ECE today.</p>		<p>you can see street children everywhere.</p> <p>They don't even care about general needs of general people, let alone early education. Children have to cross the bridge through ropes at some places to go to school which is very risky. Why doesn't government do anything for those cases?</p> <p>Those children who are already working don't want to study. Take street children; no matter how hard you try they won't be ready because of their habit of sniffing glue. If government wants it can really help those children. (<i>ke garney estai chalan cha</i> -what to do, the rule is so)</p>
<p>Opinions on factors influencing policymaking and implementation</p>	<p>oip1</p>	<p>This is the way of life. More than 2500 years. Based on scripture (Hindu) divided society according to caste. Child from lower caste will be discriminated by teachers and still is practiced in some parts of the country. (<i>Ke garney, estai cha</i> – what to do, it is like that, the rule is like that)</p> <p>Nepotism and favouritism persists..because of that qualified people do not get the opportunity. This is the main reason why education system cannot develop in our country.</p> <p>We get the scholars – but in reality what is happening in the child – but we do have a lack of policy we have a lack of implementation – many agencies – they are not willing to do those things – I have loads of justifications why I cannot do this...(pointing to other people)...</p> <p>Policy makers want to correct both parts but focus on public as 80% attend 27% pass the exam in the public school 20% study in private schools and 88% pass the exam. We need monitoring systems -</p> <p>We do have a system on the paper --- many tools we do have...problem to implement². 44% of parliament are from the nepotism</p>

² Note: The words of the participants in Table 4.3 have been reported verbatim – although some of the English is not quite correct, this reflects the words and phrasing of the original speaker.

With reference to the initial ideas that were noted in the second phase of the thematic analysis, I reduced the data by removing some sections of transcripts that did not match the ideas or the information sought. Based on recurring and similar ideas in the transcripts, some emerging themes were developed in the third phase. The reduced data was divided into the concurrent emerging themes for review and reassessment during the fourth phase and themes were placed on a thematic map. The map (Figure 4.1) in the following page represents the finalised themes and the thematic map developed after identifying the relationships between the codes, ideas and data during the fifth phase of the analysis.

Figure 4.1: Thematic map of identified themes



With reference to Figure 4.1 above, it can be clearly noted that equity and quality encompasses many areas of ECE in Nepal. Braun and Clarke (2006) state that a thematic analysis is a process that “reflects reality”. The transcripts are reflective of the realities lived by participants as well as their perceptive deductions. Pursuing the thematic analysis model, during the 6th phase I developed a final narrative for each theme with reference to research questions, field questions, transcriptions and notes. In the following section, I will present this final analysis while relating them to developing arguments, existing literature and theories.

4.5 Final analysis based on identified themes

This section will present the final narratives that evaluate each theme mentioned above. The results of the data will be presented with references to the research questions, field questions and existing literature. The section will contain relevant reference to transcriptions and notes that were aggregated to provide a descriptive and richer narrative. Braun and Clarke (2006) note that analysis based on a theoretical framework tends to provide a “less rich description of the data overall, and more detailed analysis of some” suggesting that descriptive narratives of the underlying themes affect the final results of the research (p. 84). They further add that thematic analysis at the “latent” level is a constructivist approach and brings to light the “underlying ideas, assumptions, and conceptualizations and ideologies” (p. 84) that shapes the content of the data and influences the results. My poststructuralist positionality refutes constructivism and I argue that although knowledge is socially constructed and internalised through social norms, customs and traditions, it is essential to deconstruct how this knowledge is influenced by existing power plays within societal contexts. It is also important to understand how this knowledge is expressed in local language so that perceptions about equity and quality are encapsulated through participant voices. The final analysis therefore amalgamates my theoretical choice with my poststructuralist positionality to present the perceptions of participants regarding the words ‘equity’ and ‘quality’ and their legitimacy in policy texts pertaining to ECE. The final analysis presented below highlights each theme relative to the key terms ‘equity’ and ‘quality’ in ECE with references to the data and relevant literature.

4.5 a. Rights of the child in Nepal: Children’s Act 2048 (1992) vs. equity and quality in ECE

This theme was identified when focus group participants voiced the following:

Overall development of a child is vital, the fulfilment of basic requirements of all children (town, village, urban, etc.). It is important to clearly define the child in collaborative work: Whole child focus.

Children are viewed often times as an economic resource or property.
Those who sometimes should advocate for children do not.

(Individual interview, 2014)

I argue that the rights of the child play an integral role in fulfilling equity and quality agendas in ECE. Nepal ratified the “Convention on the Rights of the Child” in 1990 and developed the “Nepal Children’s Act” in 1992 with a preliminary focus on creating conducive environments for children (Gapany, 2009, p. 6). The Children’s Act 1992 states that any person below the age of 16 is considered a child and holistic development and education are fundamental rights of every child (Gajurel, 2009). Aryal (2013) reports however that despite rapid expansions of government run centres to fulfil Goal 1 of Education for All (EFA) (expansion and improvement of comprehensive early childhood care and education (UNESCO, 2015)) only “65% of age appropriate children” are enrolled in facilities provided by the government (p. 50). This suggests that children from a number of communities have no access to ECE and therefore are unable to take advantage of one of the most important fundamental rights, the right to early childhood education. Furthermore, research indicates a “lack of holistic, integrated services” and that many such centres focus on academic learning rather than strategies for “early stimulation” (UNESCO/UNICEF, 2012; Raven, 2009). This suggests that the rights to beneficial environments as promised by the Child Act 1992 have failed in many instances, especially in ECE. My data also revealed several inconsistencies concerning the right to holistic and equitable early education in the communities where this research was conducted. Participants mentioned that there are many children who are unable to access services due to circumstantial issues and therefore their rights are compromised. These children are unaware of their rights, therefore vulnerable to more risks and often taken as an “economic resource” in households, as well as in a number of businesses employing children as cheap labour (Baker and Hinton, 2001). Groot (2010) however notes that “child labour in Nepal” is a socially accepted norm and “children are expected to contribute to household activities” (p. 9). Groot (2010) also states that children belonging to lower economic communities bear larger burdens and most forsake education in order to contribute to the household income. Some of the excerpts taken from the focus group interviews

suggest that children are likely to face financial burdens when they are subjected to the following circumstances:

- Children with parents who are severely ill or dead
- Children whose parents cannot take care of them for various reasons
- Displacement of parents who migrate to work
- Abandoned children
- Homeless children
- Poor children
- Children who have severe needs where parents abandoned them
- Older children are caring for younger ones
- Family has no home
- Man-made and natural disasters; floods, conflict, legal issues, etc.
- Fathers gamble, don't work, or leave
- Squatters
- Health issues: physical and mental issues

(Focus group excerpt, 2014)

Further to that, other participants also expressed that “some children are victims of crimes, rape, trafficking, abuse and some are bonded labourers”. They also added that there is a “new form of trafficking through religion, mostly with churches and monasteries” that remove young children (below the age of 5) from their societies and therefore they are unable to access ECE services. Some participants further added that “government has no enforcement and protection; empowerment and what that means: Do the parents realise they have rights; policy not enforced” and “there is a blame game all the time when programmes fail and situations for children do not change” (Focus group, 2014). This suggests that children whose rights have been compromised due to the circumstances mentioned above have little or no access to ECE services.

“If you go to the motorcycle workshop in Kathmandu, you can see a boy working there. If you go to the houses, you can see children working as servants and you can see street children everywhere. I don't think it is possible to meet the goal of the policy”.

“Those children who are already working don't want to study. Let us take the example of street children; no matter how hard you try they won't be

ready to go to school because of their habit of sniffing glue. If government wants it can really help those children may be not the quality”.
(Focus Group, 2014)

Participants perceive that equity is relatable to the rights of the child, with ECE being an important area for the policy of equity to thrive. Similarly they view quality in ECE as another important component and they understand that the concept of holistic ‘whole child’ ECE exudes quality. They also understand that quality ECE is a fundamental right of children. Concerning policies of equity and quality, they feel that it is unsuccessful and an obligatory ideology based on vested political interests at grassroots levels of implementation, as this excerpt suggests: “Writing down the policy is very easy; we can write whatever we can and the same things never happens in school”. They suggested that there is a “need for comprehensive programs to keep children in schools and rights need to be designed with children first”; “communicated to everyone in home language”; “rights need to be developed by informed specialists across different areas, and enforced” (Individual Interview, 2014). The assigned meanings of ‘equity’ and ‘quality’ in ECE in local language translated into holistic methodologies for every child, equal rights to education, rehabilitation and alleviation of poverty.

4.5 b Ethno-social, cultural, economic and spatial disparities

Many participants articulated that social, cultural, economic and spatial disparities hugely influence the equity and quality status of ECE. I also argue that disparities based on culture, caste, class and geographical locations contribute extensively to the imbalance in equitable and quality early childhood provision. According to Sharma et al., (2014) the current Human Development Index (HDI) for Nepal shows many “inequalities across geographical regions and social groups” (p. 11). They further add that socio-economy “varies significantly across different castes and ethnic groups” (p. 18). Likewise, according to UNICEF (2010), at least “two thirds of Nepal’s children are severely deprived and 40% live in absolute poverty”, therefore they are unable to access ECE services due to poor socio-economic conditions (p. 2). They further add that many poverty-stricken children belonged to marginalised groups living in remote rural regions with parents who are less educated. This suggests that inequity of access

to ECE programmes due to social, cultural, economic and spatial disparities is prevalent in the communities identified for this research. Participants expressed that sometimes “children have to cross the bridge through ropes at some places...which is very risky; why doesn't government do anything for those cases?” (Focus group, 2014). According to Wood, et al., (2011), “access to education” is one of the initial stages to achieve equity in education. Similarly, Britto, et al., (2011) inform that “access has been a primary thrust, guiding action towards reducing disparities” (p. 3). However, data from this research reveals that inequity in ECE due to inaccessibility prevails, especially for children and families living in far-flung communities where there is a lack of ECE centres. B. P Shrestha (2010) further informs that “a very limited percentage of children have access to private, fee-paying preschools” which are mostly “based in urban areas” and there are no “specific support provisions of ECE available for marginalized communities or disabled children” (pp. 55-56).

Participants also conveyed that some families are automatically excluded due to stratification of caste and class and “issues of untouchability has [sic] become more evident due to ethnic conflict” (Individual Interview, 2014). Nepal has a long history of hierarchical systems based on caste and class. Bennet (2005) and Subedi (2010) also inform that most social exclusions are based on caste and class in most communities of the country. Subedi (2010) further adds that:

The Hindu caste system may be defined as a hierarchy of endogamous division in which membership is hereditary and permanent. Here, hierarchy includes inequality both in status and in access to goods and services. There are rigid rules of avoidance between castes, and certain types of contacts are deigned as contaminating, while other non- contaminating. The crucial fact is that caste status is determined, and therefore the systems are perpetuated, by birth.

(Subedi, 2010, p. 140)

Data collected through the focus group also revealed similar patterns of hierarchies and disparities based on caste and class. Participants also expressed that these disparities are still very much prevalent in educational systems and ECE centres. The issues faced

by children and families of different ethnicities were also based on diversity of languages and mother tongues as revealed by the data excerpts below. Participants expressed that:

“My friends were of lower caste and not allowed to enter my home and their children don’t come to school. Mother tongue not being used, only Nepali being used, is also a bias”

“Child [sic] has to go through different difficult sessions due to language especially children of different language groups. Lower castes are not allowed to go to temple or school. There is discrimination based on caste and class”

“Perception of policy makers – very good policies and laws regarding these issues but no implementation. You can ask any principal – are all children the same, do you treat them equally? They will say yes but as you watch them work you will begin to notice the biases. The law stipulates anti-bias but it is not implemented.”

(Focus group, 2014)

When asked about their perception on equity regarding ECE, participants voiced that equity has to begin with bringing “unspoken voices into the constitution” and they agreed that “discrimination in ECE centres has become less but not fully removed” (Focus group, 2014). Likewise, they perceived quality as being closely related to issues of discrimination inside the classroom. They expressed that in classrooms and centres “most teachers do not meet the needs of the children” and many “do not pay attention to diversity in caste or language” (Focus group, 2014). This suggests that the perception of many of the participants regarding equity and quality in ECE is closely related to the biases they and their children experience due to ethno-social, cultural, economic and spatial disparities. The assigned meaning of the terms equity and quality in local language suggested anti-biasness, education in the mother tongue, freedom of cultural and social expression and access for all. Regarding the policy of equity and quality in ECE, participants communicated that although there is a “local governance, there is plenty of nepotism...in our system, the school principal is chosen according to political parties” (Focus group, 2014). They further expressed that:

There are several problems in Nepal as many early childhood advocators and directors in big NGOs and INGOs are not qualified in ECE and most are appointed not because they have the knowledge but through corruption (nepotism and favouritism and also influence of political parties). We do have educated community but our leaders/people in the fields and other people responsible for certain monitoring duties are not responsible and are often corrupt and do not fulfil their duties. Mother tongue status is also changing – the trends are evident but there is need for more study. We still have hope that someday this will change.

(Focus group, 2014)

4.5 c Equity and quality in the early childhood education curriculum

Walker et al., (2011) inform that ‘early cognitive development’ is highly influenced by the quality of care and education. They further suggest that activities that are age-appropriate help in developing “language and problem-solving skills” (p. 6). Pande (2009) states that the curriculum for ECE in Nepal, published in 2006, has “rightly stressed the need for holistic development of children” (p. 40). Several studies indicate, however, that there is malpractice in many ECE centres in Nepal. The end of the decade reports by UNESCO and UNICEF (2012) on the EFA also reveal that services that embrace “integrated services that address all aspects of development” are few and therefore “remains a problem” (p. 4). According to Pande (2009), there is no prescribed ECE curriculum in Nepal, but there are documents that make suggestions about the overall development of children between the ages of three and five. These documents were further modified in 2006 and proclaimed as the ECE curriculum to be implemented in government-run centres. He further adds that:

Academic achievement of children is often emphasized at the cost of physical, emotional and social development related experiences. It is the experience of some facilitators that parents stress on academic achievement of their children so that the children are better prepared to compete with others to gain entrance to the more prestigious schools. Schools also are reported to expect some literacy experience of their newly enrolled first graders. Children in some schools are mixed with grade one students. Teachers in such classes tend to focus more on grade one curriculum than on curriculum for ECD aged

children.

(Pande, 2009, p. 41)

I argue that a holistic curriculum that meets the needs of children at different developmental levels is essential to achieve equity and quality in ECE. Some of the most revered pioneers of the study of the child such as Fredrick Froebel (1782-1852), Rudolf Steiner (1861-1925), Margaret McMillan (1860 – 1931), Maria Montessori (1870-1952), Jean Piaget (1896-1980), and Erik Erikson (1902-1994) have all emphasized the importance of an ECE curriculum that accommodates all areas of development, such as social, emotional, physical and cognitive, in order to have positive outcomes for the child. Literature from recent research also identifies the importance of an integrated and inclusive ECE curriculum. For example, Mann and Williams (2011) argue that children thrive in centres that implement curriculum content that are supportive of “experiences that are responsive” (p. 4). Global debates on curriculum content, however, identify several issues regarding the assessment of young children. For example, Ang (2014) describes how ECE has become highly politicised internationally and “tensions remain about the role of early years education and what it entails” (p. 185). She suggests that “curriculum needs to be conceptualized beyond the confines of any formalized or homogeneous framework of learning” and move towards helping children “build and participate in complex and reciprocal relationships” with the environments around them (p. 193). Although the perspectives of equity and quality in the discussion above are defined in universal terms drawn from Western perspectives, it is critical to note that equity and quality are two of the most important features of holistic ECE. It is understandable that cultural variations may need to be scrutinised more efficiently in order to refine global and local discourses to match the context-specific anomalies.

Data collected through this research indicated similar inconsistencies as noted above. Participants expressed that the current ECE curriculum “has a lot of Grade 1 content being taught. We are thinking we want to have holistic but we still have reading and writing because of the way the curriculum is defined” (Focus group, 2014). The participants also voiced that:

Children have lost the desire to learn because of the pressure they are under. They begin to learn before 3 and they hardly finish high school. Private schools have immense competition. We talk about eliminating the entrance exam but only if the government makes a national curriculum good and comprehensive this could stop.

(Focus group, 2014)

Participant perceptions of equity and quality regarding the ECE curriculum appeared to be ambiguous, as confusion about whether to please the parents or to understand the child was a concern. They stated that “parents do not understand the curriculum and want reading and writing, no provisions for younger children, only for 4 year-olds” (Focus group, 2014). Meanings of the terms ‘equity’ and ‘quality’ concerning the ECE curriculum perpetuated several local definitions that reflected the need for “local language and mother tongue, ethnic knowledge and skills” and “respect and tolerance for culture and traditions” (Focus group, 2014). Likewise, the perceptions and opinions of participants relating to policies on equity and quality in the ECE curriculum were mostly concerned that current policies were not being revised. They expressed that “revisions need to address diversified learning” and create “inclusive actions for special needs” as well as “focus on infants and toddlers, not only three to five years”. They also added “government need [sic] to address the national framework and standardize the curriculum for all” (Focus group and individual interviews, 2014).

4.5 d Equity and quality through early childhood teacher education and training

Research suggests that teachers and facilitators are in the forefront of a quality ECE. Research also verifies secure, safe and caring environments with adults who are informed about how children learn and develop benefit children in all aspects of development. Wood et al., (2011) describe the “high quality of teacher education and performance” in Finland and how it “underpins children’s successful outcomes, and the equity of their provisions”. Boyd (2013) argues that quality programmes are intermittently linked to teacher qualifications. Kagan (2009) also supports the argument and adds that the “single most important determinant of quality and the factor most related to achieving critical outcomes for children” is dependent on the “quality of the

faculty who work directly with children” (p. 11). According to Schleicher (2014) however, recruiting, retaining and developing high quality teachers is a global challenge for several reasons, such as work overload, low pay and lack of respect. There are other alarming issues, such as teacher education programmes that do not include culturally or developmentally responsive knowledge or skills, especially for children from diverse backgrounds or for children with special needs (Ray et al., 2006).

Nepali ECE also faces similar woes. For example, Pande (2009) informs that regulations issued by the Nepali government in 2002 recommends at least two qualified facilitators/helpers in ECE centres. However, most centres only have one facilitator, with “educational attainment of 8th grade or more” (p. 42). He further comments that facilitators with only these minimum qualifications are incapable of meeting the developmental needs of children. Several issues such as “lack of attractive pay and job security” plague ECE in Nepal, resulting in many qualified facilitators leaving for greener pastures (Pande, 2009, p. 43). I argue that knowledge of child development and skills to develop strategies that help to fulfil children’s needs are essential for every ECE teacher or facilitator. Data collected through this research shows that a lack of comprehensive teacher qualification programmes and training affect equity and quality in Nepali ECE centres. For example, participants expressed that “most ECE workers are hardworking, lowly paid” and “teacher [sic] are not getting the training as most training centres are part of the private sector” (Focus group, 2014). They also added that the government provides “90 hours of training but no refresher, no supervision or checks on implementation or accountability; trainers go to the field and are supposed to conduct 5 day trainings [sic] but finish in 2 days” (Focus group, 2014). Likewise, individual interviewees expressed that “there may be hope if more facilitator trainings, parent level trainings [sic] are conducted and more resources, decent salary are [sic] provided for facilitators” (Individual interview, 2014).

Perceptions regarding equity and quality based on teacher qualifications for ECE remained challenging, as participants expressed that many teachers are unable to fulfil the needs of children from indigenous ethnic groups due to not speaking the local language. Parents mostly want English as a medium of instruction, therefore creating

further gaps in equity and quality. Facilitators have little or no training in child development, as they are compelled to ‘teach’ academic content in English. Opinions voiced by participants about equity and quality in ECE concerning teacher qualifications showed a lack of knowledge and understanding of child development at various levels where “children are being pressurised” and “corporal punishment is still relevant” (Individual interview, 2014). Some participants also added that:

Teachers in government schools are aware of the importance of child development and holistic learning and teaching but there are no resources. There is no accountability of services; there is no standardised framework. Politics should be removed from mainstream education then there may be some changes. Most teachers are affiliated to political groups and so are students. The need is to reduce politics and remove old traditional methodology through innovative training and they are in the policies but again there is no implementation.

(Focus group, 2014)

The meaning of ‘equity’ and ‘quality’ in relation to ECE teacher qualifications and training reflected equal and/or higher pay for qualified teachers, good training and refresher courses, university level programmes for teacher education and support through accessible resources. Perceptions and opinions regarding policies of equity and quality in ECE teacher education showed several flaws as well. For example, participants commented that “most of the time governments focus on policy and advocacy and have elite discussions, round table talks, they do research and create good policies but there is no implementation”. Individual interviewees also added that “some indicators were developed to monitor implementation of trainings [sic] in provisions for children but many have not materialised, there are no child focused services in most villages” (Focus group and individual interviews, 2014).

4.5 e Equity and quality in ECE based on gender

Aina and Cameron (2011) argue that a “teacher’s inherent biases can perpetuate unfair stereotypes and may be manifested in discriminatory classroom practices” (p. 13). Likewise Hyland (2010) notes that the critical messages conveyed by teachers add to

how children “construct their identities” (p. 86). She further argues that cultural and social awareness is essential while working with young children and to “advocate a pedagogy” to support and improve children’s outcomes (p. 84). Studies conducted by the Asian Development Bank (ADB) mention that Nepal has ratified a number of “international commitments to non-discrimination and gender equality” (ADB, 2010, p. 4). Other research informs however that Nepali social and cultural values are still based on patriarchy and gender bias is prevalent in many areas and localities. Acharya et al., (2010) further confirm that even to this day, Nepali women often have “unequal access to food, education and health care” (p. 2). Likewise, very young children are also subjected to gender bias through practices based on cultural and social norms and even today there are more girls who are not attending school than boys (2008; ADB, 2010). SAFED and UNGIE (2009) reports that Nepal’s “gender parity index (GPI)” indicates that gender disparities are likely to remain unchanged, as centres still face immense challenges to meet “standards that can be considered fully gender-sensitive” (p. 22). The ADB (2010) report further confirms that:

Within the Ministry of Education and Sports, gender focal points have been appointed, and the Women’s Education Section has been renamed the Gender Equity and Development Section and is responsible for developing policies and programs on women’s education. The ministry has also established a gender and social inclusion unit and has been using gender, caste, and ethnic indicators in its management information system. Even though gender issues have received attention in the education management system, women’s representation in decision-making and administrative positions is low.

(ADB, 2010, p. 25)

Data collected through this research also reiterated similar discrepancies relating to gender. For example, participants of individual interviews shared that some of them had been to many districts and “people say there is no gender discrimination but parents prefer to send son [sic] to school, there is discrimination in every sector, even in family, I experience it myself” (Individual interview, 2014). Some participants in focus groups expressed that “in rural areas girls get married very early, 14 – 15 years

old, so girls don't have time for study, they have to learn to cook and clean” (Focus group, 2014). Other participants commented that sometimes parents make these disparities more explicit, as they “differentiate between girls and boys and I have noticed that those boys don't talk to girls because their parents told them not to” (Focus group, 2014). Some participants were aware of the need to make centres gender-sensitive and gender friendly and shared how they tried to make such efforts. They informed that:

Whenever we do any activity we make boys and girls participate equally. Until and unless they both participate, the task is not complete. We make them sit together and make one girl captain and one boy captain in the class. If we divide our students in groups then we make sure that there are equal numbers of boys and girls in each group. If boys will win then girls also have to win otherwise boys will think they are powerful and start dominating girls.

(Focus group, 2014)

Vendrell et al., (2014) argue that gender equity can only be achieved if children are offered “gender equity models” through the “presence of men and women in ECE” (p. 280). During the data collection process for this research, I noticed that Nepali ECE has more female practitioners working directly with the children and most males holding administrative positions, therefore not in direct contact with children. The participants were in agreement that facilitators “are supposed to be women – female because female care very well [sic]” (Focus group, 2014). This ideology reflects cultural and social values regarding care of children and that females are more capable of deploying these skills, therefore are solely responsible for the education of young children. My data shows that these values and beliefs are deeply embedded in the contexts visited, therefore eliminating gender equity models.

The perceptions of participants regarding equity and quality in ECE were based on gender-reproduced narratives of discrimination against the girl child, inequality in pay for female teachers/facilitators, gender-insensitive environments and subordination. Local meanings of equity and quality relative to gender were nonexistent, as most

participants believed that patriarchy was the rule of the land and social norms are to be followed despite the hardships. “*Ke garney estai chalan cha*” or “what to do, it is the rule” was a phrase that was reiterated many times during the interviews. Opinions and perceptions regarding the inclusion of gender equity and quality in ECE policies brought out many recommendations, such as “retention of girls, equality of participation, equal opportunity to speak”. “We need a mentor in classroom to help teachers make necessary changes, to call on girls and reward girls; voices have to be raised by many villages—that girls have to be educated; equal treatment of daughters in the home; provide for continuous education for fathers and mothers to support their daughter’s education” (Focus group and individual interviews, 2014).

4.6 Conclusion

This chapter consolidated the results of the research through qualitative data. Thematic coding based on the model provided by Braun and Clarke (2006) was utilised to create five themes based on the data. Data was analysed and expanded to relate each theme to the terms equity and quality in ECE and in ECE policies in Nepal. The final results exemplify the inconsistencies of current policies regarding equity and quality in ECE. For example, there are few recognisable successes in equity of access despite the huge efforts of expanding ECE facilities to fulfil Goal 1 of the EFA. Likewise, many young children are still considered economic resources and their rights for education are forsaken. Social and cultural stratification due to caste and class also affect many young children who are unable to attend quality centres. Those who do attend are discriminated against through systemic barriers such as language of instruction, academic rigour and gender insensitiveness. Similarly, lack of quality teacher education and training add to the imbalance of equity and quality in ECE provision and children are subjected to poor quality and stringent curriculum content imparted through rigorous rote learning methodologies.

Chapter 5

Discussion

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I will present a critical discussion of the results of this research study as outlined in the previous chapter and compare them with the desk reviews conducted using policy papers from the United States (US). According to several bodies of research, the discussion section mainly contains a broader version of the findings. Personal perceptions and interpretations of the findings and results are essential in order to identify new knowledge or to add to global discourses (Annesley, 2010). Furthermore, I assert that discussions are important in recommending further investigations and/or reformations by attaching meaningful and valid interpretations to the real life narratives of participants. This chapter presents amplifications of the verbatim data amalgamated with desk reviews and my personal opinions relative to the status of equity and quality in ECE in Nepal. The first few sections of the chapter will briefly summarise this doctoral research study, undertaken between 2012 and 2014. Subsequent sections will define the implications of the results and findings in relation to policies of equity and quality in ECE and with reference to parallel global literature and discourses. Several such debates are subjects of investigation in many developing and developed countries. As pointed out in Chapter 2, issues of equity and quality are relevant in countries as diverse as Nepal and the US. Although problems and solutions may vary, essentially the issues of poverty and economic and structural inequities are similar, especially when highlighted in terms of their impact on children's life chances. Grimes and Bagree (2012) argue that all nations should work towards developing strategic approaches to equity through policies that are inclusive and coherent with vertical inequities. Likewise, Wood et al., (2011) state that in many developed countries, quality correlates to academic outcomes. Such indicators, they argue, increase inequities "by creating a bigger divide between high and low quality schools" (p. 19). Keeping all these discourses and debates in view, Chapter 5 reveals similar but culturally, economically and politically positioned debates through the interpretations

of participant perceptions and by juxtaposing them against the current policies in the two diverse countries. I argue that wider interpretations are significant if equity and quality are to be achieved, as meanings and perceptions of the terms are heavily determined through the culturally, economically and politically influenced experiences of locals, stakeholders and policy makers. The discussions in this chapter therefore relay information relative to local culture and meanings assigned by the participants, as opposed to policy rhetoric, along with my personal interpretations. The chapter will also discuss the limitations of the study at different levels. Limitations are based on the physical and structural issues faced during data collection as well as some of the moral and ethical dilemmas pertaining to my poststructural position. The chapter will conclude with recommendations for the future direction and scope of ongoing research on further local perceptions of equity and quality, so as to contextualise meaning-making that will assist and enhance policy formation. In the following section, I will summarise the research and elaborate the findings of the research through discussions based on relevant literature and arguments.

5.2 A brief summary of the research

This research was primarily aimed at deconstructing the terms ‘equity’ and ‘quality’ with reference to ECE and related policies that concern child services to provide definitions of the terms in local language. The objective was to collect qualitative data through focus groups and individual interviews to delineate the perceptions of respondents regarding these terms and their relevance in policy documents. The methodological implication was based on an interpretive and qualitative approach through a poststructuralist position. The research design followed the critical paradigm and data analysis was conducted through a thematic coding system based on the model provided by Braun and Clarke (2006). The research questions for the study originated from the epistemology of current trends and ontology of historical evidence of the terms ‘equity’ and ‘quality’ in ECE in both developing and developed countries. The experiential and personal dilemmas concerning policies of equity and quality that I encountered in the ECE sectors in Nepal and the US were the main provocations that

drove this research study. To obtain answers to these dilemmas, the following research questions were framed:

1. What are the perceptions of quality and equity in early childhood services among policy/polity heads and practitioners?
2. To what extent do these perceptions justify the inclusion of equity with regards to quality in policy papers for early childhood education in Nepal?

I selected urban and semi-urban Kathmandu as the context for active data collection due to a number of reasons, such as familiarity of premises, shared affiliations in cultural backgrounds, common language and my commitment towards unearthing hidden meanings of the terms ‘equity’ and ‘quality’ in ECE in local language. Participants were identified through a sampling survey, then finalised for focus groups and individual interviews through consent forms and information sheets with the help of research assistants. Elite participants were requested for individual interviews through a formal letter of invitation containing all the information about the intended research study. Secondary data to compare and contrast the ECE policies in two diverse nations (Nepal and the US) was collected through critically analysing policy and similar documents from both countries between 1950–2014 and has been presented in Chapter 2 in the literature review. Primary data was culled and reduced through a thematic coding analytical tool and secondary data was reduced to reflect only the data that iterated policies of equity and quality in ECE. The emergent ideas from verbatim data were aligned with secondary data and analysis was conducted based on the premise of critical theory. The emergent ideas were further analysed and a set of themes relevant to perceptive issues of equity and quality in ECE were developed. These themes reiterated the perceptions of participants and expounded their understanding of the terms ‘equity’ and ‘quality’. The themes were elaborated with reference to verbatim data/desk reviews in Chapter 4 and presented as the final results of the research. In the following section I will present a critical and analytical discussion of the themes identified in Chapter 4 to associate the findings with relevant and global discourses of equity and quality in ECE.

5.3 Discussions of themes: deconstruction of ‘equity’ and ‘quality’ in ECE

This section of the chapter will elaborate, compare and contrast the themes uncovered during analysis of the qualitative data as mentioned in Chapter 4. The themes were finalised based on verbatim transcripts of the focus group and individual/elite interviews that were utilised to pinpoint reiterated phrases, concerns and issues voiced by participants regarding the terms ‘equity’ and ‘quality’. These themes were further referenced, compared and contrasted with data collected through critical reviews of policy and other relevant documents pertaining to equity and quality in ECE within Nepal. The themes echoed a number of premises on which a substantial amount of global and local research has been conducted. Issues of child rights, gender, teacher education/qualifications, curricula and socio-cultural, economic, structural and spatial disparities have been widely examined in a variety of contexts both in developing and developed countries. I argue however that country and context-specific impediments still exist due to socio-cultural and economic differences, as well as dissimilarities in political ideology and philosophical viewpoints that continue to make these issues debatable and relevant. In my research, these themes reiterated context-specific cogitations throughout the raw data and were visible also in circumstantial evidence collected, for example, through messages conveyed through participants’ body language, side conversations and reiterated phrases in local language that were continuously observed and noted during data collection. In the following sub-section I will refer to these hidden messages, as well as to the analysis of the findings, to discuss the theme of children’s rights in Nepal and compare it with similar issues in the United States.

5.3 a. Children’s Rights in Nepal and the US

Issues of children’s rights in Nepal were constantly referred to during the focus group, individual and elite interviews, when participants defined the meanings of ‘equity’ and ‘quality’ in ECE. Prior to defining the terms, some participants reported, however, that they were unable to designate a suitable and reciprocal meaning for the term ‘equity’

and had resorted to exploring translations in the Nepali language. The closest meanings disclosed after these explorations were phrases or terms that echoed concepts of fairness, anti-bias and non-judgemental attitudes. I found out that there was no parallel meaning or word/s in Nepali that substantiates the English word ‘equity’. The meaning of the word in local language had to be defined through perceived and visible services in ECE and the perceptions of participants. These perceptions resonated with equality, anti-bias and fairness in dealing with children from socially, economically and ethnically diverse backgrounds. Participants continuously referred to the ‘rights of the child’ and voiced that implementing these rights in all areas would determine equity and quality in ECE. I argue however that there are many structural and philosophical differences in the terms ‘equity’ and ‘equality’, as evidenced in current debates.

Policy debates over the terms ‘equity’ and ‘equality’ are common in several contexts and definitions are still ambiguous (Espinoza, 2007; Thapa, 2013). Espinoza (2007) claims “equality involves only a quantitative assessment” while “equity involves both a quantitative assessment and a subjective moral or ethical judgement” (p. 346). Definitions of equity are multidimensional, especially concerning education. Morris et al., (2011) state that equity in education, relative to current narratives, suggests “equity to access” and “equity of teaching outcomes” (p. 129). Other broad definitions also mention ‘access’ and ‘quality’ as the two-pronged properties of equity, especially in ECE (Wright, 2011). Many sources have mentioned that Nepali ECE services have expanded to provide access to children in remote districts, keeping in line with the agreements rendered during the formation of the Dakar Framework-Education for All (EFA) and the Millennium Development Goals (MGD) (MOE, 2010; UNICEF, 2012). Evaluation reports prepared by UNICEF and UNESCO still mention the ‘lack of holistic, integrated services’. Likewise, the report adds that “compartmentalization of different aspects of children’s services” results in “fragmented or inconsistent delivery” (p. 4).

The perceptions of participants uncovered some meaningful phrases that reflected equity relative to the rights of children, and the Nepal Children’s Act 1992 does mention that every child has an *equal* right to “survival, care, growth, protection

against violence, trafficking, exploitation and discrimination” and every child should have a “congenial climate for physical, mental and social development” (Triparthee, 2004, p. 75). Although the Children’s Act 1992 document mentions that every child has the right to early childhood services, it does not define accessibility, nor does it mention quality as being integral in achieving equity in such services. Likewise, terminology in the document suggests providing “congenial” (as noted above) environments for children to thrive, but does indicate that these services should be equitable for all children and of high quality. Even though perceptions of participants relative to equity and quality are closely related to the rights of the child to ECE, there are nonetheless gaps and disparities in understanding the multifaceted definitions of ‘equity’ versus ‘equality’.

In the aftermath of the two devastating earthquakes and considering the vulnerability created in the governance and policy structures of Nepal, tackling equity and quality issues is likely to be an uphill challenge. Reports by several INGOs and other sources state that nearly 2 million children have been displaced by this natural disaster and are vulnerable to abuse in the form of trafficking and violence (UNICEF, 2015). UNICEF (2015) mentions rescuing children who were being trafficked from districts affected by the earthquakes in their recent report and states that:

The collaboration between police, CCWB and UNICEF has led to the interception of 95 children who were being trafficked, of which 25 were being trafficked to India. The remaining children were prevented from unnecessary and illegal institutionalization.

(UNICEF, 2015, p. 2)

Children and their rights are at a vulnerable point due to the natural disaster and many will fall victim to different crimes, such as those mentioned above. Achieving equity and quality standards in ECE may be another distant dream, as the pressing need is rehabilitation and restoration of services for children so that their rights to ECE are fulfilled and child protection is ensured. I assert however that a number of key policy initiatives need to be in place; the government and policy heads need to take advantage of the circumstances and utilise the substantial funds being donated to develop child

friendly infrastructures. Intensive teacher training modules should be developed, alongside a standardised national framework suggestive of equitable and high quality ECE. If these developments occur, then there is hope that equity and quality in ECE in Nepal may, in the longer term, be accomplished and the child's right to an equitable and high quality early education will be fulfilled. In order for these aspirations to be fulfilled, a number of wider structural disparities also need to be addressed.

On the contrary, the US is one of the only two nations that have not ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (Bartholet, 2011; Ochshorn, 2015). Several historical documents indicate a number of policies framed for the protection of children after the establishment of the "Children's Bureau" in 1912 (Meyers, 2008). According to Meyers (2008), the responsibility of the Children's Bureau was to provide protection and care for "neglected children, and children in danger of becoming delinquent" (p. 453). Meyers (2008) further informs that it was not until the early 1970s that the country stepped up to create comprehensive policies for children and their rights due to many untoward incidents of child abuse. The Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act 1974 was one such policy that actively supported the rights of children and catered to their well-being. It is surprising to note that the world's foremost nation has withheld its children's voices from being heard, but according to Bartholet (2011), these decisions are significantly political. According to her, ratification to the UN affiliated Convention on the Rights of the Child, would require the US to provide "extensive, detailed reports" regarding child issues to the UN committee (p. 4). She further adds that:

The reporting process would, for example, highlight the country's high rates of infant mortality, child poverty, and child deaths due to abuse and neglect (Todres 2006, 31). It would highlight the country's outlier status with respect to juvenile life without parole sentences, given Article 37's express prohibition of such sentences. It would provide children's rights organisations information that they could use to push for child-oriented reforms, including an opportunity for input to the UN committee.

(Bartholet, 2011, p. 4)

According to the discussions and information above, children in both these contexts, whether their voices are heard or unheard, seem to be in the milieu based on political interests. For example, Nepal's ratification of children's rights has provided the world with information regarding the poor state of children in the country, providing free passage to hundreds of INGOs and NGOs to set up home and influence policies. Bhatta (2011) argues that educational plans in Nepal are the immediate outcomes of interventions by these aid agencies as they have become more "powerful and monolithic and they continue to instruct more than they listen" (p. 22). He further adds that the ownership of educational agendas in Nepal has "shifted from ownership over content to ownership over process, primarily because the contents have been pre-determined" as opposed to in the US (p. 23).

5.3 b. Ethno-social, cultural, economic and spatial disparities

Nepali societal organisation is best represented through a hierarchic model consisting of different layers divided by caste, class and gender (Bennett, 2005; Acharya, S. 2007). These disparities are evidence of the feudal laws that existed during the historic rule of the Shah dynasty (Basnet, 2009). Basnet (2009) further adds that Nepali "society was conceived within a uniform socio-political framework" that consisted of "diverse castes and ethnic categories" that were "incorporated into a holistic framework of a national caste hierarchy". According to Basnet (2009), this law was "codified and legally enforced" and prohibited "any form of inter-caste mingling" (p. 14). This was followed by the autocratic rule of the Ranas that reinforced "oligarchy" (Basnet, 2009; Cadell, 2007). Cadell (2007) further adds that:

The diversity within the Nepali state was recognized through a framework of inequality, with cultural variation framed around the central pillar of Hinduism and rulers presented as a focal point of the political and ritual order.

(Cadell, 2007, p. 3)

Democracy was restored after a decade long 'People's war', or the Maoist insurgency, that ravaged the country and widened disparity gaps. Bharadwaj, Dhungana and Upreti (2004) state that "the experiment of democracy under the 1990 Constitution of the

Kingdom of Nepal, remained highly deficient” and caste hierarchy was evident even in political structures (p. 55). Current politics are based on “federal democratic republic” governance; however, disparities in several sectors still persist. Sharp, et al., (2009) state that “significant gender disparities persist in the share of women in wage employment” (p. 3). In his opening remarks in UNICEF’s 2010 report on child poverty and disparity in Nepal, Pokharel, the Vice Chairman of the National Planning Commission of Nepal, noted that there are “serious disparities”, especially amongst children, “along the lines of geography, caste, ethnicity and household characteristics” (p. xv). The evaluation of child poverty conducted by UNICEF (2010) also reveals inconsistencies relative to disparities in child protection and educational services. The report discloses that the lack of a “child sensitive judicial process” and the fragmentation of services “across an array of ministries and departments” render the outreach provision weak. As a result, equity and quality in ECE are compromised (p. 3). Wood et al., (2011) however note that these disparities are not only relevant in developing countries such as Nepal, but “structural inequities” are visible in developed nations as well. They add that “ethnicity and low socio-economic status appear to be the two main risk factors” in achieving equity in highly developed countries (p. 18). Schleicher (2014) defines “equity in education” as possessing “two dimensions: fairness and inclusion”. Fairness, according to Schleicher (2014), is when “personal or socio-economic circumstances, such as gender, ethnic origin or family background” do not hamper the success of students and “inclusion means ensuring that all students reach at least a basic minimum level of skills” (p. 21). Nepal, I contend, lacks in both these dimensions, as reported by a large volume of research and evaluations conducted by a variety of sources. For example, the SABER (System Approach to Better Education Results) country report (2013) filed by the World Bank indicates “low access” to ECE services for “children from the poorest families or those living in rural areas” (p. 13).

In the aftermath of the two destructive earthquakes, the government was pressured into drafting the new constitution (Onta, 2015). Media reports inform that the rights of women and children are being compromised, as drafts of the new constitution, according to eminent women activists and politicians, exemplify patriarchy. I argue

that these stringent political agendas are co-constructed outcomes of historical influences and ideologies of hierarchy, oligarchy and patriarchy at different levels of the ecological system. I also argue that ecological systems and interactions within them influence perceptions and thoughts at various levels in all societies. This plays an integral role in shaping views and perceptions regarding attitudes towards equity and quality in ECE. Bronfenbrenner's (1994) ecological proposition states that "human development takes place through processes of progressively more complex reciprocal interactions between an active, evolving bio-psychological human organism and the persons, objects, and symbols in its immediate environment" (Bronfenbrenner, 1994, p. 38; Thapa, 2015). Likewise, according to Rosa and Tudge (2013) "the developing individual" is constantly "influencing and being influenced by the environment" at different levels of the ecological system (p. 243). Disparities in ethno-social, cultural, economic and spatial contexts therefore persist due to intergenerational indoctrinations relating to patriarchy, caste and class hierarchy. Bronfenbrenner's ecological model does not account for how structural changes come about at different levels of the system in order to address inherent problems. The perceptions of the participants in this research study revealed similar anomalies relating to disparities and discriminations based on gender, caste, location, traditions, language and ethnicity. Many expressed the need for early education in mother tongue and access for marginalised children, especially from lower castes and from remote districts. They also emphasised the necessity of reforming ECE to reflect inclusivity, especially for language, citing examples from China where ECE facilitators undergo a rigorous 3-year training period and are compelled to learn all the local dialects. I argue that although Nepal was never colonised, there is ample evidence that suggests patronisation of policies that belong to its dominant neighbour, India. There is thus a hegemonic dominance of the English language, which is one of the official languages of neighbouring India. Participants in this research study expressed that equity and quality in ECE could only be attained if such disparities were addressed and child poverty eliminated.

The US also has its share of ethno social/cultural, economic and spatial disparities, despite being the world's most affluent nation. For example, Ochshorn (2015) argues that maintaining equity in ECE is challenging because more and more immigrant

families are adding to the populace. Citing data from country reports, she states that many families are unable to live above the poverty line. Likewise, racial discrimination against African American children in many states across the nation is deeply embedded in cultural discourses despite policy makers “thinking about equity for decades” (p. 44). She notes similar dispositions towards disabilities and adds that “perceptions of disability” may have undergone a change, but research has not been put into practice in most cases. I argue that disparities are caused due to the presence of structural poverty and attitudes towards caste, class, gender, location and socio-economic conditions. These in turn are embedded in systemic hierarchies of power and politics. Unless robust pro-child and anti-poverty policies are developed, intergenerational poverty and disparities will remain endemic.

5.3 c. ECE curriculum

I argue that curriculum design is an essential element for equitable and high quality ECE programmes. Years of research on the active nature of children’s learning, child development and child psychology have redefined curricula content to supplement ECE so that it reflects integrated methodologies aimed at enhancing both development and learning of very young children. Laevers (2005) notes however that there are several countries where academic learning occupies a major portion of the content despite the expandable “scope of the curriculum” and informs that curriculum content may sometimes be harmful if not monitored carefully (p.19). According to the Oxford English dictionary, the term ‘curriculum’ originates from the Latin phrase “the course of a chariot race” or in other words, the track that a race follows (Oxford Dictionary, 2015). Likewise, many other authors define ‘curriculum’ as a set of prescribed objectives that are to be taught in a classroom or school. Duffy (2008), however, defines curriculum as something that is “much more than a body of knowledge to be transmitted, subjects to be delivered, formal learning contexts or schooling” (p. 80). In agreement with Duffy (2008), I further argue that ECE curriculum is beyond a mere prescribed format and is continuously evolving due to innovative methodologies and discoveries relating to child development, health and child psychology, as well as pedagogical and curriculum theory. Moravcik and Feeney (2011) notes that curriculum

is influenced by time and age and mutates according to the impact of socio-cultural and political values of one particular social context (Thapa, 2013). Likewise, Britto (2012) informs that social policies impact and influence “access to education services” and “determine school curricula and resources” (p. 8). The Nepali ECE curriculum is also directly impacted by such social policies that are framed on the interests of larger aid providing bodies such as UNESCO and the United Nations. For example, the Nepali curriculum for preschool prescribes definite learning trajectories in specific academic areas such as mathematics, language, science and social studies, with the aim of preparing the child for acceptance into primary school (UNESCO, 2011; Thapa, 2013). According to Britto (2012), such designs “use a narrow pre-primary educational approach” to “align with the primary school curriculum” (p. 6).

Other research also suggests that ideologies of ‘school readiness’ as a primary prerequisite in many ECE programmes have skewed holistic approaches and emphasise academic learning. For example, C. P. Brown, (2010) notes that early childhood reforms in the United States compel educators to “provide young children with a specific set of academic experiences that both mimic and in turn prepare children for elementary/primary school” (p. 134). Likewise Ang (2014) argues that “rhetoric from world organizations seems to also focus increasingly on education and less on care, driven strongly by a ‘productivity agenda’” (p. 187). Papatheodorou (2010) further adds that “economic arguments” place the child as an “object of economic benefits and returns” and most “governments now spend more funds” on ECE than in previous years (p. 2). Nepali ECE is not free from this global threat of commodifying children into economic resources, especially after the Nepali government pledged allegiance to the ‘Education for All’ reform plan during the World Education Forum in Dakar, Senegal in April 2000 (Vaux et al., 2006; Thapa, 2013). Since then, policy concerns around developing children’s readiness for primary school have continued to shape curricula content, especially in developing countries like Nepal. For example, the current curriculum guidebook developed by the Ministry of Education and Sports (MOES) of Nepal states that the main objective of the ECE curriculum is “to prepare all children to go to primary schools” (MOES, 2006, p. 2). I argue that this narrow definition of readiness reduces children to products for economic gain and increases

achievement gaps between children from disadvantaged and affluent groups, therefore failing to address issues of equity of access to high quality programmes. A tension for ECE and the transition point to primary education is that successful development in literacy and numeracy are central to improving children's life chances in terms of further education and employment. A balance needs therefore to be struck between the immediate educational needs of young children, and enabling them to make a successful transition to the next stage. "Readiness" is often interpreted in terms of formal approaches to teaching and learning, with a narrow focus on the 'core' subjects of literacy and numeracy, an issue that is reflected in this research.

Participants of this research expressed facing multiple hurdles when trying to integrate holistic early childhood education "because developmental areas and subject areas are separated" and "a lot of Grade 1 content is being taught". They also expressed that they do think about holistic philosophies but "there is reading and writing because of the way the curriculum is defined in most situations" (Focus group, 2014). The interviewees further added that:

Children have lost the desire to learn because of the pressure they are under. They begin to learn before 3 and they hardly finish high school. Private schools have immense competition. Can we talk about eliminating the entrance exam? If the government makes the national curriculum good and comprehensive this could stop.

(Focus group, 2014)

Several recommendations relating to curriculum design were discussed during the focus group and individual interviews. Suggestions included "revisiting the current curriculum, referring to and following good practices such as the Singapore framework and focusing the ECE national curriculum on ages 0-8" (Focus group/individual interviews, 2014). The participants also proposed separation of ECE from the Ministry of Women and Children and creation of a "one door system" where all INGOs and NGOs work together for the betterment of curriculum for ECE. The participants seemed positive regarding the recent addition of ECE under the fundamental rights of children; however they voiced the necessity to bridge the gap between public and

private enterprises to ensure equity and quality in curriculum content. I agree that these are pro-children propositions and, if implemented and policies reconstructed to suit these recommendations, equity and quality through a well-designed, holistic curriculum may, in the long term, be achievable. Proper supervision and monitoring bodies need to be equally prudent in order to maintain quality standards and to ensure that all ECE services are delivering culturally and developmentally appropriate curriculum content through appropriate pedagogies. Ochshorn's (2015) comment on ECE curriculum design in the USA reiterates similar challenges that consistently relate to standards and benchmarks and the absence of play. She adds that today, ECE in USA has a "goal of universal readiness" that is as "inchoate and elusive as ever" (p. 81). C. P. Brown (2010) further remarks that expectations of readiness have led towards determining curriculum content in many states of the USA. While there is broad agreement in international literature that both child-initiated, freely chosen activities, and teacher-directed activities can be combined to support children's learning and developmental process, policy makers in both these countries seem to be focused on readiness as an outcome of curriculum content. Laevers (2007) warns that application of standardised curricula in programmes could "engender processes" that lead away from the sought-after goals, as they could go "against the principles of good practice" (p. 20).

5.3 d. Teacher Education and Training

To date, there is no university degree for early childhood teachers in Nepal; however, training programmes lasting approximately a year are conducted by private organisations such as the Early Childhood Education Centre or ECEC (MOE, 2009). The School Sector Reform Plan (SSRP), formulated in 2009 by the Nepal Ministry of Education, does not indicate prerequisites for ECE teachers or facilitators but mentions that it has prioritised "teacher preparation and development" through raising the "minimum qualifications of teachers" (MOE, 2009, p. 37). According to information obtained during elite interviews, the ECEC centre offers a one-year Bachelor's degree course in affiliation with Kathmandu University (KU) to students who are willing and able to spend a semester at KU. In addition, I also came to learn that the country's oldest university, Tribhuvan University (TU), began their teacher education

programme in 1947, which eventually led to the development of the College of Education (COE) in 1956. Teacher education was formalised and began to take a “definite shape” until the ‘National Education System Plan’ changed the status of the COE to Faculty of Education (FOE) based on “recommendations made by the Royal Commission on Higher Education” (TU-FO, 2015). The university offers a one-year Bachelor’s degree along with other higher degrees for prospective students who wish to become primary or high school teachers. The following table represents the objectives and structure of the one-year Bachelor’s degree course followed at TU:

Table 5.1 d

Objective of the programme	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To prepare professionally qualified teachers required for the secondary schools of Nepal • To develop human resources contributing to the management and supervision of school education in Nepal • To provide a basis for further training in teacher education 	
<p>Course Structure The one-year B.Ed. programme courses can be divided into three categories, viz. Core Courses which carry 300 full marks, Specialization Courses (English, Math, etc.) which carry 200 full marks, and Teaching Practice which carries 100 full marks. The following table shows different courses with their mark distribution.</p>	
S.N.	Nature of the Course
1	Professional (Core Course)
2	Specialization
4	Teaching Practice

<http://tufoe.edu.np/one-year-b-ed>

Through one of my elite interviews, I also obtained information regarding ECE training programmes conducted in collaboration with the Embassy of Israel. This initiative allowed this respondent to travel to Israel to undertake a month-long ECE training funded by the Nepali government. According to this participant, similar training is disbursed to the government officials who head the ECE departments. The participant

lamented the state of ECE despite the training some of them received and blamed the authorities concerned for insufficient funding, poor implementation and lack of evaluation and monitoring services.

I argue that teacher qualifications and training are important factors that influence equity, as well as the quality of programmes and services in ECE. If teachers and facilitators are unaware of the developmental and psychological needs of young children, the quality of services they provide may be severely compromised, therefore eliminating equity and quality from their practices. Wood et al. (2011) stress the importance of teacher education and states that good practice “underpins children’s successful outcomes and the equity of their provisions” (p. 25). Owen (2011) further comments that “positive teacher-child relationships” enhance “children’s social and cognitive development and their success” (p. 26). McCartney (2007) also remarks that teacher sensitivity and responsiveness to the child’s needs are key components of high quality and equitable ECE services. Likewise, other research studies also indicate that quality of early education and care is reliant on teacher qualifications and level of education. The global evaluation report of the EFA states that providing “access is not enough” as quality of programmes and services is “crucial to ensure that children develop to their potential” (UNESCO, 2015 p. 68). Mathers et al., (2014) further emphasise the importance of teacher qualification for ECE provision and highlight that education enables “practitioners to know what to expect as children grow and mature” (p. 42). They state that:

Pedagogical knowledge (linking theory to practice) helps practitioners to foster the next stage of development: for example, to support that same child in shifting her attention by using her name and then pausing before giving instructions. An understanding of child development must therefore be tied to pedagogical knowledge: one without the other is insufficient. Theory is of little use without an understanding of how it can be applied to support children’s development. And without a grasp of developmental theory, practitioners can implement only ‘wholesale’ the ideas gained through their training. Understanding different developmental trajectories, and why certain practices are important, enables them to adapt their practice to new situations and tailor provision to

individual children's needs; essential when caring for disadvantaged children with diverse needs.

(Mathers et al., 2014, p. 41)

According to one of the elite participants of this research study, ECE teachers/facilitators receive a “limited amount of training - 90 hours” from the government but a large number do not practice what they are taught due to “limited salary, lack of resources and low pay” (Elite interview, 2014). Other participants indicated that training programmes are organised on a “needs basis” and some of them had undertaken training in areas such as “appreciative inquiry, care for caregivers and storytelling and puppetry” (Focus group, 2014). I was informed that they were unable to maintain quality and equity in their respective workplaces as it was difficult for them to put theory into practice due to lack of proper education and training, resources, low wages and the immense diversity of ethnicity, language and socio-economic conditions among their students and parents. It was surprising to note that none of them mentioned terms such as ‘qualifications’ or ‘college degrees’ as opposed to terms like ‘training and workshops’. I argue that these are outcomes of attitudes and beliefs of the community regarding teacher qualifications and are influenced through ideologies present in politics and policymaking, especially in countries such as Nepal where ECE is a relatively new concept. The SSRP, for example, only prioritises primary and secondary teacher education as a requirement to advance and enhance student performances in schools. Likewise, a number of training centres, INGOs and NGOs disburse short-term training that provides ECE teachers and facilitators (mainly female) with basic knowledge regarding child development, child friendly methodologies and pedagogies and skills to develop activities and materials. Despite global debates regarding the importance of providing positive learning experiences for young children by highly qualified ECE teachers and facilitators, the Nepali ECE sector does not require higher education qualifications for ECE teachers (Focus group, 2014).

Focus group participants also mentioned that “ECE workers are hardworking but low pay and high job [sic]” makes retention of teachers difficult, as “children enter at 2.5 years and up to 6 years” (Focus group, 2014). I argue that this is a fundamental lack of

understanding of the wellbeing of young children, therefore devaluing their rights to equitable and high quality early education. While countries like the US are continuing to explore and enhance the education of teachers through stringent degree programmes and licensure requirements, Nepal has yet to determine specific qualifications and awarding bodies, as currently there is a lack of university level courses or degrees for ECE teacher education. Other issues such as retention of teachers, recruiting male teachers and creating respect for ECE teachers, are also problematic due to lack of awareness among stakeholders, lack of funding and multi-sector involvement of aid agencies and ministries (UNESCO, 2008). I therefore assert that unless the constitution provoked in the post-earthquake phase recognises the importance of high quality ECE and ensures the requirement of appropriate qualifications for teachers and facilitators, Nepali ECE will remain inequitable. Disparities between private and public sectors will remain pervasive and public sector ECE provision is unlikely to achieve high quality standards.

5.3 e. Gender Issues

My focus group participants huddled in different corners of the room divided by gender during the interviews. When asked why they were seated so, some of them giggled but made no effort to change their places. This kind of attitude is not new in Nepali communities especially in rural and semi-urban contexts. Gender disparities are deeply embedded in societal ideologies and are evident in common practices as normative behaviour, just as mentioned above. During the interviews regarding equity and quality in ECE, one of the participants mentioned “girl-child discriminations” and shared that she “saw a mother crush and kill her disabled infant daughter” (Focus group, 2014). Through conversations such as this, it was imperative to include gender as an issue related to equity and quality when analysing data for this research. Participants mentioned that equity in ECE can be achieved only if there is a substantial paradigm shift, especially among parents, so that they practice “equality at home first” (Focus group, 2014). Practices of stratification and discrimination according to gender are still prevalent in many communities and newspapers and other media carry news about such incidents even to this day. Women and female children are the most vulnerable victims

of domestic violence and societal pressures owing to patriarchy and male dominance. For example, the local newspaper reported that a 22-year-old woman had been beaten to death by her husband for “not making chapatis (unleavened bread)”. Likewise, other news described how women in some communities are still subjected to ‘chhaupadi’ – a widespread traditional/cultural practice in western Nepal, ostracising women/girls from families during their menstrual cycles and forcing them to spend about 14 days in a cow-shed (UN, 2011).

Besides these discriminations, female children are often sacralised in the name of religion, hence depriving them of their childhoods (Bhatta, L. O., 2001; Dubin, 2004; Thapa, 2011). The “living goddess” according to Bhatta (2001) belongs to the “Shakya” community and is chosen to serve as the ruling goddess at the age of three (Thapa, 2011). Shakya communities are descendants of the family of King Suddhodana of the Shakya dynasty to whom Lord Buddha was born as Prince Siddhartha (Pyakhuryal and Suvedi, 2000). Bhomi (2015) further informs that in many communities “boys receive preference from their family – they are given more freedom”, while girls are expected to engage in household chores (p. 4). Participants of this research voiced several recommendations so that issues of equity and quality in ECE could be addressed through achievement of gender parity. For example, they suggested that ECE centres and preschools should have “gender-friendly” environments, especially where sanitation is concerned; provide parent education and train teachers to exercise anti-bias approaches with regards to gender and create advocacy channels for girls (Focus group, 2014). Participants also expressed that the government should make efforts to include gender parity as a priority in the upcoming new constitution. The new constitution was drafted immediately after the two devastating earthquakes and presented to the public for feedback. Several women’s rights activists condemned the proclamation, citing biases against women and children. According to an interview with an eminent lawyer and women’s activist, Meera Dhungana, posted in an online newspaper; “the preamble of the draft constitution made by the first constituent assembly aimed to do away with all forms of injustices” such as “feudal, autocratic, centralized, unitary and patriarchal state mechanisms”. The report highlights however that “the current draft removes the word patriarchal” hence,

“denying the role patriarchal norms and values have played in discriminating [against] women” (Dhungana, 2015). Dhungana (2015) further states that:

It is all about power-relations. The one who holds the power rules the rest. In the current context, we have a male-dominated society. The household head is always a man because that is what the law says. Therefore, women have to seek their rights from the men. And the fact that women go to live in a man’s house after marriage is also a manifestation of patriarchy. When a woman, alone, goes to live in a man’s house it is his rule that prevails.

(Dhungana, 2015).

These discriminatory actions by the government suggest that gender parity in Nepali society is still a considerable distance away. I argue therefore that achieving equity in ECE through gender equality will be challenging, as the convictions of policy heads still resonate with discriminatory ideologies. Gender parity and inclusion are essential elements for attaining equity and quality in ECE, not only for children but also for teachers. Aina and Cameron (2011) suggest that young children need to be supported when they are forming their “gender identity” so that they are able to prevent “gender bias” and “gender stereotypes” in their environments (p. 11). They further add that teachers influence children’s ideas regarding “gender and gender significance” therefore training and education for teachers of young children is essential to maintain gender parity and equity in classrooms. I argue that gender parity is closely related to social justice and social inclusion, which in turn is a fundamental element of equity. Brodyk (2010) explains social justice as a concept based on “human rights, equality and a just and equitable society” (p. 19). According to her, many adults assume that “young children don’t notice differences” and are unable to “understand diversity and injustice” (p. 20). Several theories regarding socio-cultural learning (Vygotsky, 1978) and effects of micro and meso-systems on children’s cognition have however proven the opposite. Brodyk (2010) states that young children are extremely aware of these discriminatory agents and are able to judge what is “fair and unfair” (p. 20). Likewise, Aina and Cameron (2011) state that gender related issues in ECE in the US are mainly related to natural biases that often result in stereotyping and discriminatory practices in

societies and classrooms.

A deeper understanding of diversity, differences and fairness are key factors if equity and quality are to be achieved in relation to gender in ECE. As mentioned previously, Nepali contexts are still rife with gendered connotations, therefore gender stereotyping, discriminations, and ostracism will be problematic barriers to equity and quality in ECE. Although there are positive findings by UNICEF (2011) that suggest that Nepal is improving and moving towards gender equity in ECE enrolment, specifically in “mountain/hills” and “urban/semi” regions (p. 27), there is a definite scarcity of equitable policies pertaining to gender in ECE. As this research study has revealed, teachers and parents are ignorant due to lack of knowledge and educational training. Likewise, cultural and societal norms adhere to patriarchal philosophies that epitomise gender bias and discrimination. Realising equity and quality in ECE will therefore require challenging and confronting gendered ideologies and a massive paradigm shift in the attitudes, perceptions and intentions of policy heads as well as the general public. In the next section, I will briefly explore the limitations and ethical issues that arose during the process of this research study.

5.4 Limitations/ethical dilemmas while researching equity and quality in ECE in Nepal

Limitations in social research are highly evident, especially when methodology is designed to collect verbatim data with diverse groups of participants. This research study was not without its share of barriers. In this section, I will highlight some of the limitations I experienced during the process of this research. As mentioned in Chapter 1, I aimed to develop a comparative analysis of the policies for equity and quality in ECE through perceptions of participants from the two distinctly diverse contexts of the United States and Nepal. The intention was to collect verbatim data from through focus groups and elite interviews in both countries. Due to time constraints, recruitment of participants in the United States and critical issues in my personal life, I was unable to follow the initial design. I therefore resorted to developing a comparative analysis on

the basis of desk reviews of policy documents alongside verbatim data collected with participants in urban and semi-urban Kathmandu in Nepal. This analysis is presented in Chapter 2 as the literature review. Besides this early setback, there were other structural and philosophical impediments that impacted my research. For example, structural difficulties while recruiting participants for focus groups in Nepal consumed a large portion of my time, as I was out of the country. Likewise, persuading elite participants to contribute their views proved to be another challenge due to their busy schedules. My poststructural positionality was a philosophical difficulty that continuously placed me on shifting ground as an insider/outsider. I struggled to maintain my status as a reflexive researcher due to subjectivities that ensue when researching one's own people (Choi, 2006). In the following section, I will briefly describe the structural limitations that impacted this research study.

5.4 a. Structural Limitations

In Chapter 3, I described the process of recruitment of focus group participants from different settings in urban and semi-urban Kathmandu by initially employing graduate assistants and a sampling survey mechanism. The survey was utilised to generate quantitative data to identify the prospective participants based on homogeneity of geography, gender, caste and profession. Homogeneity was, however, difficult to maintain, due to participant withdrawals and restrictions from respective employer authorities. Out of 111 total participants who were handed the information sheet and consent forms, 71 signed the form and agreed to participate. In order to maintain homogeneity, several willing participants had to be dropped due to the large number of female respondents. Besides, this obstruction, issues such as language and interpretation of my field questions impacted the collection of data as well. As mentioned previously, there is no parallel meaning for the term 'equity' in the Nepali language, so it was difficult to translate my field questions into their literal form in Nepali. We ended up spending a large part of the allocated time on defining the term in relevant Nepali literature. The closest meanings we discovered related to social justice, anti-bias, equality and non-discrimination. I argue that although these terms may be suitable and fulfilled my purpose, they did not justify many other issues relating to

equity that I had hoped to reveal, such as equitable distribution of services through high quality services and quality of teacher education and its relation to equity and quality in ECE. As noted previously, these concepts are however difficult to define regardless of the region or country in which the research is situated. The uncovering of local meanings therefore provides insights into variations in context and history.

Elite interviews also presented structural complications in terms of time constraints, participants' schedules and their rigidity in sharing information. As disclosed previously, the elite participants for this research were identified with the help of local village heads such as the principal and administrations of the schools, SMC personnel and other such sources. Tansey (2007) informs that elite interviews are usually planned in order to "corroborate what has been established from other sources" such as policy texts, "establish what a set of people think, make inference about a larger population's characteristics/decisions or to reconstruct an event or a set of events" (p. 766). In my case, elite interviewees were recruited for the purpose of validating information in policy literature and to highlight issues that impeded implementation of equity and quality policies in ECE at grassroots level. Hoping to conduct semi-structured interviews utilising a similar set of field questions as I had for the focus groups, I requested 30 minutes of time with each interviewee. Due to their positions of power in organisations they represented, my interviews had to be redesigned impromptu into a structured format. Kezar (2003) argues that elite interviews often tend to transform interviewees into "objects rather than subjects" of study due to the focus on their "specialized knowledge" (p. 397). In my case, some of the elites were new to the ECE sector due to the changes in the governance of the country, while some of them had vast amounts of theoretical knowledge regarding the development of children and the importance of ECE. Tansey (2007) warns that researchers need to be mindful regarding elite interviewees' opinions and perceptions so that it is possible to recognize politically influenced answers to questions asked during the interviews and while analysing such data. Other structural difficulties, such as jumping bureaucratic red tape to gain access to organisational heads, the back and forth communication while requesting consent and rescheduling due to cancellations were also part of the

limitations of this research. In the following section, I will explain the philosophical limitations that impacted this study.

5.4 b. Philosophical Limitations and Ethical dilemmas

I argue that a qualitative research study such as this relies on interpretations of what the participants said, what the researcher heard, and subsequent interpretations of local meanings. Interpretations are highly influenced by researcher positionality as well as by the values, beliefs and attitudes of both participants and the researcher. According to Clough and Nutbrown (2008), interpretations are always subject to ethical problems as “researchers adopt a variety of practices to make meaning” from the data. Likewise, Tickle (2001) informs that researchers who are primarily educators tend to “operate as activists” intending to bring change (p. 346) therefore philosophical limitations and ethical dilemmas are bound to occur. Besides, my positionality as a poststructuralist researcher in my own community also posed numerous ethical obstacles related to the “insider-outsider” discourse (Choi, 2006; Pillay, 2011; Weiner-Levy and Queder, 2012). Choi (2006) informs that poststructuralist positionality is proliferated due to its unpredictable nature and places the researcher in between shifting grounds of a constructivist society and the research community. Pendlebury and Enslin (2001) agree that such a dual identity brings philosophical limitations and ethical concerns, especially when the researcher romanticises his/her own culture and/or community. They further expound that as an insider, the researcher can gain special insights into the “practices and understanding of the community” as well as “warrant the trustworthiness” to “serve the interests of the community”. However, the researcher could also be looked upon as a “special outsider – as the researcher with the critical lens” that may “cast doubt on his/her trustworthiness” (p. 363). Likewise, Mullings (1999) further informs that:

Traversing the landscape of power relations in interviews, by attempting to create momentary spaces where the interviewer and the interviewees’ positionalities complement each other, is easier said than done. Particularly where information is sought from individuals who occupy highly disparate positions within an economic or industrial hierarchy, the creation of positional spaces with individuals

who are viewed as part of one group might negatively affect the perceptions and willingness of other groups to share information.

(Mullings, 1999, p. 340)

Similar dilemmas were part of this research study due to my personal background, comprised of my education, ethnicity, gender, profession, current geographic location and economic status. Griffith (1998) argues that as researchers we “cannot be outside society” therefore assuming the objective lens is a difficult procedure (p. 361). O’Conner (2004) also asserts that researchers who belong to the same community have a privileged position that allows for positive rapport with participants and consistency in interpretations of data. Chattopadhyay (2012) describes the insider-outsider dilemma as sometimes being challenging to researchers due to its dualistic characteristics. Similarities in culture and language, alongside differences in class, education and socio-economic status are some of the dualisms that are starkly visible when researching within one’s own community. Caste, religion, gender and ethnicity are among those categories that create typical constraints, especially when working in patriarchal contexts (Griffith, 1998; Mullings, 1999; Chattopadhyay, 2012). These dualisms were part of my dilemma, as I shared commonalities with my participants at different levels. Belonging to and practicing Nepali culture and traditions and speaking the same language were some of the commonalities that allowed me to be accepted and tolerated as an insider. I must mention here that I have always observed Nepali people to be generally hospitable and welcoming and the same generosity was afforded towards my research assistants and me when we approached the participants. As discussed earlier in this thesis, Subedi (2014) demonstrates this sociable attitude as relationships that are reciprocal in nature. He deconstructs the Nepali term *afno manchhe* meaning “one’s own people” as relationships with an “implicit hierarchy” and such associations are tactically developed “between people unconnected by kinship or marriage” (p. 56). He further remarks that such a relationship “has the potential of being used to construct an informal personalized organization of activities” that are influential in “operations of formal structures of market and bureaucracy” (p. 56). This exchange in cordialities led me to consider myself as the *afno manchhe*; a privileged insider sharing the same cultural heritage as my participants. With reference to the

implicit hierarchies that such relationships reflect, the differences in socio-economy, education, gender (in some cases) and my current US residency between my participants and I were however evident in some of the conversations and interview transcripts that placed me in an outsider position, therefore severely limiting me from obtaining relevant information.

In accordance with Merriam et al., (2010), I would consider my position as that of an “indigenous-outsider”- one who has “high levels of cultural assimilation into an outsider or oppositional culture” but “remains connected to his or her indigenous community” (p. 412). This assumed positionality brought in another set of problematic encounters. Although the participants did not negatively perceive my outsider position, power relationships were evidently visible in the conversations that occurred. As argued by Foucault (1977) the power and knowledge of researchers are opposed by the underpowered knowledge of participants and they often seek to empower themselves through such encounters. Some transcripts point to instances where I was often regarded as the activist who would help them to dramatically change their lives. This was an ethical concern that urged me to maintain reflexive rigour. However, these dualities confirmed my beliefs regarding my assumptions about the differences that participants experience when faced with implicit hierarchies within their professions, and within the politics of policymaking and implementation.

Humes and Bryce (2003) suggest that “too much reflexivity can lead to a kind of intellectual paralysis” (p. 181) thus failing to contribute towards the pending debate and giving way to objectivity (Thapa, 2013). However, Sultana (2007) argues that opulent reflexivity is condemned as a process that results in “navel-gazing”, but reflexivity in positionality allows researchers to understand and reflect on “how one is inserted in grids of power relations and how that influences methods, interpretations, and knowledge production” (p. 376). Working and researching my own people created shifting dynamics relating to power, relationships and my insider-outsider position, hence exercising reflexivity assisted in keeping my emotional and sentimental thoughts straight and analytical. Besides these dilemmas, other stringent protocols hampered my research, especially when conducting elite interviews. Nepal is a predominantly

patriarchal society where most government officials and heads of policy are male. Hoping that my power position as an assistant professor working in a renowned university in the US would gain me access to elite participants, I requested 20 (three of whom were women) members of the elite governance and aid agencies for an interview regarding policies in early childhood education. Being approached by a Nepali woman residing and working in the US was however probably culturally unacceptable, since there were only three positive responses (one of whom was female). In this scenario, I was definitely considered an outsider with power relations coming into play. Khawaja and Morck (2009) expound these power struggles in poststructuralist approaches as being “political” and “aiming to destabilize existing problematizing discursive images” (p. 40). Merriam et al., (2010) also argue that power relationships need to be negotiated and processed with participants to impose such processes as a knowledge developing symposium rather than a subjugation of empowerment. My case as the outsider when conducting elite interviews created imbalanced power situations where I was considered the “know-it-all” professor from a fancy university abroad, arriving to question their authority on policies that were home grown and formulated through their knowledge of reality, to which I was an unknowledgeable stranger.

My strong commitment towards bringing change in early childhood education in Nepal and vehemently voicing my concerns despite negative responses; encountering endless barriers as a ‘foreign’ educated non-resident Nepali, are some of the issues that I have had to reflect on during this project. As aptly argued by Wilson ((1992), we, as educators-turned-researchers, find it difficult to “disconnect ourselves from value-judgements” (p. 356) and we often tend to surrender our authoritative expertise to follow “values of power holders” however misguided they may be (p. 355). During the elite interviews for this research, it was a foreboding task to probe to obtain answers regarding the knowledge and awareness of the government regarding policies on equity and quality in early childhood education. The transcriptions point out many instances where the elite participants continuously evoked their authority over such issues and continued to stress the amount of work being done rather than answering my questions. I understood that these evocations reflected the rhetoric of policy texts infused with their positional power. These dilemmas were ones that required tremendous ethical

concerns and continuous reflexivity, rigour and reflection during the entire process of this research study. In the next section, I will present the conclusion of this chapter and thesis with recommendations and scope for future studies on similar grounds.

5.5 Conclusion

This chapter presented discussions relative to the themes that were realised during data analysis. The themes represented perceptions, opinions and recommendations from participants of focus group and individual interviews. Deconstructing each theme with reference to local language and thought, this research unveiled a number of issues surrounding equity and quality in ECE of Nepal. Views expressed by participants reflected deeply embedded ontological realities that created a diaspora of epistemological concerns around awareness, understanding, evaluation and implementation of equity and quality policies in ECE at micro and macro levels. Economically influenced global levers and drivers continue to shape and impact ECE policies in Nepal, where the focus is on measurable outcomes, results and children becoming commodified and made ready for primary/elementary schools through formal curricula and academic standardisation. Rights to early education for the children of Nepal are rightfully placed in the draft of the new constitution, but this fails to recognise equity and quality as primary factors to ensure the holistic development of children. Likewise, young children today are still victims of crime, religious sacralisation and trafficking, with boys still being idolised as the typical heirs to citizenship to safeguard patriarchal dogmas. The perceptions of participants, especially in the focus groups, revealed enthusiasm to do better for all children; to change what has historically been accepted; to challenge authority; but, as one of them expressed, “in paper [sic] it is all very good” (Focus group, 2014). I could read the anger in their faces, the apprehensions in their body language and hopes in their side conversations, but there is little that I can do. I therefore recommend pursuing issues of equity and quality in ECE through local voices so that studies in these areas are culturally appropriate and responsive to local contexts. I also recommend that policy makers take a deeper look into local and cultural attitudes, perceptions and childhood issues before following recommendations from larger and richer nations to expand ECE services.

Expansion is necessary, but not at the cost of imparting factory-like, commodified education just to ensure that children are ready for Grade 1. Quality of education and care through well-qualified teachers and facilitators in the foundation years is key to enhancing development and learning in children. Quality of curriculum content and equity in imparting educational goals are essential for the enrichment of children's learning and development. Likewise, equity in services, gender parity and advocating for respect and higher wages for teachers working with young children all remain pressing needs, so that all children will eventually have the opportunity to grow into socially aware, skilful, mindful and adept citizens of the nation. They may ultimately be able to contribute to the very change processes that are needed in Nepal.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

This research study sought to answer questions relating to equity and quality in ECE in two diverse contexts through interviews and desk research. The research was based on an interpretive and qualitative design. Adopting a poststructuralist position, I collected primary data through semi-structured focus groups and individual and elite interviews and critically assessed policy documents for secondary data. The interview data was analysed through a thematic coding analytical tool and secondary data was grouped to reflect information related to emergent themes in the verbatim data. The finalised themes were reiterated in the results and findings with further elaborations in the final discussions. The discussions pursued several international debates and studies to illustrate issues of equity and quality in ECE of the two countries in focus, using the concepts of horizontal and vertical equity as a means for understanding tensions and competing demands. This chapter will conclude the thesis by synthesising and summarising the main arguments, results and the discussions presented in various chapters. The chapter will also provide final recommendations on the scope and purpose for similar research in ECE.

6.1 Deconstructing ‘equity’ and ‘quality’ in ECE

In Chapter 1, I stated that the primary aim of this research study was to reveal localised meanings of the terms ‘equity’ and ‘quality’ in ECE in Nepal through participant perceptions. Likewise, the secondary aim was to critically examine these perceptions and substantiate the findings with policy documents from two diverse countries that have both equity and quality in ECE as their focus. To achieve these aims, several objectives were outlined, such as collecting interview data through focus groups, individual interviews and desk reviews, defining the terms in the local language by analysing the data and finally, ascertaining the implementation of policies on equity and quality in ECE at local levels that determined the relevance of the rhetoric in such texts. As a poststructuralist researcher, I was committed to revealing truths through the

narratives/stories of local participants and to attach local meanings to the terms ‘equity’ and ‘quality’ in ECE. The thesis is built around the central idea of bringing local truths to the surface, with the intention of unmasking hidden systemic constraints that subjugate local voices, while policy keeps meandering down a discursive path. Meaning, according to Saussure (1857-1913) as cited by Wright (2003), is always in a fluid state and personal narratives are influenced by context-specific exchanges in language and meaning-making. As a poststructuralist researcher, it was therefore important for me to understand that the narratives recorded were highly influenced by the current social/cultural/political conditions and contexts of participants and deconstructing applied meanings would be vital to obtain answers to my research questions. Using the local language as a means to obtain valid data was also necessary, as meanings of certain policy terms in the local language demystified hidden meanings that were context-specific and influenced by the current conditions of participants (Giroux, 1995). For example, in Chapter 3 I relate to the policy term ‘equity’ being extensively discussed during my focus group interviews, and how we were unable to find a suitable word in Nepali. We were compelled to substitute the word with Nepali phrases that suggested social justice, equality and empathy, therefore bringing sensitive issues such as children’s rights, gender bias and poverty to the surface. Besides these, there were other instances where policy and polity were demystified through local language and local meaning. For example, the Nepali phrase *Ke garney estai chalan cha* or “what to do, it is the rule” was a constant theme in most of the interview sessions, and even elite participants uttered these words without remorse, suggesting the presence of a supra-national/international dominance that was beyond their jurisdiction.

My insider/outsider position was another aspect that had to be handled with caution, as power struggles were evident due to “invisible positioning” (Choi, 2006, p. 445). Data, Choi (2006) states, is almost always manipulated by researcher positions, since they portray power and/or authority; therefore, it is necessary to remove all assumptions, presuppositions and bias during the entire research process. I have taken the contrasting view as a poststructural researcher that assumptions, presuppositions and bias cannot be removed, therefore they have to be acknowledged as an integral part of the research

process. In Chapter 1, I revealed some of the influences and personal experiences that sparked my interest in issues of equity and quality in ECE. To a certain extent these influences and experiences became part of my biases and presuppositions, but developing a reciprocal partnership with participants, using the local language and making them feel safe and secure enhanced my insider position, allowing me access to their personal narratives mostly during individual interviews. My outsider position came into play mostly during the focus groups, as some of the focus group participants were wary of the power position I held due to my background and my “researcher” image. Interviewing elite participants positioned me on the outside and power struggles between them (due to their roles in State organisations) and myself (as the ‘foreign’ educated researcher) were evident. Applying critical analysis skills and reflecting on my shifting position assisted me in reflexively objectifying truths about the state of equity and quality in current conditions and contexts. This allowed me to identify and discuss five different themes that were inadvertently tied to equity and quality in ECE of both Nepal and the US. For example, most participants were in agreement regarding the lack of policy interventions in meeting the current needs of abandoned children or children/families living in poverty. Likewise, participants also discussed the pitiful state of current policies for children and identified ECE as being an area where concrete and comprehensive reforms were necessary. Although Nepal and the USA are thus at different points in their policy development for ECE, it is interesting to note that similar themes were evident in terms of insufficient quantity and quality of provision. This indicates that differences in wealth between the global North and South do not always result in significant differences in ECE provision in terms of equity and quality for all children.

There were several significant narratives obtained through individual and elite interviews (and mentioned in this research) that conveyed how policy rhetoric and policy heads are highly influenced by political conditions, aid agencies, oligarchic ideologies and by the lack of knowledge among policy-level leaders. These different policy players and providers do not always work in harmony in ECE, where some practices promoted by the aid agencies (such as language use) may be considered inequitable and even to sustain a colonial narrative. Due to such discords between

public policies and their implementation at different levels, the perceptions of several participants illustrated that Nepali ECE is entrenched in a continuous struggle that is further amplified by endemic poverty and wider socio-economic and cultural disparities. It was noted that changes were being implemented through several reforms in early childhood education policies in Nepal and ECE programmes are being extensively expanded for accessibility, indicating success in achieving horizontal equity. Global discourse still labels Nepal as a 'poor nation' despite the efforts to eliminate poverty by several outside agencies, indicating that vertical equity is still unattainable. These, I argue, could be the outcomes of discords between polity and policy and the dominance of the supra-national and international organisations and their associated discourses. I contend however that, it is necessary to investigate the country's political history before pathologising developing nations such as Nepal. Nepali politics, as outlined in Chapter 2, have been variously manipulated by different oligarchic ideologies, influenced by aid agencies and pressured by powerful neighbours throughout history. I further assert that assigning the 'poor' label signifies manipulation and dominance by these hierarchies that result in further mutations of discursive policy trends. Furthermore, these dominating ideologies transcend cultural ethos, thereby giving rise to amorphous Western philosophies that are endorsed by the ECE sector and that many children then experience, for better or for worse. For example, the Montessori methodology and downward extensions of primary curricula into ECE are all outcomes of such idiosyncrasies and supra-national discourses. Likewise, failing to dissipate structural disparities such as intergenerational poverty, educational inequity and gender insensitivity, (as revealed by the data of this research) is another facet that testifies to the dominance of outside agencies and the power of manipulation that keeps poorer nations away from complete emancipation from issues such as poverty. Such supra-national influences therefore prevent efforts to achieve vertical equity at a national level.

Similar contentious issues (mentioned in Chapter 2) concerning the status of equity and quality in the US, a developed and rich nation compared to Nepal, were also noted in this research. For example, the extreme measures taken to include deprived children through amendments in the 1965 U.S. immigration law negatively affected the

economy and threatened social structures (James et al., 1998). Likewise, the introduction of the Head Start programmes managed to achieve horizontal equity to a certain extent, but failed to maintain the quality and equality of services, thereby indicating an absence of vertical equity (Johnson, 2014). According to several sources, child poverty in the US is rated as one of the highest among developed countries and many children have little or no access to ECE services. Watkins (2013) asserts that these aspects of vertical inequity magnify funding issues due to inequalities in household incomes and significantly, much of the funding fails to reach children living below the poverty line. As one of the countries that has withheld endorsement of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, policies for ECE and children's rights remain in the hands of internal polity and lawmaking, therefore avoiding international interventions (Bartholet, 2011). Bartholet (2011) expounds that ratifying the treaty would mean giving more rights to children, contrary to current US laws. Parents, according to Bartholet (2011), have rights to "make decisions related to their children" while the State governance has limited authority over such decisions. This goes back to the discussion in Chapter 2 regarding "family privacy and primacy" elaborated by Kagan (2009) who informs that US laws and policies were primarily framed based on these "twin values" (p. 4). Other issues such as lack of funds, fragmented service delivery, disparities in diversity or ethnic backgrounds and poverty have also been disclosed in prior chapters of this thesis. For example, Ochshorn (2015) relates to the rhetoric in policy documents that acknowledges the presence of disparities in household incomes, gender, race and/or disability through its advertisements of educational opportunity for all, as discussed in Chapter 2 of this thesis. Similarly, Kagan (2009) describes ECE in USA as being a "confusing hybrid" consisting of several different programmes therefore "lacking clarity and coherence for parents, policy makers, and the public" (p. 5). The wealth of a nation therefore does not always translate into vertical or horizontal equity goals, not least because the goals are difficult and expensive to accomplish in education systems without parallel support through parent education programmes, social welfare and employment opportunities.

The principal tasks that I set out to accomplish with this research were to deconstruct equity and quality in ECE through local perceptions and demystify the language

occurring in both policy rhetoric and in the opinions of participants. It was interesting to note that although the two countries chosen for the study are distinctly dissimilar in many ways, issues relating to children, equity, quality and ECE appear to be relevant in both contexts. The only difference that conspicuously remained visible was the terms ‘developed’ and ‘developing’ and I argue that these terms also need to be deconstructed at local and contextual levels so that they too are demystified. I therefore recommend that further studies should elucidate the deeper meanings that define those terms locally, in order to challenge and deconstruct supra-national and global discourses. According to this research, several endemic issues related to poverty, disparities and subservience of children and their rights are present in both USA, as a ‘developed’ country, and in Nepal as a ‘developing’ country. Balancing the equity and quality equation in ECE remains a significant challenge, as much in the global North as in the global South.

6.2 Original Contribution to Knowledge

This research claims that equity and quality issues are deeply embedded in cultural discourses. It also claims that the development of ECE policies by governments around the world are overtly related to several factors such as endemic poverty, disparities due to ethnicity, social class and caste, accessibility and quality perceptions at different levels of society in both the global North and the South. Rhetoric occurring in policies of both the developed and developing countries appear similar although the influences impacting such rhetoric and implementation of policies are dissimilar. For example, Kagan (2009) expounds the formation of ECE policies of USA being cleverly concealed behind rhetoric such as ‘visions of childhood and their values for young children’ (p. 4) while the primary intention was to ‘improve the lot of the poor and disenfranchised’ (p. 4). Likewise, Nepali ECE policies contain rhetoric such as expanding services for disadvantaged children and preparing children for further education while the primary intention is to gratify aid agencies and supra-national powers that provide funding for such services. Although parallels in inequities such as extreme child poverty and lack of high quality services exist in both contexts (Wisconsin and Nepal) chosen for this study, the impact of external influences is

distinctly different.

It was discovered through this research that historically ECE policies of USA were based on public funding with families being the largest funders. Recent literature reveals that due to persistent recessions and downfalls in socio-economic conditions of the middle class families, public funding has been constrained leading towards the reduction of ECE services for children living in poverty (Mitchell and Stoney, 2011). For example, recent statistics place over a quarter million children living in poverty in Wisconsin alone and declines in enrolment for ECE services were highly noticeable (Wisconsin Council on Children and Families (WCCF), 2013). The pressure on both the federal and state governance to reassess ECE policies and to base them on child developmental needs driven by data on quality and guided by ECE standards has been immense over the past few years especially after the unsuccessful implementation of the 'No Child Left Behind Act' of 2001. Several literature sources cite ECE agencies welcoming the new Obama government's announcement of the 'Every Student Succeeds Act' as a precursor that would lead towards equitable and high quality services for all children. The act according to the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) (2015), would allow substantial improvements in equity and quality through targeted funding provisions such as state and local grant programmes. It can therefore be noted that the elusiveness of equity and quality in USA is embedded in public policy debates and are mainly targeted towards economic emancipation rather than for individual children and families.

Likewise, it was discovered through this research that Nepali ECE policies have undergone several amendments but unfortunately, these were mainly based on pressures from supra-national powers who operate under the flagship of United Nations affiliated aid agencies such as the UNICEF and numerous other charitable institutions such as Save The Children, USAID and International Child Resource Institute to name a few. For example, this research revealed the imbalance of power between the direct providers of ECE services such as the teachers and administrators and the funding bodies (aid agencies) when participants expressed the need for culturally appropriate and need based implementable ECE approaches rather than teaching children 'English'.

The research also revealed power struggles between the different aid agencies and the government through the irregularities in operations at different sectors. For example, some participants cited the need for a 'one door policy' to eliminate ambiguities in the implementation process. It can therefore be noted that aid agencies such as the NGOs and INGOs operate simultaneously at the peripheral as well as the central level of policy making and implementation process and clearly represents another layer of inequity that adversely impacts ECE in Nepal as the governance does not have access to accountability but has to comply with the evaluations presented by each individual aid agency. I argue that although structural inequities related to women and children do occur in several contexts of Nepal, there are a number of culturally appropriate pedagogies that would be more beneficial to children and families. For example, the child rearing practices of Nepali families are based on the values of extended family and care for young children is provided mainly by grandparents and relatives. Likewise, the value of the mother-tongue and culturally aligned approaches such as learning through apprenticeship or by participating in cultural and social rituals are far more appropriate than learning through artificially created westernized classrooms. Unlike in the USA, this research revealed that subjugation and a hidden form of colonization was transmitted in Nepal through public policies and most policies were targeted towards gratifying a domineering supra national power that manipulated the source of funding. Therefore the elusiveness of equity and quality in ECE in Nepal remains buried under discourses such as children's rights, teacher education, ECE curriculum, gender and ethno-social/cultural and revelations of eminent issues are overruled by a governance that is unconditionally governed by supra-national powers.

Epilogue

July 26th, 2015: The Himalayan Times reports on the number of children displaced due to the two destructive quakes in Nepal. Reports prepared by UNICEF (2015) inform that 700,000 to 1 million people could potentially be pushed below the international poverty line and among them over 60 – 70 % are children. The report further states that “10,000 children have been identified as acutely malnourished since the first earthquake; 1000 children identified as suffering from severe malnutrition; 200 children remain without a parent or caregiver; 600 children have lost one or both parents; 32,000 classrooms have been destroyed and 900,000 houses have been damaged or destroyed”. Voices of older children were incorporated in national dialogues through recent consultations conducted by aid agencies, where children expressed their fear and insecurity and lack of privacy while living in tents and temporary shelters. They provided recommendations on “how to rebuild their lives and communities, including the need for earthquake resistant homes, schools and better preparation for future calamities” (Himalayan News Service, 2015). Representatives of children in their early childhoods, however, remain silent, while the leaders of the nation ignore the importance of ECE once again.

I still listen to stories while Kathmandu continues to experience minor jolts every day. I read a heart-wrenching story on a Facebook page titled “Nepal Earthquake - untold stories” about a building collapsing and burying a mother and child along with their pet dog. Some parts of the city still have rubble and debris lying in large heaps, with children playing on them. Families, fearing the worst, still living in tents at the exhibition grounds of the city, are some of the panoramic views observed while driving around. Children are attending schools and preschools and the darkness has dissipated. There is hope for a new tomorrow - my heart lifts at the thought of this glimmer of light. I pray that there will be more advocates, more enthusiasts and researchers with foresight to pursue equity and quality in ECE for all the children of Nepal.

"All of us have moments in our childhood where we come alive for the first time. And we go back to those moments and think, 'This is when I became myself.'"

- Rita Dove

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Appendix 1 - Survey Form

Name of the local area					
General population					
Predominant means of livelihood					
Predominant ethnicity of community					
Socio-economic conditions (low/middle/upper middle/affluent)					
Names of the centres visited					
Proximity of the centre from the city (for semi-urban centres)					
Number of children in identified area/context					
Gender, approximate range in age, ethnicities of children attending	Boys = Ethnicity = Age range = Girls = Ethnicity = Age range =	Boys = Ethnicity = Age range = Girls = Ethnicity = Age range =	Boys = Ethnicity = Age range = Girls = Ethnicity = Age range =	Boys = Ethnicity = Age range = Girls = Ethnicity = Age range =	Boys = Ethnicity = Age range = Girls = Ethnicity = Age range =
Number of staff					
Gender and	Men =	Men =	Men =	Men =	Men =

ethnicities of staff,	Women=	Women=	Women=	Women=	Women=
Staff training and qualifications (low/high/advanced)	Low = High= Advanced=	Low = High= Advanced=	Low = High= Advanced=	Low = High= Advanced=	Low = High= Advanced=
Parent involvement	Yes = No =	Yes = No =	Yes = No =	Yes = No =	Yes = No =
Funding initiatives and					
Specific pedagogy/curriculum (if any).					

Appendix 2

Request Letter for Centres and Principals (English and Nepali)

Dear Sir/Madam,

I am conducting a research to study how the policy of equity in early childhood education is being achieved at different levels of the society and at different centres of urban and semi-urban Kathmandu. This research is part of my Doctoral Studies at the University of Sheffield, UK. In order to identify local centres and participants for focus group and individual interviews I have developed a survey that will be administered by my research assistants at your esteemed institution. I would be very obliged if you could grant my research assistant, _____(name of RA) entry into the premises of your centre and allow him/her to collect the required data.

Please note that the data collected will be used only to establish demographic information and will be kept confidential at all times. The data will not be shared nor publicized and will be destroyed once the required information is obtained.

Please feel free to ask any questions for further clarifications. I will be available at these numbers and addresses.

N0: 9851083192

Email: rasathapa@gmail.com

Address: Balwatar, Kathmandu.

Thank you for your consideration.

Regards

Sapna Thapa

Principal Investigator

University of Sheffield

United Kingdom.

अभिजात्य सहभागिताका लागि अनुरोधपत्र

आदरणिय श्रीमान / श्रीमती

शुरुको वाल्यवस्थाको शिक्षामा समताको नीति समाजका विभिन्न तहमा नगर एवं नगरोन्मुख काठमाण्डौमा विभिन्न ठाउमा कसरी हासिल गरिएको छ भन्ने बारेमा अध्ययन गर्न म एक अनुसन्धान गरि रहेको छु । यो अनुसन्धान मेरो संयुक्त अधिराज्य स्थित सेफिल्ड विश्वविद्यालयको विद्यावारिधिको अध्ययनको एक भाग हो ।

शुरुको वाल्यवस्थाको शिक्षामा समताको नीतिको निर्माण र कायान्वयनको थप ज्ञान हासिल गर्न अन्तर्वाताला लागी करिव ३० मिनेट समय याहाले दिनु भएमा म धेरै कृतज्ञ हुने थिए ।

कृपया जानकारी होस कि संकलित तथ्याक केवल जनसंख्यिक सूचना कायम गर्न मात्र प्रयोग गरिनेछ । र सदैव गोप्य राखिने छ । यो तथ्याक कसैलाई जानकारीमा दिइने छैन र प्रकाशनमा ल्याइने पनि छैन र आवश्यक सूचना प्राप्त हुने वित्तिकै नष्ट गरिनेछ ।

अन्य आवश्यक स्पष्टोक्तिका लागि प्रश्न गर्न स्वतन्त्र महसुस गर्नुहोस । म निम्न लिखित नम्बर र ठेगानाहरुमा उपलब्ध हुनेछ ।

नम्बर : ९८५१० ८३१९२

इमेल : rasathapa@gmail.com

ठेगाना : वालुवाटार काठमाण्डौ

यहाँको ध्यानाकर्षणका लागि धन्यवाद

भवदिय

सपना थापा

मुख्य अनुसन्धानकर्ता

सेफिल्ड विश्वविद्यालय

संयुक्त अधिराज्य

Appendix 3

Information Sheet in English and Nepali

Participant Information Sheet

Research Project Title: Achieving equity standards: an analysis of policy in early childhood education through participant perceptions in urban Nepal and semi-urban Wisconsin, USA

You are being invited to take part in a research project that aims to analyze the policy of equity in early childhood education through your perceptions. This information sheet will give you a brief description about the main elements of the project. Please make sure you read the information carefully and should you have any questions or issues that you would like to discuss before you participate in the study, please feel free to talk to me.

Thank you for reading this.

What is the project's purpose?

Equity is a highly debated subject especially when very young children are involved. However the word 'equity' seems to have several applied meanings in different cultural contexts. Several studies have pointed out that the ambiguous nature of the word has led to misinterpretation of policies outlining equity as a mandate for early childhood education. This project aims to critically analyze the meaning attached to the word 'equity' through perceptions or views of early childhood practitioners and policy level heads from two diverse settings. Through this study I aspire to bring multiple innovative meanings to the word equity so that the mandated policy in early childhood education is clearly understood at different levels of society.

The project will include two focus group interviews with early childhood practitioners and policy level heads for approximately an hour and four individual interviews with randomly selected early childhood practitioners and policy level heads. Interviews will be conducted at your convenience and in a place chosen by you.

Why have I been chosen?

You have been randomly selected from a group of participants who were identified through a baseline survey.

Do I have to take part?

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part in the project. You can discuss it with your office, family or any authority concerned before you make your decision. If you do agree to participate you will be free to keep this information sheet and will be asked to sign a consent form. If you feel that you wish to withdraw at any point in the study, you will still be free to do so without any negative repercussions. Your identity and your participation will be kept confidential at all times. If you do not wish to participate, there will be no further consequences. I shall be happy to assist you in any way during the process if you need me to do so.

What will happen to me if I take part?

You will be asked to make time for one focus group interview and one individual interview (if you are one of the randomly selected participant) for approximately an hour. The focus group interview will take place at a mutually agreed location and convenience. All interviews will be tape-recorded only with your permission. The interview questions will be based on your personal experiences and understanding of the policy for equity. Please note that all the information will be treated as highly confidential and you will have full access to all information on request.

What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

The only physical disadvantage of taking part would be travelling to the designated location (for the focus group interview) and making time for the individual interviews. In order to make you comfortable, I shall make the necessary travel arrangements and conduct the individual interview at your convenience and in a setting of your choice. Should you feel uncomfortable sharing information during either interview, I shall respect your decision to remain silent or withdraw. If at any time during the interviews you need to take a break to recall or rethink, I shall oblige. If you are still in doubt, I shall be happy to discuss, explain everything you want to know about the project whenever you wish.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

There may not be any immediate benefits but your participation may contribute towards understanding some key points about the policy of equity in early childhood education. This would further lead towards planning for high-quality early childhood education centres that implement equity as a statutory mandate for the benefit of all children.

Will I be recorded, and how will the recorded media be used?

Yes, all interviews will be tape-recorded to ensure collection of high-quality data. However your permission will be sought and audio recordings will be used only for the

project and all information will be kept confidential. The recordings will be destroyed once the required information is analysed. However, you shall have access to the recordings on request and all transcriptions will be made available to you and the group for validation. If you or the group wish to clarify, elaborate or correct any misinterpretation in the transcripts, you shall be free to do so.

What if something goes wrong?

If there is any kind of discomfort or a possibility of any kind of distress to you or any member of the focus group please feel free to contact me immediately at rasathapa@gmail.com 9851083192 (Nepal cell)/ 7153085371 (USA cell). If your complaint is not satisfactorily addressed please contact any of the following personnel for further analysis of your complaint.

Supervisor: Professor Elizabeth E.A. Wood e.a.wood@sheffield.ac.uk

Course director: Professor Jackie Marsh j.a.marsh@Sheffield.ac.uk

Will my taking part in this project be kept confidential?

Please be further ensured that your participation will be kept completely confidential except within your focus group. Your name and any other details will not be used for any other purpose other than this particular study. All the data collected will be stored appropriately and will only be accessible to the researcher. All recordings will be destroyed after transcriptions have been obtained.

What will happen to the results of the research project?

The results of the research project will be used for an academic assignment only. However, should the researcher decide to elaborate the study in later research, the results may be reused as part of the data collection with your permission.

Who is organising and funding the research?

The research is self-funded and is part of my ongoing Doctoral studies in Early Childhood Education at the University of Sheffield. United Kingdom.

Who has ethically reviewed the project?

The University of Sheffield's Research Ethics Committee monitors have ethically reviewed this project in accordance with the University of Sheffield's Ethics Review Procedure in the Department of Educational Studies in School of Education.

Contact for further information

For any further information and questions, please contact:

Sapna Thapa – rasathapa@gmail.com or 9851083192 (Nepal cell)/7153085371 (USA cell)

THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR TAKING TIME TO READ THIS.

संक्षिप्तमा विवरण दिने छ । कृपया निश्चित गर्नुहोस कि तपाईंले सूचना ध्यानपूर्वक पढ्नुभयो र यदि तपाईंसंग कुनै प्रश्न छ वा तपाईं अध्ययन मा सहभागी हुनु अघि कुनै विषयमा छलफल गर्न चाहनुहुन्छ भने मसंग कुरा गर्न स्वतन्त्र महसुस गर्नुहोस ।

यो पढ्नु भएकोमा धन्यवाद

परियोजनाको उद्देश्य के हो ?

समता धेरै कलिला बालबालीका समावेश भए पछि उच्चस्तरमा छलफल गरिने विषयमा पर्दछ । तर समता शब्दको अर्थ विभिन्न सांस्कृतिक सन्दर्भमा विभिन्न रूपमा निकालिने हुन्छ । धेरै अध्ययनले स्पष्ट गरेको छ कि विश्वको अस्पष्ट प्रकृतिले समतालाई शुरूको बाल्यवस्थाको शिक्षामा आवश्यक समताको नीतिको मिथ्यावर्णन गरेको छ । यो परियोजनाले दुई विविध प्रकृतिको संरचना अर्थात शुरूको बाल्यवस्थाको अभ्यासकर्ता र दुई नीति तहका प्रमुखको मान्यता र दृष्टिकोणबाट आलोचनात्मक तवरबाट समतामा निहित अर्थको विश्लेषण गर्न खोजेको छ । यस अध्ययन वाट मैले समताका लागि विभिन्न सिर्जनात्मक अर्थ निकाल्न खोजेको छु । जसबाट शुरूको बाल्यावस्थाको शिक्षामा अनिवार्य बनाइएको नितिबारेमा स्पष्ट जानकारी समाजको विभिन्न तहमा हुन सकोस ।

यस परियोजनाले दुई वटा केन्द्रित समूह अन्तर्वार्ताको लागि समावेश गर्नेछ । जसमा शुरूको बाल्यावस्थाका अभ्यासकर्ता र नीति तहका प्रमुखहरु करिब १ घण्टाको लागि रहनेछ र चार वटा व्यक्तिगत अन्तर्वार्ता अन्धाधुन्ध छानिएका शुरूका बाल्यावस्थाका अभ्यासकर्ता र नीतितहका प्रमुखसंग लिइने छ । अन्तर्वार्ता तपाईंको सुविधामा सञ्चालनमा गरिने छ । र तपाईंले स्वयम गरेको ठाउँमा लिइने छ ।

म किन चयन भए ?

तपाईंलाई सहभागीहरुको समूहबाट अन्धाधुन्ध चयन गरिएको छ । जसा आधारभुत सर्भेक्षणबाट सहभागी चयन गरिएको थियो । के मैले सहभागी हुनुपर्छ ?

यो तपाईंले नै निर्णय गर्ने कुरा हो कि परियोजनामा सहभागी हुने वा नहुने । तपाईंले यस वाटोमा आफ्नो कार्यान्वयन गर्न सक्नु हुने छ । यदि तपाईंले सहभागी हुने निर्णय गरेमा तपाईंले यो सूचनाको फाराम साथमा राख्न सक्नु हुने छ र तपाईंलाई स्वीकृती फाराममा दस्तखत गर्न अनुरोध गरिनेछ । यदि तपाईंले अध्ययनको कुनै बुढामा फिर्ता हुन चाहेमा तपाईं त्यसो गर्न स्वतन्त्र रहनुहुनेछ । कुनै नकारात्मक परिणाम बेगर तपाईंको पहिचान र सहभागिता सधै गोप्य राखिने छ । यदि तपाईंले सहभागी हुन चाहेमा त्याहा कुनै अतिरिक्त

परिणाम हुने छैन । म तपाईंलाई कुनै तरहबाट प्रकृत्यामा सहयोग गर्न पाउदा खुशी छु यदि तपाईंले त्यसो गर्न चाहनु भयो भने ।

मैले सहभागीता जनाएमा मलाई के हुन्छ ?

तपाईंलाई एउटा केन्द्रित समूहमा अन्तर्वाता र एउटा व्यक्तिगत अन्तर्वाता -यदी तपाइ अन्धाधुन्ध रुपमा चयन गरिनु भएको सहभागी हो भने) करिव एक घण्टाका लागि समय दिन अनुरोध गरिने छ । समूह केन्द्रित अन्तर्वाता दुवैले सहमति गरेको क्षेत्रमा सुविधा अनुरूप सञ्चालन गरिने छ । सबै अन्तर्वाता तपाइको स्वीकृति वाट टेप रेकर्ड गरिनेछ । अन्तर्वाताका प्रश्नहरु तपाइको समताको नीति सम्बन्धि अनुभव र बुझाई आधारमा बनाइने छ । कृपया जानकारी होस की सबै सूचना उच्चताका साथ गोप्य राखिने छ र तपाईंले अनुरोध का आधारमा त्यसको पुरा जानकारी पाउनु हुनेछ ।

सहभागीताको सम्भावित वेफाइदा र जोखीम के के हुन ?

केवल एउटा शारिरीक वेफाइदा सहभागितावाट हुन्छ त्यो हो निर्धारित स्थानमा मण गर्नु - केन्द्रित समूह अन्तर्वाताका लागि) र व्यक्तिगत अन्तर्वाताका लागि समय दिनु हो । तपाईंको सुविधाको लागि म आवश्यक भ्रमण व्यवस्था मिलाउनेछु र व्यक्तिगत अन्तर्वाता तपाइको सुविधामा तपाईंले निर्धारण गरे अनुसार सञ्चालन गर्नेछु । यदि तपाईंले सूचना आदान प्रदान गर्न असहज महसुस गरेमा अन्तर्वाताको दोरानमा म कि मौन बस्नेछ कि फिर्ता लिने छु तपाईंको निर्णयलाई सम्मान गर्दै । यदि तपाईं आफ्नै शंकामा हुनहुन्छ भने म छलफलका लागि खुशी हुने छु । हरेक कुरा तपाइको चाहनामा वर्णन गर्न चाहन्छु ।

परियोजनाका वारेमा तपाईंले चाहे अनुसार सहभागिताका संभावित फाइदाहरु के के छन ?

तात्कालिक फाइदा त केही छैनन । तर तपाइको सहभागिताले केही महत्वपूर्ण कुराहरुका सम्बन्धमा बुझ्न सहयोग पुर्याउने छ शुरुको वाल्यावस्थाको शिक्षामा समताको नीति सम्बन्धमा । यसवाट बालबालिको फाइदाका लागि उच्चस्तरिय शुरु वाल्यावस्थाको शिक्षा केन्द्रको योजना बनाउनु अग्रस गराउने छ जसले सबैवालवालीकाको फाइदाको लागि समताको कानुनी दायीत्व स्वरुप कार्यान्वयन गराइनेछ ।

के मेरो रेकर्ड राखिने छ र के रेकर्ड गरिएको मिडीया प्रयोग गरिनेछ ।

हो सबै अन्तर्वाताको टेप रेकर्ड गरिनेछ । उच्चस्तरको तथ्याक संकलन अभिनिश्चित गर्न तर तपाइको स्वीकृति खोजिने छ सबै सूचना गोप्य राखिने छ । रेकर्डहरु आवश्यक सूचना विश्लेषण गर्ने वित्तिकै नष्ट गरिनेछ । तर रेकर्डमा तपाइको अनुरोधको आधारमा प्रवेश पाउनु हुनेछ जसमा सबै प्रति उपलब्ध गराइने छ । तपाईं र समूहका लागि अनुरोधनार्थ । यदि तपाइ

वा समूहले आवश्यक ठानेमा प्रतिहरुमा देखिएको मिथ्यावर्णन संसोधन गर्न वा कुनै कुरा स्पष्ट गर्न वा विस्तृत पार्न स्वतन्त्र पूर्वक सक्नु हुने छ । र केही गलत हुन गएमा के हुन्छ ?

अदि केही असुविधा भएमा वा अन्यथा भएमा तपाईं वा केन्द्रित समूहको कुनै सदस्यले निर्वाध पूर्वक मलाई तुरुन्तै Rasatapa@gmail.com ९८५१०८३१९२ (नेपाली सेल ७१५३०८५३७१ (संयुक्तराज्य अमेरिकी सेल) मा सम्पर्क गर्न सक्नु हुनेछ । यदि तपाइएको गुनासो सन्तोषजनक रुपमा सम्बोधित नभएमा थप विश्लेषणका लागि तल उल्लेखित कुनै पनि व्यक्तिलाई सम्पर्क गर्नुहोस ।

सुपरिवेक्षक : प्राध्यापक एलिजावेथ E. A. wood@ Shaffield ac.uk वुड
पाठ्यक्रम निर्देशक प्राध्यापक ज्याकी मास j.a. maya@sheffield.a.c.uk

के मेरो सहभागिता गोप्य राखिने छ ?

थप विश्वस्त हुनुहोस की तपाइको सहभागिता पूर्ण रुपमा गोप्य राखिनेछ तपाइको केन्द्रित समूहमा बाहेक । तपाईंको नाम र अन्य विवरणहरु अन्य उद्देश्यका लागि प्रयोगमा ल्याने छैन । त्यो विशेष अध्ययन का लागि बाहेक सबै संकलित तथ्याक उपयुक्त तवरवाट संचित गरिनेछ, र त्यो अनुसन्धानकर्ता लागि मात्र प्रवेशयोग्य हुने छ । सबै रेकर्डहरु परिणाम हासिल गरिएपछि नष्ट गरिनेछ ।

अनुसन्धान परियोजनाको परिणाम के हुन्छ ?

अनुसन्धान परियोजनाको परिणाम प्राज्ञिक अध्ययनका लागि मात्र प्रयोग गरिनेछ । तर यदि अनुसन्धानकर्ताले पछिल्लो अनुसन्धानमा अध्ययन विस्तृत पार्न चाहेमा परिणामको पुनः प्रयोग गर्न सकिनेछ । तपाइको स्वीकृतिवाट तथ्याक संकलनका लागि ।

कसले अनुसन्धान संगठित गरेको छ, र आर्थिक स्रोत प्रदान गरेको छ ? यो अनुसन्धान आफैले लगानी गरेको आफ्नो जारी विद्यावारिधी संयुक्त अधिराज्य को एउटा भाग हो ।

कसले आचारगत रुपमा परियोजना पुनारवालोकन गरेका छन ? यो परियोजनालाई आचारगत रुपमा पुनरावलोकन गर्नु भएको छ जसमा आचार पुनरावलोकन कार्यविधि -संहिता विश्वविद्यालयको आधार पुनरावलोकन कार्यविधि, शैक्षिक अध्ययनको विभाग, शिक्षाको विद्यालय, अवलम्बन गरिएको छ ।

थप जानकारीको लागि

थप जानकारी र प्रश्नका लागि सम्पर्क :

सपना थापा Rasatapa@gmail.com ९८५१०८३१९२ (नेपाली सेल ७१५३०८५३७१ (संयुक्तराज्य अमेरिकी सेल)

यो पढ्न समय दिनु भएकोमा धेरै धेरै धन्यवाद

मिति २६ जनवरी २०१४

निवेदकको नाम : सपना थापा

Appendix 4

Interview Questions: Focus group and Individual questions in English and Nepali

Questions linked to Research question No 1

What are the concepts held by practitioners and local heads of equity and quality in early childhood education?

What meanings are ascribed to equity and quality through local language and meaning making?

How do you as a practitioner reflect the inclusion of equity and quality in your early childhood environment?

Questions linked to Research question No 2

What are the attitudes of policy/polity heads towards the inclusion of equity and quality in early childhood education policy?

What is the level of awareness/understanding among policy heads regarding quality in early childhood education?

What is the status of the policy of equity and quality at grass-root level implementation?

What levers and drivers in the state polity influence the policy for early education?

Has the policy been subject to mediation as it cascades down through the different ecological systems?

Is the policy of equity and quality actually working at different ecological levels?

Focus Group/Individual Interview Questions

What does equity in early childhood education mean in local language?

What does quality in early childhood education mean in local language?

What do you personally think or what concepts do you as a practitioner/working with children, have about equity and quality in early childhood education?

How do you as a practitioner reflect the inclusion of equity and quality in your early childhood environment, can you give me some examples?

What, in your opinion, are the attitudes of policy/polity heads towards the subject of equity and quality in early childhood education in Nepal?

What, in your opinion, is the level of awareness/understanding among policy heads regarding quality in early childhood education today?

What is the status of the policy of equity and quality at your centres or in public today?

What do you think influences policy heads when making such policies for early education? Do you think the policy is mediated/negotiated at the different ecological levels and systems? If so, how and by who? Why do you think this happens?

In your opinion, do you think the policy of equity and quality is relevant in early childhood education of Nepal today? Give reasons for your answer.

लक्षित समूह / व्यक्तिगत अन्तर्वाता प्रश्नहरू

- शुरुको वाल्यवस्थाको शिक्षामा समता भन्नाले स्थानिय भाषामा के लाई बुझिन्छ ?
- शुरुको वाल्यवस्थाको शिक्षामा गुणस्तर भन्नाले स्थानिय भाषामा के लाई बुझिन्छ ?
- शुरुको वाल्यवस्थाको शिक्षामा समता र गुणस्तर भन्नाले तपाई व्यक्तिगत रुपमा के सोच्नुहुन्छ, वा तपाई अभ्यासकर्ता र बालवच्चासँग कार्य गरि रहेकोले तपाईको त्यस वारेमा के अवधारणा छ ?
- शुरुको वाल्यवस्थाको वातावरणमा समता र गुणस्तर एक अभ्यासकर्ताको हैसियतले कसरी समावेश गरिएको देखाउनु सकिन्छ ? के तपाई केही उदाहरण दिन सक्नु हुन्छ ?
-
- तपाईको रायमा शुरु वाल्यवस्थाको शिक्षामा समता र गुणस्तर जस्तो विषयमा नीति एवं निति प्रमुखहरुका के किसिमको व्यवहार छ ?
- तपाईको रायमा निति प्रमुखहरुको आजकल शुरुको व्यवस्थाको शिक्षामा सचेतना बुझाइको स्तर के छ ?
- शुरुको शिक्षा सम्वन्धमा उपरोक्तानुसार नीति निर्माण गर्दा तपाईको विचारमा निति प्रमुखलाई के ले प्रभावित गर्छ ? के तपाई ठान्नु हुन्छ, की नीति विभिन्न तह र प्रणालीमा मेलमिलाप वा सम्झौताद्वारा टुगो लगाइन्छ ? यदि त्यसो हो भने कसरी कसवाट त्यस्तो हुन्छ ? याहाको विचारमा किन यस्तो हुन्छ ?
- तपाईको रायमा समता गुणस्तर सम्वन्धि नीति शुरुको वाल्यवस्थाको शिक्षामा नेपालमा आजकल आवश्यक छ ? तपाईको उत्तर कारणसहित दिनुहोस ?

लक्षित समूह / व्यक्तिगत अन्तर्वाता प्रश्नहरु

- शुरुको वाल्यवस्थाको शिक्षामा समता भन्नाले स्थानिय भाषामा के लाई बुझिन्छ ?
- शुरुको वाल्यवस्थाको शिक्षामा गुणस्तर भन्नाले स्थानिय भाषामा के लाई बुझिन्छ ?
- शुरुको वाल्यवस्थाको शिक्षामा समता र गुणस्तर भन्नाले तपाई व्यक्तिगत रुपमा के सोच्नुहुन्छ वा तपाई अभ्यासकर्ता र बालबच्चासँग कार्य गरि रहेकोले तपाईको त्यस वारेमा के अवधारणा छ ?
- शुरुको वाल्यवस्थाको वातावरणमा समता र गुणस्तर एक अभ्यासकर्ताको हैसियतले कसरी समावेश गरिएको देखाउनु सकिन्छ ? के तपाई केही उदाहरण दिन सक्नु हुन्छ ?
-
- तपाईको रायमा शुरु वाल्यवस्थाको शिक्षामा समता र गुणस्तर जस्तो विषयमा नीति एवं निति प्रमुखहरुका के किसिमको व्यवहार छ ?
- तपाईको रायमा निति प्रमुखहरुको आजकल शुरुको व्यवस्थाको शिक्षामा सचेतना बुझाइको स्तर के छ ?
- शुरुको शिक्षा सम्वन्धमा उपरोक्तानुसार नीति निर्माण गर्दा तपाईको विचारमा निति प्रमुखलाई के ले प्रभावित गर्छ ? के तपाई ठान्नु हुन्छ की नीति विभिन्न तह र प्रणालीमा मेलमिलाप वा सम्झौताद्वारा टुगो लगाइन्छ ? यदि त्यसो हो भने कसरी कसवाट त्यस्तो हुन्छ ? याहाको विचारमा किन यस्तो हुन्छ ?
- तपाईको रायमा समता गुणस्तर सम्वन्धि नीति शुरुको वाल्यवस्थाको शिक्षामा नेपालमा आजकल आवश्यक छ ? तपाईको उतर कारणसहित दिनुहोस ?

Appendix 5

Request letters for Elite Participants

Respected Sir/Madam,

I am conducting a research to study how the policy of equity in early childhood education of Nepal was formed and how is it being achieved at different levels of the society and at different centres of urban and semi-urban Kathmandu. This research is part of my Doctoral Studies at the University of Sheffield, UK. In order to gain more insight into the formation and implementation of the policy for equity in early childhood education, I would be very obliged if you could grant me approximately 30 minutes of your time for an interview.

Please note that the data collected will be used only for educational purposes and will be kept confidential at all times. The data will not be shared nor publicized and will be destroyed once the required information is obtained.

Please feel free to ask any questions for further clarifications. I will be available at these numbers and addresses.

N0: 9851083192

Email: rasathapa@gmail.com

Address: Balwatar, Kathmandu.

Thank you for your consideration.

Regards

Sapna Thapa

Principal Investigator

University of Sheffield

United Kingdom.

Appendix 6

Elite Interview questions

What does equity in early childhood education mean in Nepali ECE policy?

What does quality in early childhood education mean in Nepali ECE policy?

What do you personally think or what concepts do you have about equity and quality in early childhood education?

How does policy for ECE reflect the inclusion of equity and quality early childhood environments?

What, in your opinion, are the attitudes of policy/polity heads towards the subject of equity and quality in early childhood education in Nepal?

What, in your opinion, is the level of awareness/understanding among policy heads regarding quality in early childhood education today?

What is the status of the policy of equity and quality in public today?

What do you think influences policy making in early education?

Appendix 7
Representative Data in Nepali (prior to translation)

(See following page)

गुणस्तरको अर्थ	एमक्यु १	<p>गुणस्तर देखिएको छैन - कसरी बालबालिका प्रत्येक दिन रमाई रहेका छन् ? के तिनीहरू खुशी छन् ? के तिनीहरू वस्न चाहन्छन् ? स्कुल आउछन् ? गुणस्तरको प्रमुख संकेत खुशीयाली हो । रमाईलोपन शिक्षणको एक तत्व हो ।</p> <p>गुणस्ततर भन्नाले विद्यार्थीको अनुशासन विभिन्न अतिरिक्त पाठ्यक्रमका कार्यहरू मित्रता सिर्जनशिल शिक्षा, नियम, शिक्षक शिक्षा, अन्तरक्रिया ... र अन्य विभिन्न कुराहरू ।</p> <p>गुणस्तर शिक्षकका लागि समेत उद्देश्य हुनपर्छ ... शिक्षकले बालबालिका, बालबालिकाको संरक्षक, समुदायसंग सहकार्य गर्नु पर्दछ ।</p>
समता र गुणस्तर को समावेशीता	आइ क्या १	<p>म बालबालिकाबाट सिक्दछु । म फरक ल्याउन चाहन्छु । केही विद्यार्थी सूचना वेगर छाड्दछन । - हामी तिनलाई हेर्दछौ । बालबालिकाले असल र खराब जान्दैनन् - तिनीहरू त्यही गर्दछन जसमा रमाईलो हुन्छ ।</p> <p>बालबालिकालाई जीवनका असल कुराहरू बताउ । शिक्षकहरू भन्दा सहयोगी बन्नु - जब म पढाइएरहेको हुन्छु मेरा असल व्यवहारहरू प्रयोग गर्दछु, तिनीहरूको जीवनमा केही परिवर्तन ल्याउन सक्दछु - म असल मानिस बनाउन सहयोग गर्न चाहन्छु ।</p> <p>कक्षा कोठामा हामीसंग धेरै भाषा हुन्छन र कतिपय अवस्थामा बालबालिकाले नेपाली पनि बुझ्दैनन त्यसैले त्यो गाह्रो हुन्छ ।</p> <p>तर यदि त्यो अंग्रेजी भएमा हरेक व्यक्ति लाभान्वित हुन्छन् । हामीले तालिम लियौ र तालिका बनाउन सिक्यौ तर यो केही समय गाह्रो भयो किनकी हामी र बालबालिका लाई समयमा यसो गर्न पर्ने वनायौ । हामीले आफ्नै समयमा आफ्नै तरिकाबाट गर्न पाउदा त्यो थप अनुकूल थियो ।</p> <p>संरक्षकहरू कामदार वर्ग / दैनिक ज्यालादारीमा निर्भरत छन् । हामी दिउसो १.०० वजे बन्द गर्दछौ तर धेरै बालबालिका ४ वजे सम्म बस्दछन किनकी संरक्षकले तिनलाई लिन सक्दैनन ।</p>

Appendix 8 Participant Consent Form

Title of Project:

Name of Researcher:

Participant Identification Number for this project:

box

Please initial

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet/letter (delete as applicable) dated *[insert date]* for the above project and have had the opportunity to ask questions.
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason. *Insert contact number here of lead researcher/member of research team (as appropriate).*
3. I understand that my responses will be anonymised before analysis. I give permission for members of the research team to have access to my anonymised responses.
4. I agree to take part in the above research project.

Name of Participant

Date

Signature

(or legal representative)

Name of person taking consent

Date

Signature

(if different from lead researcher)

To be signed and dated in presence of the participant

Lead Researcher

Date

Signature

To be signed and dated in presence of the participant

Copies:

Once this has been signed by all parties the participant should receive a copy of the signed and dated participant consent form, the letter/pre-written script/information sheet and any other written information provided to the participants. A copy for the signed and dated consent form should be placed in the project's main record (e.g. a site file), which must be kept in a secure location.

Appendix 9 Approved Ethics Application

 <p style="margin: 0;">The University Of Sheffield.</p>	<h1 style="margin: 0;">The School Of Education Ethics Application Form for all STUDENTS</h1>
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This form has been adapted for The School Of Education, and agreed with The University Research

Ethics Committee (UREC)

Complete this form if you are a student who plans to undertake a research project which requires ethics approval via the University Ethics Review Procedure. If you are a member of staff or are submitting an en bloc ethical review, this is the wrong form.

Your Supervisor decides if ethics approval is required and, if required, which ethics review procedure (e.g. University, NHS, Alternative) applies.

If the University's procedure applies, your Supervisor decides if your proposed project should be classed as 'low risk' or potentially 'high risk'. *For the purpose of ethical review all research with "vulnerable people" is considered to be High Risk (eg children under 18 years of age).*

Date:	09/02/2014
Name & Registration No of applicant:	Sapna Thapa - Registration no. 110104544
Contact details (University email address & telephone number):	Email: edp09st@sheffield.ac.uk Address: 2622 Bongey Drive Apt 1 Menomonie Wisconsin – 54751 United States Cell No: +1 7153085371
Applicant's signature:	
Research project title:	Achieving Equity Standards: cross cultural perceptions of the

	policy of equity in early childhood education
Programme of study:	Doctor of Education (EdD/Early Childhood)
Module code:	EDUR19
Is the research ESRC Funded?	No
Is the research project High or Low risk (please tick as appropriate)?	High <input type="radio"/> Low <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
What type of student are you (please tick as appropriate):	Undergraduate <input type="radio"/> Postgraduate Taught <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Postgraduate Research <input type="radio"/> PhD <input type="radio"/> MPhil <input type="radio"/>
I confirm that I have ethically approved the above named project.	Supervisor's name: Elizabeth Wood Signature: <i>E.A. Wood</i> Date: 17.2.14

PART A

This form should be accompanied, where appropriate, by all Information Sheets/Covering Letters/Written Scripts which you propose to use to inform the prospective participants about

A1 the proposed research, and/or by a Consent Form where you need Is this a student project? to use one.

A1. Other key investigators/co-applicants (within/outside University), where applicable:

Please list all (add more rows if necessary)

Title	Full Name	Post	Responsibility in project	Organisation	Department

A2. Proposed Project Duration:

Proposed start date: 01/02/2014

Proposed end date: 31/08/2015

A3. Mark 'X' in one or more of the following boxes if your research:

<input type="checkbox"/>	Involves children or young people aged under 18 years
<input type="checkbox"/>	Involves only identifiable personal data with no direct contact with participants
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Involves only anonymised or aggregated data
<input type="checkbox"/>	Involves prisoners or others in custodial care (eg young offenders)
<input type="checkbox"/>	Involves adults with mental incapacity or mental illness
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Has the primary aim of being educational (eg student research, a project necessary for a postgraduate degree or diploma, MA, PhD or EdD)

A4. I can confirm that in my judgement, due to the project's nature, the use of a "Consent Form" is/is not* relevant [*please delete as appropriate]

I can confirm that in my judgement, due to the project's nature, the use of an "Information Sheet" is relevant [*please delete as appropriate]

A5. Briefly summarise the project's aims, objectives and methodology?

Aims and Objectives of the project

This research study aims to analyze equity and quality in early childhood services/education through the perceptions of three policy level heads and three practitioners from semi-urban

locales of Kathmandu, Nepal. The analysis aims to determine the relevance of these two terms in current policy papers. The study also focuses on examining perceptions of equity and quality from two practitioners and an early childhood Advisor in the state of Wisconsin, United States to present a comparative, cross-cultural analysis of equity and quality. The primary objective of the study is to determine the influences of drivers and levers in the formation of policies at state levels in these two contrasting settings. The secondary objective is to determine how these policies are interpreted and implemented at different ecological levels and whether the process of interpretation and implementation are fulfilling equity standards mentioned in policy documents or not.

Methodology

The research design is based on the critical paradigm utilizing the inquiry approach. The methodology will follow elite studies using focus group interviews and individual

interviews as the research tools. Secondary data will also be obtained through desk reviews of policy texts and other relevant documents.

A6. What is the potential for physical and/or psychological harm / distress to participants?

Interviews of the participants would be conducted in a setting chosen and accepted by them; therefore any physical distress or harm may be considerably minimized. However, there may be some psychological distress due to the politicized nature of some questions in the project. Therefore, in order to overcome such problems, I will ascertain that the participants are duly informed about the nature of the study through the information sheet. I shall respect all the decisions they make regarding the extent of the information they wish to share or not with me. All information will be regarded as highly confidential and the participants will be assured of both their physical and psychological safety during the entire time span of the project.

A7. Does your research raise any issues of personal safety for you or other researchers involved in the project and, if yes, explain how these issues will be managed? (Especially if taking place outside working hours or off University premises.)

I confirm that no issues of such matters will occur during the project. I further assert that all investigation/interviews will be conducted in a setting that will be chosen and accepted by the participants therefore eliminating issues of personal safety. For my personal safety, I shall carry a mobile phone to inform my family/colleagues about my whereabouts during all interview sessions both in Nepal and the United States.

A8. How will the potential participants in the project be (i) identified, (ii) approached and (iii) recruited?

- i. The research study requires participation of practitioners working with children under the age of 5 from the two contrasting settings (Wisconsin and Kathmandu, Nepal). These participants will be identified through personal contacts. The second group of participants (advisor from Wisconsin and policy level heads, Kathmandu, Nepal) will be identified with the help of local media, news and policy documents.
- ii. The participants will be approached through an information sheet that will outline the main aims and objectives of the project. The information sheet will help them understand the methods that will be used to obtain data.
- iii. Participants will only be recruited once they fully understand and comply with the nature of the project and are willing to participate in the study.

A9. Will informed consent be obtained from the participants?

Yes

No

X

If informed consent is not to be obtained please explain why. Further guidance is at

<http://www.shef.ac.uk/ris/other/gov-ethics/ethicspolicy/policynotes/consent>

Only under exceptional circumstances are studies without informed consent permitted. Students should consult their tutors.

A10. How do you plan to obtain informed consent? (i.e. the proposed process?) – remember to complete your “Consent Form” and “Information Sheet”:

The participants will be requested to sign a consent form after they have read and understood the information sheet (both are attached to this ethics application). All questions and further queries requested by participants regarding the project will be entertained until the participants completely understand the nature of the project and are fully compliant to participate.

A11. How will you ensure appropriate protection and well-being of participants?

The well-being and protection of all participants will be of high priority. As mentioned earlier, I further confirm that each participant will be fully informed about the study and explicit consent will be obtained. All interviews will be conducted at a mutually agreed setting and at the convenience of the participants. Should any participant wish to withdraw, they shall be free to do so at any point of the study without the need to provide a reason for discontinuation. All data obtained from participants will be considered highly confidential therefore their identity will be anonymised.

A12. What measures will be put in place to ensure confidentiality of personal data, where appropriate?

All data will be stored in a personal laptop computer requiring a password for accessibility. The password will only be available to the researcher at all times. Tools used for collection of data through interviews such as tapes, notes and other documents will be stored until/after transcription is complete and eventually destroyed. No further use will be made of the material unless written consent is first sought from the participants.

A13. Will financial / in kind payments (other than reasonable expenses and compensation for time) be offered to participants? (Indicate how much and on what basis this has been decided.)

Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>
No	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

A14. Will the research involve the production of recorded or photographic media such as audio and/or video recordings or photographs?

Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
No	<input type="checkbox"/>

A15. This question is only applicable if you are planning to produce recorded or visual media: How will you ensure that there is a clear agreement with participants as to how these recorded media or photographs may be stored, used and (if appropriate) destroyed?

The necessity of using a tape recorder to collect data will be fully explained in the information sheet. However the tool will only be used if the participant fully agrees and understands that the recordings will only be used as a source for qualitative data after transcription and not used for anything else. They will be informed about the storage facilities and assured complete confidentiality of all information gathered

through such media. All transcribed materials will be shared with the participants for further clarifications, corrections of misinterpretations and validation.

PART B - THE STUDENT DECLARATION

I confirm my responsibility to deliver the research project in accordance with the University of

I confirm my responsibility to deliver the research project in accordance with Sheffield's policies and procedures, which include the University's *'Financial Regulations'*, *'Good the University of Sheffield's policies and procedures, which include the University's research Practice Standards'* and the *'Ethics Policy for Research Involving Human Participants, 'Financial Regulations', 'Good research Practice Standards' and 'Data and Tissue'* and the *'Ethics Policy for Research Involving Human Participants, Data and Tissue'* (Ethics Policy) and, where externally funded, with the terms and conditions of (Ethics Policy) and, where externally funded, with the terms and conditions of the research funder.

the research funder.

In signing this ethics application on the cover page I am confirming that:

1. The above-named project will abide by the University's Ethics Policy for Research Involving Human Participants, Data and Tissue': <http://www.shef.ac.uk/ris/other/gov-ethics/ethicspolicy>
2. The above-named project will abide by the University's policy on good research and innovation practices: <http://www.shef.ac.uk/ris/other/gov-ethics/researchethics/grippolicy>
3. The research ethics application form for the above-named project is accurate to the best of my knowledge and belief.
4. There is no potential material interest that may, or may appear to, impair the independence and objectivity of researchers conducting this project.
5. Subject to the research being approved, I undertake to adhere to the project protocol without unagreed deviation and to comply with any conditions set out in the letter from the University ethics reviewers notifying me of this.
6. I undertake to inform the ethics reviewers of significant changes to the protocol (by contacting my supervisor or the Ethics Administrator as appropriate
7. I am aware of my responsibility to be up to date and comply with the requirements of the law and relevant guidelines relating to security and confidentiality of personal data, including the need to register when necessary with the appropriate Data Protection Officer (within the University the Data Protection Officer is based in CICS).
8. I understand that the project, including research records and data, may be subject to inspection for audit purposes, if required in future.

9. I understand that personal data about me as a researcher in this form will be held by those involved in the ethics review procedure (eg the Ethics Administrator and/or ethics reviewers/supervisors) and that this will be managed according to Data Protection Act principles.
10. I will inform my supervisor if prospective participants make a complaint about the above-named project.
11. I will inform my supervisor of significant changes to my project that have ethical consequences.
12. I understand that this project cannot be submitted for ethical approval in more than one department, and that if I wish to appeal against the decision, this must be done through the original department.

PART C - THE SUPERVISOR DECLARATION

The Ethics Administrator needs to receive an electronic copy of the form, and other documents where appropriate, plus a signed and dated electronic copy of this Part C 'the Supervisor Declaration'.

Full Research Project Title:

In signing this Supervisor Declaration I am confirming that:

- x The research ethics application form for the above-named project is accurate to the best of my knowledge and belief.
- x The above-named project will abide by the University's 'Good Research Practice Standards':
www.sheffield.ac.uk/ris/other/gov-ethics/good
- x The above-named project will abide by the University's 'Ethics Policy Governing Research Involving Human Participants, Personal Data and Human Tissue':
www.sheffield.ac.uk/ris/other/gov-ethics/ethicspolicy
- x Subject to the above-named project being ethically approved I will undertake to ensure that the student adheres to any ethics conditions that may be set.
- x The student or the Supervisor will undertake to inform the Ethics Administrator of significant changes to the above-named project that have ethical consequences.

- x The student or the Supervisor will undertake to inform the Ethics Administrator if prospective participants make a complaint about the above-named project.
- x I understand that personal data about the student and/or myself on the research ethics application form will be held by those involved in the ethics review process (e.g. the Ethics Administrator and/or reviewers) and that this will be managed according to Data Protection Act principles.
- x I understand that this project cannot be submitted for ethics approval in more than one department, and that if I and/or the student wish to appeal against the decision made, this must be done through the original department.

Supervisor's name:	<i>E.A. Wood</i>
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Supervisor's signature and date:	Elizabeth Wood 17.2.14
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Model Information Sheet

1. Research Project Title:

Is the title self-explanatory to a lay person?

2. Invitation paragraph

Explains that the prospective participant is being asked to take part in a research project.

Example paragraph:

'You are being invited to take part in a research project. Before you decide it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask us if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part. Thank you for reading this.'

3. What is the project's purpose?

The background, aim and duration of the project should be given here.

4. **Why have I been chosen?**

You should explain how the participant was chosen and how many other participants will be recruited.

5. **Do I have to take part?**

You should explain that taking part in the research is entirely voluntary and that refusal to agree to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which the participant is otherwise entitled and the participant may discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which the participant is otherwise entitled.

Example paragraph:

'It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep (and be asked to sign a consent form) and you can still withdraw at any time without it affecting any benefits that you are entitled to in any way. You do not have to give a reason.'

6. **What will happen to me if I take part?**

You should state how long the participant will be involved in the research, how long the research will last (if this is different), how often they will need to participate and for how long each time. You should explain if travel expenses are available.

You should explain what exactly will happen (e.g. blood tests, interviews etc.?) Whenever possible you should draw a simple flowchart or plan indicating what will happen on each occasion they are to participate.

You should explain the participant's responsibilities, setting down clearly what you expect of them.

You should set out simply the research methods you intend to use.

7. What do I have to do?

State if there are any lifestyle restrictions as a result of participating.

8. What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

Any reasonably foreseeable discomforts, disadvantages and risks need to be stated. Researchers should make known to the participants any predictable detriment arising from the proposed research process. Any unexpected discomforts, disadvantages and risks to participants, which arises during the research, should be brought immediately to their attention.

9. What are the possible benefits of taking part?

Any benefits to the participants that can reasonably be expected should be stated. However, where there is no intended benefit to the participant from taking part in the project this should be stated clearly. It is important not to exaggerate the possible benefits to the particular participant during the course of the project. This could be seen as coercive.

Example opening sentence:

'Whilst there are no immediate benefits for those people participating in the project, it is hoped that this work will ...'

10. What happens if the research study stops earlier than expected?

If this is the case the reason(s) should be explained to the participant.

11. What if something goes wrong?

You should inform participants how complaints will be handled and what redress may be available (i.e. what the process is). You need to distinguish between handling complaints from participants regarding their treatment by researchers and something serious occurring during or following their participation in the project (e.g. a reportable serious adverse event).

In the first instance you should inform the participants which member of the research project they should contact should they wish to raise a complaint (this is most likely to be the Principal Investigator or Supervisor). However, the participants should also be informed that should they feel their complaint has not been handled to their satisfaction (e.g. by the Principal Investigator or Supervisor) that they can contact the University's 'Registrar and Secretary'.

12. Will my taking part in this project be kept confidential?

You need to obtain the participant's permission to allow restricted access to information collected about them in the course of the project. You should state that all information collected about them will be kept strictly confidential and explain how information will be kept confidential.

Example paragraph:

'All the information that we collect about you during the course of the research will be kept strictly confidential. You will not be able to be identified in any reports or publications'.

You should always bear in mind that you, as the researcher, are responsible for ensuring that when collecting or using data, you are not contravening the legal or regulatory requirements in any part of the UK. A fact sheet on 'anonymity, confidentiality and data protection' is available in the 'Guidance & Training' section of the University's central ethics website.

13. What will happen to the results of the research project?

You should be able to tell the participants what will happen to the results of the research (i.e. when the results are likely to be published, where they can obtain a copy of the published results, whether they be told which arm of the project they were involved in) and add that they will not be identified in any report or publication.

Depending on the nature of your proposed project, you may need to include a statement indicating that the data collected during the course of the project might be used for additional or subsequent research.

14. Who is organising and funding the research?

You should state the organisation or company that is sponsoring or funding the research.

15. Who has ethically reviewed the project?

You should state the name of the academic department that managed the ethics review process – i.e. this project has been ethically approved via 'x' department's ethics review procedure (every academic department either administers the University's Ethics Review Procedure itself, internally within the department, or accesses the University's Ethics Review Procedure via a cognate, partner department). The University's Research Ethics Committee monitors the application and delivery of the University's Ethics Review Procedure across the University.

16. Contact for further information

You should give the participant a contact point for further information.

This can be your name, address and telephone number or that of another researcher in the project (if this is a supervised-student project, the address and telephone number of the student's Supervisor).

Finally ...

the information sheet should state that the participant will be given a copy of the information sheet and, if appropriate, a signed consent form to keep.

and remember to thank the participants taking part in the project.

Question to insert into an information sheet if the research involves producing recorded media:

Will I be recorded, and how will the recorded media be used?

You need to obtain the participants' permission to record their activities on audio or video media. You must ensure that there is a clear understanding as to how these recorded media will be used. For instance, if you record a music or theatre performance, you must not publish or broadcast the recording, show it in public, or deposit it in an archive without the performers' permission. Storage (and eventual disposal) of interview recordings which contain sensitive material can also be an issue to address.

Example paragraph:

'The audio and/or video recordings of your activities made during this research will be used only for analysis and for illustration in conference presentations and lectures. No other use will be made of them without your written permission, and no one outside the project will be allowed access to the original recordings.'

If you plan to use the recording in a publication or broadcast or deposit it in an archive, it will usually be best to prepare and sign a separate release form for each item used.

Questions to insert into an information sheet if the research project is a clinical trial:

What is the drug or procedure that is being tested?

You should include a short description of the drug or device and give the stage of development. You should also state the dosage of the drug and method of administration. Participants entered into drug trials should be given a card (similar to a credit card) with details of the trial they are in. They should be asked to carry it at all times.

What are the alternatives for diagnosis or treatment?

For therapeutic research the participant should be told what other treatments are available.

What are the side effects of any treatment received when taking part?

For any new drug or procedure you should explain to the participants the possible side effects. If they suffer these or any other symptoms they should report them next time you meet. You should also give them a contact name and number to phone if they become in any way concerned. The name and number of the person to contact in the event of an emergency (if that is different) should also be given. The known side effects should be listed in terms the participant will clearly understand (e.g. 'damage to the heart' rather than 'cardiotoxicity'; 'abnormalities of liver tests' rather than 'raised liver enzymes'). For any relatively new drug it should be explained that there may be unknown side effects.

What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

For projects where there could be harm to an unborn child if the participant were pregnant or became pregnant during the project, the following (or similar) should be said -

'It is possible that if the treatment is given to a pregnant woman it will harm the unborn child. Pregnant women must not therefore take part in this project, neither should women who plan to become pregnant during the project. Women who are at risk of pregnancy may be asked to have a pregnancy test before taking part to exclude the possibility of pregnancy. Women who could become pregnant must use an effective contraceptive during the course of this project. Any woman who finds that she has become pregnant while taking part in the project should immediately tell her research doctor.'

Use the above statement carefully. In some circumstances (e.g. terminal illness) it would be inappropriate and insensitive to bring up pregnancy. There should be appropriate warning and advice for men if the treatment could damage sperm that might therefore lead to a risk of a damaged foetus.

If future insurance status (e.g. for life insurance or private medical insurance) could be affected by taking part this should be stated (if e.g. high blood pressure is detected.) If the patients have private medical insurance you should ask them to check with the company before agreeing to take part in the trial. They will need to do this to ensure that their participation will not affect their medical insurance.

You should state what happens if you find a condition of which the patient was unaware. Is it treatable? What are you going to do with this information? What might be uncovered?

What if new information becomes available?

If additional information becomes available during the course of the research you will need to tell the participant about this. You could use the following:

‘Sometimes during the course of a research project, new information becomes available about the treatment/drug that is being studied. If this happens, your research doctor will tell you about it and discuss with you whether you want to continue in the study. If you decide to withdraw your research doctor will make arrangements for your care to continue. If you decide to continue in the study you will be asked to sign an updated consent form.

Also, on receiving new information your research doctor might consider it to be in your best interests to withdraw you from the study. He/she will explain the reasons and arrange for your care to continue.’

Title of Project:

Name of Researcher:

Participant Identification Number for this project:

Please initial box

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet/letter (delete as applicable) dated *[insert date]* for the above project and have had the opportunity to ask questions.
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason. *Insert contact number here of lead researcher/member of research team (as appropriate).*
3. I understand that my responses will be anonymised before analysis. I give permission for members of the research team to have access to my anonymised responses.
4. I agree to take part in the above research project.

Name of Participant
(or legal representative)

Date

Signature

Name of person taking consent Date _____
(if different from lead researcher)
To be signed and dated in presence of the participant

Lead Researcher Date _____
To be signed and dated in presence of the participant

Copies:

Once this has been signed by all parties the participant should receive a copy of the signed and dated participant consent form, the letter/pre-written script/information sheet and any other written information provided to the participants. A copy for the signed and dated consent form should be placed in the project's main record (e.g. a site file), which must be kept in a secure location.



**The
School
Of
Education.**

Sapna Thapa
Early Childhood Education

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Dear Sapna

ETHICAL APPROVAL LETTER

Achieving equity standards: cross cultural perceptions of the policy of equity in early childhood education.

Thank you for submitting your ethics application. I am writing to confirm that your application has now been approved.

This letter is evidence that your application has been approved and should be included as an Appendix in your final submission.

Good luck with your research.

Yours sincerely

Professor Dan Goodley
Chair of the School of Education Ethics Review Panel

cc Elizabeth Wood
Enc Ethical Review Feedback Sheet(s)