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Early Childhood Education in Small Island States:
A Very British Story

Anna Baldacchino

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Abstract

How postcolonialism has impacted primary, secondary and tertiary education in small island states (defined as those each with a resident population of up to one million) is well documented. This research study is inspired by postcolonial theory, island studies and small state studies, extending this analysis to the practice and pedagogy of early childhood education (2 - 5 years) in such countries. The study explores the origins and character of colonial lingering in the pedagogy and practice of early childhood education in small island states, with special reference to Malta and Grenada, both former British colonies. Interviews, observations and focus groups have been conducted in both countries. An online questionnaire was completed by 64 individuals residing in the world's 27 small island states, (and of which 20 secured independence from Britain).

The research findings suggest a colonial lingering in early childhood education in small island states. Manifestations of this include: the preference for school uniforms; the widespread use of standard English as the language of instruction; a top-down, exam-driven pedagogy that obliges an early start to schooling; and a strong focus on literacy and numeracy in the early years. There are also restrictions in play-based learning; and story books, weather and alphabet charts that are not necessarily relevant to the country's culture and tradition and written in the English language, even though Malta and Grenada have their own vernacular.

Being a small island state has its challenges. Findings from this research suggest that role multiplicity, as well as a relative lack of expertise, funding and resources, are impacting on the pedagogy and practices of early childhood education in such countries.

Recommendations from this study include: a stronger acknowledgment of the vernacular, teaching aids that are more contextually and culturally sensitive, the provision of adequate funding and training, together with continuous support and mentoring when implementing new early years policies.

The findings encourage a sober and critical reflection of the policies and practices governing early childhood education in small island states.

Keywords: Malta, Grenada, Early Childhood Education, Small Island States, Postcolonialism, Language.

I dedicate this work to the young children of Malta and Grenada

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Abbreviations

CXC	Caribbean Examination Council
ECCE	Early Childhood Care and Education
ECD	Early Childhood Development
ECDAM	Early Childhood Development Association of Malta
ECE	Early Childhood Education
ECEC	Early Childhood Education and Care
EENEE	European Expert Network on Economics of Education
EU	European Union
EYFS	Early Years Foundation Stage
GCE	General Certificate of Education
ISISA	International Small Islands Studies Association
KG	Kindergarten
KGA	Kindergarten Assistant
LOF	Learning Outcomes Framework
MATSEC	Matriculation and Secondary Education Certification
MEDE	Ministry for Education and Employment
MFSS	Ministry for Family and Social Services
MQRIC	Malta Qualification Recognition Information Centre
MUT	Malta Union of Teachers
NCF	National Curriculum Framework
NJM	New Jewel Movement
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
PACEY	Professional Association for Childcare and Early Years
SIDS	Small Island Developing States
SIS	Small Island States
SMT	Senior Management Team
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund

Chapter 1 – Introduction

A territory may remain entangled in ‘the colonial matrix of power’ (Mignolo, 2011, p. xviii) long after it has ceased to be called a colony.

Setting the Scene

Four to five-year-old children in blue and yellow uniforms were sitting quietly at their tables in groups, with their respective educators in a large room. Brightly coloured pictures of the alphabet, wall charts and various photos of the Minister for Tourism adorned the walls. The school principal was taking me around the room to meet the children and the educators. I was greeted with a standing ovation and a sing-song of: “Good morning Miss Anna” at the educator’s instruction to say so; then the children would either smile at me or shy away and continue with their activities. As I went from group to group I was offered the same, systematic greeting while the principal started explaining that their school’s pedagogy was influenced by the Reggio Emilia and project approach. The project taking place at the time was about their national airport. Most of the documentation was represented through photos with no captions and very little of the children’s process of learning was visible. When I looked around, it seemed more like a project about the Minister for Tourism, including children’s drawings of how he looked through their eyes, rather than about the airport. I observed that activities taking place in the classroom and the representations documented about the project seemed very much teacher-directed, rather than child-centred according to the Reggio Emilia and/or project approach. The print and language being used in the kindergarten classroom was English, even though this was not the native language. It was quite evident that the children obeyed their teachers and followed their instructions. The classroom seemed very quiet and well organised for a kindergarten of around 35 children and

three educators in the same room. I left there feeling disappointed because I could see that, although the educators' claimed that their pedagogy was based on the project approach, the children did not seem to have been given the opportunity to be part of the learning that was (presumably) going on.

This was one experience that I recall from a visit some years ago to kindergarten and childcare settings in Barbados, as well as in various other small island states. The above scenario reminded me of the kindergartens in my country of origin, Malta, where a top-down, teacher-directed system of schooling is still evident. On the other hand, on my return to Prince Edward Island, Canada, where I was residing at the time, I could see the difference in the pedagogy and practice of childcare and kindergarten settings. The pedagogy adopted there appeared to me to be more child-centred and children's learning was visible through the documentation of the process of their learning. At one point, I started asking myself why was there such a difference between countries and the way educators taught young children? Why did young children wear uniforms in some countries while not in others? Why were they exam-driven in some, including Malta, but not in Canada? Through my visits to kindergarten and childcare settings in various countries, I started to notice that there might be (at least) one thing in common with the top-down, teacher-directed system: those implementing such an approach tended to be small island states (SIS) that had been colonised, in most cases, by the British. Could that have left an impact on the way educators taught? Or were there other factors that influenced the pedagogy and practice of early childhood education (ECE) in small island states? These general questions have stimulated this study and triggered my research questions which will be discussed in the next section.

Research Questions

1. *What elements influence the pedagogy and practice of early childhood education (2 to 5-year-olds) in small island states?* I chose this question because I feel that there is a gap in the literature dealing with the specific impacts of small island states' strengths and weaknesses on the practice of early childhood education.
2. *What impact, if any, has colonialism had on early childhood education in small island states, and how is that impact manifested in the current postcolonial epoch?* Coming from a former island colony and having travelled and visited early childhood education settings in other countries, I feel that colonialism might also have a lingering impact on early childhood pedagogy. This is particularly expressed by means of the continuous influence of metropolitan practices and experiences on SIS practices, in spite of many such former colonies having achieved political independence (Lee & Hayden, 2009).

The small scale and island setting allows for a more contained and manageable research process: stakeholders are more easily identified, key decision makers are known, and the consequences of policies are more easily measured. Hence, the lessons and insights arising from such locations are potentially also transferable to larger and more complex jurisdictions which do not enjoy the benefits of small scale settings.

To answer the above research questions, I have chosen a largely qualitative research method drawing upon the mixed methods triangulation principles as outlined by Creswell and Clark (2011). Data were collected from Malta and Grenada. These two countries have been specifically chosen since both are former British colonies that were under British rule for nearly two centuries. Their land area is also very similar comprising of an archipelago of three inhabited islands. Both

countries became independent around the same time. Grenada and Malta are the 208th and 209th largest countries in the world respectively (N = 219; Central Intelligence Agency, 2018a; 2018b).

The original intent was to collect data from Malta and Barbados, another Caribbean small island state, and the world's 206th largest country, rather than Malta and Grenada. After all, my research question and intellectual curiosity were triggered following my visit to a childcare centre in Barbados. Various attempts were made to establish contacts with suitable childcare settings during 2015 in that country. However, my messages were either not answered or else their recipients indicated that they were not comfortable with being observed. Hence, my decision to switch my focus to Grenada instead of Barbados where cooperation was more forthcoming.

Five different methods of data collection were used for this study:

1. Observations in four childcare/kindergarten settings: two in Malta and two in Grenada
2. Interviews with head of schools; kindergarten teachers, childcare centres' directors and early childhood educators in the two countries
3. Four focus groups with parents of children taking part in my study (two in each country)
4. A research journal, which could capture instances that may not be documented otherwise
5. An online questionnaire which was distributed to a select number of inhabitants from each of the 27 small island states around the world with a

current resident population size of less than one million (Table 1.1 and Figure 1.1).

Data collected from these five different methods have been analysed and converged later in the thesis to formulate the basis of my findings, analyses and discussion chapter.

Small island states with a resident population of less than a million

Caribbean Sea	Pacific Ocean	Indian Ocean	Atlantic Ocean and Mediterranean Sea
Antigua & Barbuda (UK)	Federated States of Micronesia (US)	Comoros (F)	Cape Verde (P)
Bahamas (UK)	Fiji Islands (UK)	Maldives (UK)	Cyprus (UK)
Barbados (UK)	Kiribati (UK)	Seychelles (UK)	Iceland (D)
Dominica (UK)	Marshall Islands (US)		Malta (UK)
Granada (UK)	Nauru (UK)		São Tomé & Príncipe (P)
St Kitts – Nevis (UK)	Palau (US)		
St Lucia (UK)	Samoa (UK)		
St Vincent & the Grenadines (UK)	Solomon Islands (UK)		
	Tonga (UK)		
	Tuvalu (UK)		
	Vanuatu (UK/F)		

Table 1.1 - Former colonial power are in brackets:

D – Denmark F – France P – Portugal UK – United Kingdom US – United States

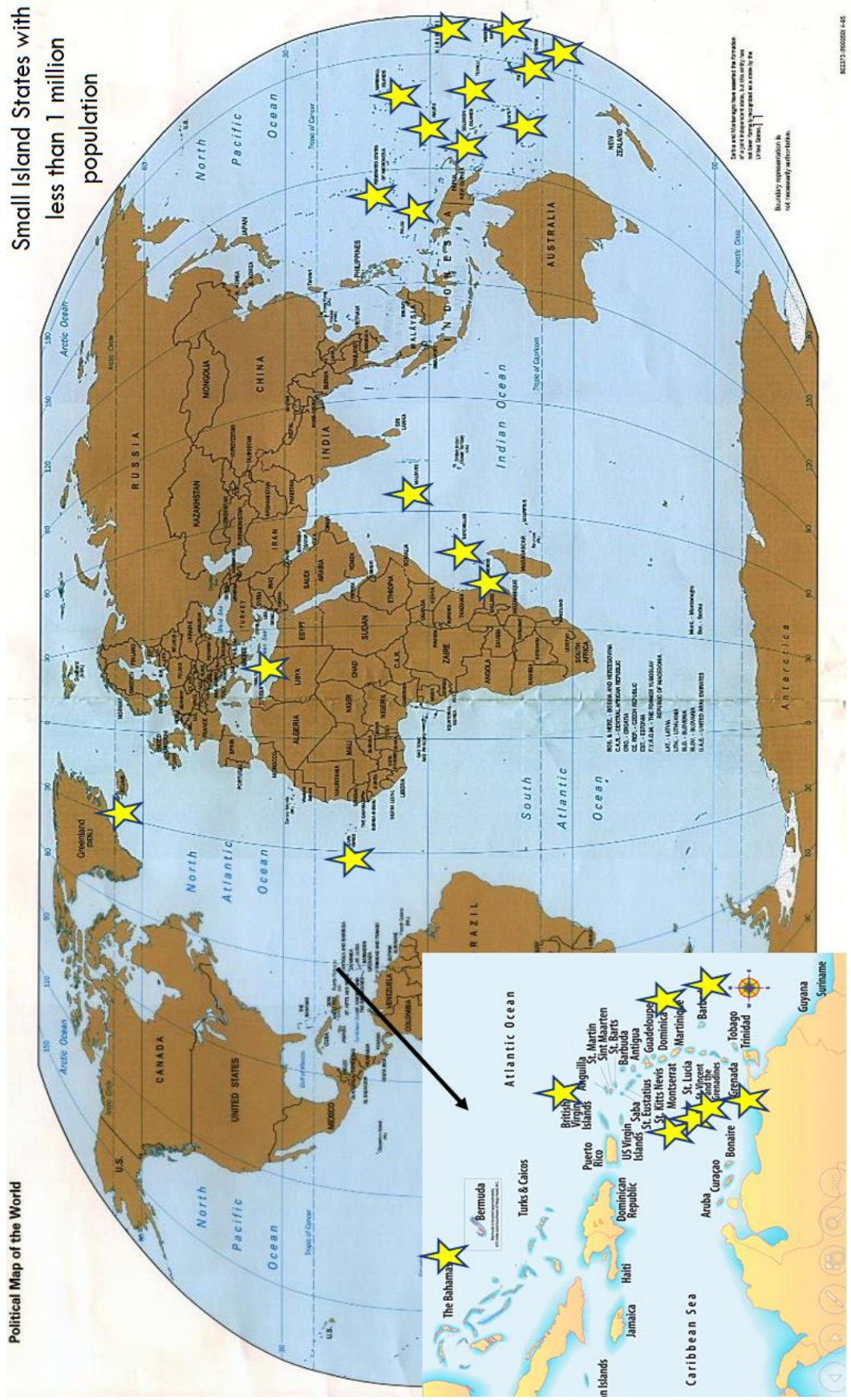


Figure 1.1 – Political Map of the World (2000) using Robertson Projection, with locations of 27 small island states added in by author.

Aim of this study

The aim of this study is to explore and document some of the consequences of being a small island state on the practice of early childhood education, and to make recommendations as to how this pedagogy and practice can be improved upon in such states.

My research study will look critically at some ECE practices and pedagogies in small island states, with a special focus on Malta and Grenada. It will pose questions such as: What elements influence such practices? Are practices and pedagogies in these states still exam-driven and heavily dependent on received wisdom, including the content-led and top-down pedagogies inherited from colonial history and legacy? The research insights gleaned from my doctoral experience will place me in a better position to analyse the data and to contribute to the necessary, positive changes required in this sector in my own country, in line with Malta's national educational strategy.

Theoretical Framework

The world's various small island states tend to have a high population density (Briguglio, 2003; Lutz, 1994; Srinivasan, 1986; World Bank, 2015). This empirical observation, enhanced by its widespread social perception, in turn contributes to a greater, keener sense of competition in most aspects of social, economic and professional life in these small jurisdictions. These contextual variables are supported by a strong belief in certification and educational achievement as the main vehicle of social mobility (Sultana, 2006). There is also the aspect of neo-colonialism and the lingering British influence on the educational systems of some of these countries (including Malta) with, for example, a social class-tinged undervaluing of vocational training (MEDE, 2015; Scicluna, 2012). In

colonial times, high academic achievement could mean that the ‘privileged few’ could either secure the limited high paying jobs available to the locals or else they could spread their wings and travel to foreign countries to obtain even higher-educational credentials and/or find better paying jobs (Brock, 1987). The acute race for certification in order to secure what are understood as scarce, well-paid and prestigious jobs also plays a part in these career trajectories (Baldacchino, 2012a; Brock, 1988; Palmer, 2016). In Malta, this might still be the case, where many individuals strive to have the highest certification possible to be in a more advantageous position to secure a job. However, the exam-heavy education system that ensures such high standards of certification is actually failing most students, who are ending up “not being equipped with the necessary skills for working life”. (Bonello, 2016, p. 1). This is in spite of the fact, or as a consequence of, Malta joining the European Union (EU) in 2004. Maltese individuals now have more opportunities of working in other EU countries; while at the same time other EU citizens have the freedom to come and work in Malta, supporting its rapidly expanding economy. In Grenada, there is also pressure of getting high certification to secure well-paying jobs. To do this, however, most of the students need to go to other Caribbean countries, US or Canada to continue their tertiary education, most often depending on their family to back them financially (Easterly & Kraay, 2000; Hall, 2013; Jules, 2010).

My research draws upon postcolonial theory which states that colonisers usually leave an impact on former colonised countries, which lasted for many years after the countries became independent (Baldacchino, 2010a; Crossley & Tikly, 2004; Sauer, 2015). Literature shows that postcolonialism has also impacted education in general in SIS, where curriculum content did not necessarily relate to

cultural practices and learning resources were written with coloniser's linguistic and cultural context in mind (Brock, 1988; Tarc, 2009). As time passed, education in these countries became even more deep-rooted in the English educational norms (Holland, 2014). The education system in Malta is still based on the British model, as in most other former and current British colonies.

I found very little literature that speaks about the impact of colonialism on early childhood education. However, I have been critically observing the practice of early childhood education in various settings during my travels – including the Caribbean, Australia, Sweden, Japan and Taiwan. Visiting different countries has given me a different perspective on early childhood education as I experienced different pedagogies and practices. It has been in Malta and Barbados that I have noted the keenest intent by both educators and parents to encourage a 'schooling' approach even in early years settings, where childcare and kindergarten settings are looked upon more as a preparation setting for school and schooling generally (Jules, 2010; Sollars, Attard, Borg & Craus, 2006). A burning question kept cropping up: is it a coincidence that Malta and Barbados are both small island states, with the highest national population density in their respective regions (Mediterranean, Caribbean) and both former British colonies? How might Barbados, Malta and similar small island states "operate within a legacy from a colonial past" (Bray, Charles, Farrugia, Packer & Swartland, 1991, p. 16)? This drive inspired me to start on my doctoral journey in the hope of finding answers to my questions, while contributing new knowledge about this field of study.

Positionality

I started my career as an early childhood educator in 1993 and have since moved on to becoming a visiting lecturer at the University of Malta in the Faculty of

Education since 2014. Here, I teach students who aspire to becoming educators in the early years (0 - 7 years). I have now been in the field of early childhood for nearly 25 years, ten of which I spent in Canada. This meant that I experienced two very different ECE pedagogies and practices, even though Canada too was once administered by Britain. However, one might argue that Canada moved away from a British educational system due to it being a larger country, with larger domestic capacity to carve out policies for itself and on its own terms, while small island states, tend to take longer to achieve this (Pillay & Elliot, 2005). During my last two years in Canada, I was employed by the University of Prince Edward Island to lecture in the Bachelor of Education programme with special reference to ECE. On my return to Malta in 2013, I started teaching as a lecturer in a vocational college. I have to admit that it was quite a cultural shock for me as I had to accustom myself to the much more rigid and bureaucratic educational system in Malta, compared to the more flexible and student-friendly one that I had been familiar with during my ten years in Canada. Even at this level of education, the students in Malta were exam-driven and not necessarily motivated by what they were learning. This prompted me to ask questions as to why things were so different in Malta where education was concerned.

I consider myself to be an advocate for early childhood education that is child-centred: where the educator guides, scaffolds and instructs, while the child explores, experiences, and achieves holistic life skills (Chesworth, 2016; Wortham, 2002). I have personally worked and experienced this type of pedagogy in Canada and could compare it with the more rigid teacher-directed pedagogy I was trained to use in Malta, and now believe that it is more beneficial to children. In fact, in the second year of my doctoral studies, a colleague (also a doctoral student) and I set up

the Early Childhood Development Association of Malta (ECDAM). This association strives to work in favour of high quality early childhood education based on the interests of the child, offering learning opportunities to educators and parents while lobbying policy makers to adopt suitable measures.

It is worth mentioning here, the notion of insider/outsider positioning (Angrosino, 2005; Gair, 2012). My positionality in this study is that of an outsider to a certain extent in Grenada and an insider, again to a certain degree, in Malta. According to Kanuha (2000), insider research refers to when participants form part of the same group as that of the researcher; while outsider research is when the researcher is not a member of the participants' group (Aoki, 1996). In my case, I feel that I am in the 'space between': Dwyer and Buckle (2009) describe it in this way:

To present these concepts in a dualistic manner is overly simplistic. It is restrictive to lock into a notion that emphasises either/or, one or the other, you are in or you are out. Rather, a dialectical approach allows the preservation of the complexity of similarities and differences...Accepting this notion requires that noting the ways in which we are different from others requires that we also note the ways in which we are similar. This is the origin of the space between. It is the foundation that allows the position of both insider and outsider. (p. 60)

As qualitative researchers, we can perhaps only occupy the 'space between' where we might be closer to one position than the other. However, because researchers read a lot of literature about the research subject, they cannot fully occupy one position only (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). I believe that by occupying the 'space between,' the two perspectives allowed me to obtain a deeper knowledge of the experience in both Malta and Grenada. I do not consider myself as a complete insider in Malta as I have lived and experienced early childhood education in Canada. On the other hand, I do not consider myself as a complete outsider in Grenada as I have experienced British colonialism and the challenges of living in a

small island state, as well as having a number of years of experience in early childhood education. My background in early childhood education, obtained not only through literature or research, but rather through lived experiences, has helped me to embrace this space, between insider/outsider positioning. I acknowledge that, in Malta, it helped me gain quick access to the research sites and I was more rapidly accepted by participants. In Grenada, this took a bit more effort on my part because at first, I was considered an outsider by the participants. However, once I showed them that I shared certain similarities with them they trusted me more willingly. Participants were then ready to share their experiences with me as they felt that I could understand their position.

The research reported in this thesis seeks to combine early childhood education as an area of professional inquiry with my long-standing interest in the study of small island states. I have lived briefly in such places as Barbados, Grenada, Iceland, Mauritius and Fiji – as well as in Malta – and I am keen to build bridges between the spheres of knowledge, policy and practice. I have attended and presented in international conferences about island studies which have broadened my knowledge on the strengths and challenges that SIS face and possible ways of dealing with them. I have also coedited the book: *A Taste of Islands* (2012) which comprises recipes and their histories from 60 islands around the world. This helped me gain more insightful knowledge about islands and their journey through time. Apart from my ECE and island studies background, being a citizen of Malta, I myself have lived and experienced colonial and postcolonial times, which led me to my second research question. The above factors have contributed to the formulation of the questions for this study about the pedagogies and practices of ECE and to whether colonialism has impacted early childhood education.

Structure of the Thesis

This chapter has presented an outline of the research study which seeks to understand what elements influence the pedagogy and practices of early childhood education on small island states. It also seeks to investigate whether colonialism has impacted such pedagogies and practices. This introduction has explained the theoretical framework and my positionality together with the context of the study. It has also outlined the research questions, and the purpose of this study.

Chapter Two consists of a broad literature review relevant to this study. It will examine the field of island studies, including the strengths and weaknesses that small island states face. The impact of SIS on education will also be explored. Postcolonial theory will then be discussed, with special reference to its impact on education in Malta and the Caribbean. The last section of the literature review will examine the history of early childhood education, different pedagogies in ECE and the provision of ECE in Malta and Grenada.

The methodology used for this study is discussed in Chapter Three. This will provide the reasons for choosing a convergent mixed method approach for this study, a description of how and where the data were collected, and how it was organised and analysed. The five different methods (interviews, focus groups, online questionnaire, fieldnotes/observations and research journal) used for the data collection will be discussed.

Chapter Four offers the presentation of the data collected in response to my first research question and my reflective analysis of them. This will give a detailed overview of data collected through interviews, focus groups, fieldnotes/observations, online questionnaire and the research journal explaining the

themes that resulted through the multiple analysis of these data. It will also provide a discussion of the main findings of the study responding to the first research question, and identifying connections with and divergences from, the literature.

Chapter Five will present, analyse and discuss the data collected in response to my second research question. A detailed overview of data collected from the 5 data sets above will be provided. A conclusion of both analyses chapters will be given as a conclusion.

The last chapter of this study gives a summary of the major findings and any insights they provide to the research questions. The limitations of the study and recommendations to all stakeholders that have emerged from my research comprises the conclusion to this thesis.

Chapter 2 – Literature Review

The literature review in my study scans and critiques what elements might influence early childhood practices in small island states (SIS). Literature about education in small (mainly island) states has increased of late; however, there has so far been a systematic failure by small state studies to engage with and integrate the field of early childhood education (ECE) – childcare and kindergarten before the onset of formal primary school – into academic and policy debates. In my study, I investigated the general challenges facing early childhood education in small island states, deploying perspectives gleaned largely from both postcolonial studies as well as island and small state studies. My research’s aim was to build a better understanding of what influences early childhood education practices and pedagogies in small island states and how to overcome challenges, if any, in the future.

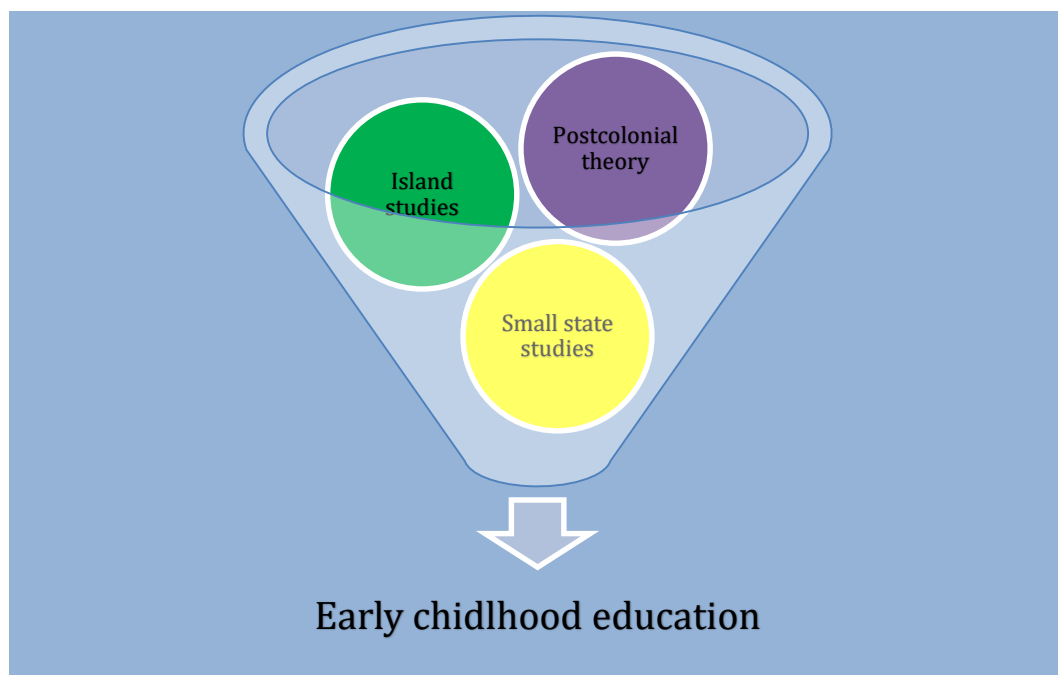


Figure 2.1: Graphical representation of the literature review

This chapter critically presents the literature review of my study, respectful of the triple theoretical foundations to my work – small states studies, island studies,

postcolonial theory – as these relate to early childhood education (Figure 2.1).

Search engines such as Google Scholar, Hydi, University Libraries (University of Sheffield, University of Malta, University of Prince Edward Island) and ERIC have been used for this research study. The main keywords used were: postcolonial/ism, small island states, education, island studies and early childhood education. These were chosen to help narrow down the search, especially when it came to postcolonial theory which is quite a broad area of scholarship. This resulted in only a handful of articles that spoke specifically about the impact of postcolonialism on early childhood education in small island states. However, to counterbalance this, I also made a specific search through UNESCO country reports, about all the 27 small island states involved in this research and their early childhood policies, if and when they had any.

Researching a field where there is hardly any available literature about the possible impact of postcolonialism on ECE, or how being a small island state might influence this sector is a mixed blessing. On the one hand, I am fortunate to have identified a research niche where I am affectively a pioneer, doing groundwork for others to hopefully follow, but the disadvantage of a limited literature base means that I lack the reassurance and comfort of a well-researched path.

The first section of this literature review provides insights into the strengths and weaknesses of SIS and the impacts these issues may have on education in general. The second section briefly reviews postcolonial theory and how colonialism, in turn, has impacted small island states' education systems. The last section of the literature review offers an overview of the theoretical background of early childhood education.

Small Island States

The first section of this literature review begins with a definition of small island states (Atchoarena, Dias Da Graca & Marquez, 2008; Baldacchino, 1993; Sultana, 2006). It will then proceed to offer insights into the strengths and weaknesses of small island states (SIS) and the impacts these may have on education in such jurisdictions. Whilst some of the citations in this section may seem dated, they are accompanied by more recent research that speaks to the present context where such more recent material has been identified. This shows that certain factors from the past linger stubbornly in the present.

Definition of SIS

Small island states (SIS) can be found aggregated in various parts of the world. There are clusters of such islands particularly in the Caribbean, the South Pacific and the Indian Ocean. Smaller groups of such island states can also be found in the Mediterranean, the Persian Gulf, the North Atlantic and off the coast of West Africa (Brock, 1987). The meaning of 'small' varies across time and literature and depends on who is providing the definition. Cut-off points usually reflect specific interests of the research under way. For the purpose of my study, small island states are defined in terms of two dimensions: resident population size of up to one million and full sovereignty, meaning full political independence (Atchoarena et al., 2008; Baldacchino, 1993; Clarke & Payne, 1987; Sultana, 2006). This leads to a current total of 27 small island states. (See Table 1.1).

Apart from resident population size and political status, there are various other factors that have been proposed to define SIS, including: "...ecology, vulnerability to external shocks, limited human and natural resources, nature of their

economies, cost per capita of services and dependence on trade” (Jules, 2012, pp. 6-7).

Bray and Packer (1993) contend that “economics, education, politics, sovereignty, national security and vulnerability issues” (p. 173) form part of the characteristics of SIS. Because of this vulnerability, the authors continue to argue that the development needs of SIS should be looked at differently from those of larger states. Pillay and Elliot (2005, p. 88) contend: “to apply the same parameters of development to these small island states ignores the fact that small states are not just quantitatively different in their characteristics: they are qualitatively different”. This study acknowledges the fact that certain challenges including those of ECE are also experienced in larger countries, as well as in SIS. However, the impact on small island states is higher than that of larger countries whose funding and human resources may elicit policy changes (Lee & Hayden, 2009).

The Commonwealth Secretariat and the World Bank Task Force (2000) point to other elements that identify small island states. These include: remoteness; proneness to natural disasters and environmental changes; isolation; and poverty or limited access to external funds (see also Atchoarena et al., 2008; Briguglio, 1995). While these features of SIS may be shared, some aspects of diversity between these states persist, for example their history and culture (Bray, et al., 1991).

In some respects, however, small states may not be that different from larger states. Baldacchino (1997) contends that: “proclaiming that a small-scale society is nevertheless a total society suggests that there is practically the same absolute total of institutions and official capacities one is bound to find in a larger state” (p. 69). In

the case of Malta, I tend to agree with Baldacchino (1997), where the lack of human resources is a major challenge that may also be shared by larger states.

Strengths and weaknesses of small island states

Based on various definitions of SIS discussed above (Atchoarena et al., 2008; Baldacchino 2012a; Brock 1998; Palmer 2016; Sultana, 2006), this section will look into challenges that these small island states face on a regular basis. These will include issues such as: role multiplicity (Sultana, 2006); close-knit communities (Bacchus 1993; Briguglio 2003); lack of resources (Bray & Packer, 1993); vulnerability of SIS (Pillay & Elliot, 2005); and favouritism/patronage (Baldacchino, 2012a; Sultana, 2006). Each of these may have an impact on the practice of early childhood education (ECE), as will be discussed further below.

Role multiplicity

According to Baldacchino (1997), role multiplicity "... role enlargement, as well as natural monopoly by the system incumbents" (p. 69) increases because of the small-scale factor. Sultana (2006) looked at the need to develop a career guidance system in small island states. He noticed that it becomes quite easy for a person in a SIS to become an 'expert' in a particular area depending on the necessity and the opportunities that arise. That person will switch to other 'expert' roles when the situation changes, or the position is terminated and calls for a different type of expertise. This is known as "flexible specialisation" (Sultana 2006, p. 31). Bray (1992) agrees that small island states may not need specialised individuals who have a lot of knowledge that might not be applicable to conditions and issues at home. He rather believes in 'extensive versatility' and flexibility, proposing suggestions for education and training involving flexibility (p. 31).

Sometimes it is not financially viable to have specialised personnel in particular educational fields. Therefore, educational administrations at times have to rely on generalists to carry out their various educational activities (Bacchus, 1993).

A respondent from one of the six small states involved in Sultana's study (2006) said:

... Today you may be an expert on this and tomorrow on something else, and sometimes quality is suffering from this... because the real expertise is too expensive or simply missing sometimes. The pressure is there for sure. Because we do not have an expert for every department, we have often to inform ourselves in reading about different themes. The problem with this is that once you have read three books about a theme you are 'an expert', and this is not correct. (p. 31)

This is also argued by Baldacchino (1997) who states that:

As soon as individuals develop even a modest edge in an area of knowledge, skill or research, they may find themselves proclaimed as experts and are ascribed with authoritative standing in that area by others. (p. 73)

This raises the question of whether this is happening as well in the ECE field in SIS and how it might be impacting on its practice. Newly fledged 'experts' may be placed in a position for which they may not yet have proper experience or thorough training. If yes, this may reflect on the quality of the education being offered in early childhood. Personal experience suggests that, when this is the case, the educators in the classrooms may know more than the 'new expert' who is there to guide them in their work.

In public administration, certain jobs may be created "for influential individuals due to promotion, or because individuals return from overseas with specific skills" (Bray et al., 1991, p. 55). It is important to acknowledge that human resources may be too scarce and valuable in SIS to be wasted. This in turn leads to multi-functionalism, and flexibility in employment. According to Sultana (2006)

multifunctionality: "...is a direct result of the nature of labour markets in small states, where some of the sectors have to perform the whole range of tasks that their counterparts do in larger states" (p. 32).

Bray and Fergus (1986) talk about multifunctionality on the small island territory of Montserrat and give some valuable examples of persons who practise multiple roles:

...one of the authors of this paper (Howard Fergus) is simultaneously Resident Tutor of the University of the West Indies, Speaker in the Legislative Council, and sometimes acts as Governor; the Financial Secretary is also a partner in a car-dealing firm and has close connections with a bar and restaurant; and one of the Permanent Secretaries also has shares in an industrial enterprise and is in effect a Director. (p. 95)

Such instances would be found in larger countries, but with less frequency and less public visibility. Moreover, Bray and Fergus (1986) argue that such behaviour is a means of survival: the economy needs personnel to take on the jobs but usually there are not enough skilled persons to fill these positions. This might also well be the case in early childhood education in SIS as it is still evolving and trying to professionalise itself as a legitimate part of the teaching profession (Payler & Georgeson, 2013a). From personal experience I can say that this happens in childcare centres here in Malta where practitioners perform several roles and hold a number of responsibilities, such as the case where the director of a childcare setting can also exercise the role of carer, administrator, accountant and cleaner. One has to be careful here that this practice is not to the detriment of the sector, in this case ECE: role-multiplicity may very well reduce the quality of the service being provided. In larger states, there are often specialised staff, so each person can practise a particular role for most of the time, therefore providing better services,

whereas in smaller states, staff have to be multi-functional and strategically flexible due to a relative lack of human resources (Baldacchino, 2011).

The issue of quickly becoming an expert in SIS may be viewed as a benefit as well as a difficulty. Since the human resource pool is quite limited and cannot be selective, the use of such 'experts' more broadly will lessen the burden on the SIS economy. This can be seen in the results of a study of higher educational institutions in SIS:

The person in a small state is like a premier capital good, a premier national resource. You would need an army of experts [in a particular subject] elsewhere. But one person in Grenada would suffice. (Academic at the University of the West Indies at Cave Hill, Barbados). (Baldacchino, 1997, p.74)

This may also lead to having job descriptions that are drawn up such as to fit the individual being employed (Bray et al., 1991). Ultimately, however, this could also lead to favouritism and patronage (Sultana, 2006).

The downside of this situation is that it also lends itself to having less specialised personnel, especially in the still evolving early childhood sector. I would further argue that this may also lead to lowering the level of certification to be able to enlarge the pool of individuals being employed. This has been the case in Malta, where from January 2018, child care providers could employ 'childcare assistants' without any certification (MQRIC Level 4 certification was mandatory up till December 2017) (MEDE, 2017). This may influence the early childhood educator's self-esteem as Payler and Georgeson (2013b) contend:

The sector [ECE] has a long history of relatively low levels of qualifications, which influences both other professionals' perceptions of the knowledge and skills of early years staff, and early years staff's perception of themselves. (p. 381)

Baldacchino (2012b) talks about ‘intimacy’ as one of the variables of what he calls the “small scale syndrome” (p. 17). He argues that in SIS, the level of privacy is quite low; there is a high level of familiarity between individuals; *who* you know may be more important than *what* you know; and role multiplicity simply cannot be avoided. Briguglio (2003) also argues that small island states are usually densely populated and have close-knit communities. This might lead one to believe that communication is a smooth day-to-day process. And yet, people might feel threatened by their neighbours as it is easy for these persons to know ‘everything’ (sometimes even personal issues) about them, so they tend to withhold information, additionally the acute competition for jobs in small island states is a factor. For example, if a person is being considered for a promotion or has applied for a job, the tendency is to keep this information private because this person may fear that, if other people get to know about it, they themselves may decide to apply for the same post or promotion. This might well be one factor about small island states that impacts on the practice of early childhood education in small island states. The credentials of an individual applying for a job within an ECE setting might not prove to be enough to merit them the job, especially in privately run childcare settings, as much as knowing a person/s who can vouch for them in that particular setting. This may in turn lead to low-quality service due to a lack of professionalism (Everest-Phillips, 2014).

A society where everyone knows everyone else may become claustrophobic and constraining. My own long personal experience in the field of early childhood education alerts me to the competition between private childcare settings to get as many children registered in their centres as possible. This sometimes invokes unnecessary rivalries and animosity, instead of creating a community of educators

who can benefit from each other's experiences, knowledge and good practice.

Another indication of a close-knit community is that persons may be unable to avoid nepotism, favouritism or patronage to secure a job (Baldacchino, 1997; Everest-Phillips, 2014; Sultana, 2006). Zammit (1981) contends that:

This practice has deep roots in Maltese society, colouring social interactions at every level. Thus, in spite of its widespread condemnation as a corrupt practice – giving some citizens an unfair advantage over others – everyone admits that it is arguably the most effective way to secure scarce resources ranging from a house, to a telephone. (p. 207)

Such practices persist in the 21st century, although they are notoriously difficult to document. For example: “‘Personality trumps policy,’ nepotism and patronage politics flourish...The ‘village’ nature of small states often creates extensive personalisation of politics” (Everest-Phillips, 2014, p. 13).

Greater opportunities for misuse or abuse of the system through ‘friends-of-friends’ networking seem to occur on SIS and this may be quite difficult to avoid (Baldacchino, 1997; Boissevain, 2013). Since the size of the social field is small in SIS, there comes into play a condition of ‘managed intimacy’ (Brock & Crossley, 2013; Lowenthal, 1987). To permit such a society to perform with less stress, ‘small-scale citizens minimise or mitigate conflict’ (Baldacchino, 1997): “Small-scale inhabitants learn to get along, like it or not, with one another, knowing that they are likely to renew and reinforce relationships with the same persons in a variety of contexts over a whole lifespan” (p. 77).

In Maltese we have a saying: *Iddardarx l-ghajn li trid tixrob minnha* (do not cut the hand that feeds you). Familiarity breeds contempt: inter-personal relationships can cause ‘intense rivalry’ which utilizes energy that might otherwise be used on more important issues (Bray & Fergus, 1986). This can be quite

damaging to both individuals and organisations. Thus, when individuals realise that disputes may occur at any time and they will have to pay dearly for them should that happen, they instead try to subdue these conflicts and try to get along with each other (Baldacchino, 1997; Sultana, 2006). Highly personalised societies exist in small states in which people know each other in various settings, and in which relationships usually last for a long time:

Small-state inhabitants learn to get along, like it or not, with folk they will know in myriad contexts over their whole lives. To enable the social mechanism to function without undue stress, they minimise or mitigate overt conflict. They become expert at muting hostility, deferring their own views, containing disagreement, and avoiding dispute in the interests of stability and compromise. (Lowenthal, 1987, p. 39)

Similar problems do arise in larger societies but, it is easier in these societies to pick up a dispute with someone that you might not come across again. To have such conflicts with people that you come across face-to-face on a regular and sometimes daily basis is quite another matter.

‘Brain Drain’ in Small Island States

As discussed above, the pool of human resources on SIS is usually limited. One factor that adds to this shortage of trained personnel is the ‘brain drain’. Small states are more prone to having a shortage of highly trained personnel, with a number of these decamping to other countries (Sultana, 2006). Where attempts have been made to train people at a higher level of education, this seems to have had a ‘brain drain’ effect, adding to their disposition and likelihood of emigrating. Trained personnel often endeavour to travel to foreign countries to find a job that fits their qualifications and ambitions, sometimes opting not to return to their country of origin (except as tourists) (Sultana, 2006). Thus, education may be considered as a

major factor in supporting emigration, more so in the smallest states whose economy can only offer basic training for a professional who then relocates elsewhere (outside the country of origin) to continue higher education (Baldacchino, 2012b; Bray & Fergus, 1986). This is the case in both Malta and Grenada which will be discussed in more detail in Chapters 4 and 5. In Grenada, to secure tertiary education, one needs to travel to other parts of the Caribbean or to the United States or Canada. In doing so, some then opt to remain in these countries as most probably the wages and conditions of work offered there are better than the ones at home. In Malta, it is even easier for people to further their studies in other EU member states (and particularly the UK): once they acquire the desired qualification, they do not even need a working permit to work in other EU countries. At the time of writing, it is still unclear whether Maltese citizens would be able to continue working freely in the UK after the Brexit negotiations are concluded in Spring 2019.

Although various research initiatives about the ‘brain drain’ phenomenon see this as a disadvantage to SIS, it has its benefits as well (de la Croix, Docquier & Schiff, 2014; Lozano-Ascencio & Gandini, 2012). When individuals decide to migrate to other countries in search of professional training and/or better jobs, there is usually a significant amount of remittances sent back to the country of origin. For a number of small island states households, migration can become a critical source of funding sent to the family by the offspring who ventured to ‘greener pastures’ in other parts of the world (Baldacchino, 2010a). In some countries, including various SIS, educational systems effectively train prime students for migration which in turn brings about financial gain to the small state (Bray et al., 1991). Places like Tonga, Cape Verde and Grenada depend considerably on remittances sent by emigrées to support their small island economies. In these small island states, the Government

makes sure that the people's qualifications are marketable in the countries that its citizens would be emigrating to (Bray et al., 1991). As Sultana (1997) puts it: "Indeed, the treatment of people as 'human capital', as units that contribute to production, obfuscates and mystifies the relationship that exists between education and production on the one hand, and domination and exploitation on the other" (p. 336).

Atchoarena et al. (2008) argue that, apart from remittances, such migration may result in "an increased demand for education in the country of origin due to an aspiration effect following the successful experience of migrants abroad" (p. 173). Moreover, Baldacchino (2012b) sees the 'brain drain' as reducing the "local labour supply, easing unemployment" (p. 19). The emigrants also acquire new knowledge and experiences that may be totally absent in their home country, and establish new contacts which, hopefully, may serve them well in their country of origin if and when they decide to go back (Baldacchino, 2006; see also Manning, 2007). In my own experience, it had always been my wish to continue tertiary studies in early childhood education. However, this was not offered in Malta at the time. It was only when my family and I migrated to Canada, that I could pursue my studies in this field. Now that I am back in Malta, I find that the knowledge and contacts I have gained overseas have opened up academic opportunities that would not have been possible otherwise.

In academic literature, small island states are often represented as victims of a chronic and inescapable vulnerability. Briguglio (1995) proposed an index of economic vulnerability for Small Island Developing States (SIDS) based on the alleged structural disadvantages that these states face. He argues that this vulnerability index is "a measurement of the lack of economic resilience arising

from the relative inability of a small island state to shelter itself from forces outside its control” (Briguglio 1995, p. 1615). Given the open economy of such states, disasters or ‘shocks’ can impact SIS much more than they would their larger counterparts. Srinivasan (1986, p. 30) however, argues that perhaps “many (though not all)” of the so-called problems of such small economies can be solved through adequate policy measures.

Jules (2012) contends that sometimes it is advantageous for SIS to be labelled as vulnerable as this description could provide donor funding from larger countries for projects that could otherwise not be undertaken.

Vulnerability can impact on small jurisdictions in various ways. Their economies may prove vulnerable to a particularly large foreign investment or dependent on one particular cash crop (bananas, sugar, copra); their environments are prone to major climatic events (hurricanes, flooding) (Briguglio, 1995). ECE policies run the risk of being determined by an external consultant on a short visit, often offering what appear to be bespoke solutions but which do not necessarily take into account local specificities (Farrugia, 1993; Farrugia & Attard, 1989). Indeed, Lee and Hayden (2009) argue that:

Early childhood care and education programmes should not overshadow the method used. Actual implementation should be carefully planned based upon each country’s culture, rather than counting on the idea and belief projected by developed countries’ research. (p. 4)

My focus will now turn to the specific characteristics of the education system on small island states.

Education in Small Island States

Education continues to be a major resource and investment in human capital for SIS. Their citizens can migrate to other countries and use their “skill sets, their qualifications, [and] their language proficiencies” (Baldacchino, 2012b, p. 20), which in turn will provide remittances for their small state’s economy. Research about education in SIS started to emerge in the 1980s (Brock, 1987). Bray and Fergus (1986) argue that such research tends to deal with educational issues that happen to unfold in small states, rather than “ones which arise because those states are small” (p. 91).

Most of the research on education in SIS that I have identified deals with primary, secondary and higher education issues. My literature search came across few published studies in the English language about pre-primary (early childhood) education as it might unfold in an SIS context. It is this dearth of scholarship that also led me to embark on this study, with the goal of contributing some critical and significant knowledge about this subject. Such a lack of literature might be due to the fact that, when literature about education and small island states started emerging in the 1980s, early childhood education was not yet considered to be an important issue. Its practice was not yet widely institutionalised, and its workforce was not yet rigorously professionalised. Another reason might be that, in SIS, especially those with very small populations and close-knit communities, relatives or members of the community themselves usually took care of the young children until they reached formal school age. Hence, this part of the literature review will focus largely, by default, on research conducted in the primary to higher education systems in SIS rather than on early childhood education.

Pillay and Elliott (2005) call for a redefinition of the education system and its management in small island states: they challenge education planners to “move beyond the stereotypical ways of thinking about education development while acknowledging the role played by previous educational development models” (p. 87). This cannot be achieved if one keeps looking at education models through an old, narrow, continent-driven lens. While this can be said of all societies, it is predominantly true for SIS where resources are scarce, and colonialism could have left a deep impact on local educational systems (Pillay & Elliott 2005). An example of this neo-colonialism is the University of Malta and how it processes applications for senior academic promotions. According to Baldacchino in an interview carried in *The Sunday Times*:

Applications for promotion to associate or full professor are sent to the Association of Commonwealth Universities, [in London] which then determines the process of adjudication, inclusive of the identification of suitable referees. Its recommendations are then sent back to Malta. (Massa 2016, p. 9)

Brock (1988) talks about the “centre-periphery” concept of various small island states and argues that “campus islands” benefit over their sister and non-campus islands (p. 171). A case in point is the Maltese archipelago, with Malta (a campus island) and Gozo (the peripheral island). Gozitan students who desire tertiary education have to either go to the main Malta Campus of the University of Malta – involving three-four hours of travel, including a ferry crossing – or move to a foreign country. Brock (1988) mentions the cases of the Caribbean and the South Pacific small island states as an example of the centre-periphery concept and argues that in both these cases “there is no doubt that the campus islands have benefitted disproportionately” (p. 171). In spite of being a sovereign state Grenada too, is a

peripheral island in the Caribbean as far as tertiary education is concerned. The local Community College does not grant degrees. Grenadians wanting to further their education need to go to Barbados, Jamaica or Trinidad and their University of the West Indies campuses or else travel to other countries.

Lack of Resources

Lack of resources is one factor that challenges education in small island states. Due to the absence of economies of scale and limited populations, it is hard for small island states (SIS) to viably produce their own educational materials and resources (for example text-books, flashcards, worksheets and reading books). It is often not cost-effective or realistic to produce these materials and keep them updated (Sultana, 2006). This means that educational materials and resources are often imported from other countries, and so would have been developed in the context of a foreign curriculum. They do not usually come in the native language of the SIS that is using them and would not reflect the traditions, cultures and beliefs of these states. This poses the question of how developmentally and culturally appropriate these imported resources are in the early childhood education (ECE) settings of SIS. Consider planning an activity for a 'winter' theme by providing children with a snowflake picture to colour, when children in that particular country have never experienced snow and when a snowflake is actually white. I have seen this happen many times in my teaching experience with the 'Winter' theme and other topics like St. Patrick's Day and Halloween which are not necessarily celebrated in Malta or other SIS.

Personal experience shows that, because of this lack of human resources, certain posts in educational services are occupied by individuals who do not necessarily specialise in the field, especially where early childhood is concerned.

This usually inhibits change from taking place as the knowledge of the policy makers and stakeholders in the field is quite limited. Farrugia (1991) and Briguglio, Persaud and Stern (2006) argue that the lack of human resources is a constant source of frustration in small countries. Malta is a case in point: it still has to have an effective educational administration which includes the same basic services and facilities that are needed in a larger country. Farrugia (1991) contends that, the actual number of personnel employed in the education sector in Malta is much less than, for example, in Italy. However, the difference is not proportional to the total number of inhabitants.

Thaman (1987) on the other hand, emphasises the importance of making good use of the “scarce professional resources” (p. 70) found on SIS. She says that SIS should utilise the experiences and skills of their own teachers by involving them in curriculum development while at the same time allowing them to maintain their daily teaching roles. Thaman also insists that teachers should be given appropriate professional development as these may be new roles they are taking on, about which they may know very little (see also Waters & Payler, 2015).

Some three decades later, and this is still not happening fully in Malta. The National Curriculum Framework (NCF) for the education system was developed in 2012. In 2014-15 the document was reviewed, and the National Learning Outcomes Framework was established. Educators from across the educational spectrum were invited to validate the learning outcomes that were being developed by international experts (Learning Outcomes Framework, 2015). However, in the case of early childhood education, both developers and validators were local ‘experts’. Although getting educators involved in the learning outcomes was a move in the right direction, it does not necessarily mean that these individuals were trained

beforehand to carry out such a role. Some individuals have been thrust into ‘expert’ roles without necessarily having the right credentials; it was a matter of either engaging the ‘non-expert’ or leaving the position vacant. This move has impacted on the development and validation of outcomes that will shape learning in our educational systems for years to come. In fact, these learning outcomes have not yet been implemented in schools due to the fact that educators across the educational spectrum have complained that they have not had any training about this new system and therefore do not feel competent in implementing it properly. In fact, the implementation of these learning outcomes was stopped by the Malta Union of Teachers (MUT) due to the complaints of educators (MUT, 2016). Educators complained that they did not get any training about this new framework, the LOF was being imposed on them without respecting their knowledge about early childhood education. In May 2018, the Minister for Education announced that the proposed learning outcomes framework will indeed be implemented in September 2018 (MEDE, 2018b) and offered a two-day ‘professional learning course’ to educators involved in this policy (MEDE, 2018c, para. 1). Payler and Locke (2013) investigated a similar scenario where early childhood practitioners were reluctant to embrace the Early Years Professional Status which was one of the government’s key policies to move forward reform in the sector. Their study conducted in 15 settings (n=35) in the UK suggests, that one reason why these practitioners resisted the change was because they “felt the powerful force of government in imposing [this] change that they did not buy into” (p. 134). Although Payler and Locke (2013) research study talks about professionalism in the early years sector, it still resonates well with the Maltese case where educators felt that the learning outcomes

framework was being pushed on them by the government and so they resisted this change.

Decentralisation of Education

Bacchus (1993) talks about decentralising education and the challenges that small states (not all of which are islands) face with implementing such a policy. One factor that is likely to influence this is the geographical distribution of the small jurisdiction: whether it is laid out as an archipelago (e.g. Grenada, Malta or the Solomon Islands); scattered over a large expanse of land (e.g. Greenland or Botswana); or concentrated in a limited area (e.g. Barbados or Nauru). There is also the issue of remoteness of some areas in larger islands where groups of people live some distance from main population centre (e.g. Iceland and Vanuatu). This adds not only to the “cost of providing education but also to the difficulties of administration, especially in a fairly centralised system” (Bacchus, 1993, p. 78). Managing from a central office can lead to a very slow decision-making process for such remote areas and may not always be sensitive to individual local needs (Pillay & Elliott, 2005).

Centralisation may also result in the disempowerment of local communities, “which in turn may hinder their engagement in education innovations at a time when we recognise that the role of local stakeholders is increasingly becoming critical in providing a balanced education” (Pillay & Elliott, 2005, p. 99). In 2005, the Ministry for Education, Youth and Employment in Malta proposed the decentralisation of state schools into ten Colleges where a number of primary schools would feed into secondary schools and Junior Lyceums (Ministry for Education, Youth and Employment, 2005). According to the Learning Outcomes Framework (2015): “These Colleges would have increasing administrative, managerial, financial and

ultimately curricular autonomy, within a framework of standards and quality assurance” (p. 1)

Another factor that influences the decentralisation of education in SIS is that organised state departments (such as education) may often want to, or feel obliged to, take decisions themselves. Sometimes, there is the fear that, if important decisions are taken in such line departments, these would not tally or align with policies originally formulated at the top of the chain of command. Bacchus (1993, p. 83) goes on to say:

Further, the chief concern of the elected officials is not always the achievement of greater rationality or efficiency of the educational system. Rather, it is usually to satisfy as much as possible, the demands of the elected Government which is funding these services... These concerns often militate against any serious attempt to decentralise important decision-making responsibilities, even to the senior management staff within the Ministry for Education.

A critical area in education where decentralisation ought to be considered is at the instruction/learning process (Baldacchino & Farrugia, 2002). Decisions regarding this area should be the “ultimate responsibility of the schools and the teachers, especially in small states” (Bacchus, 1993, p. 93). If teachers are given the freedom to make their own decisions, they will rise to the occasion and be able to produce “the type of individuals who are creative and are flexible enough in their approaches to problem solve” (Bacchus, 1993, p. 93). In the case of Malta, the Learning Outcomes Framework (LOF, 2015) states that:

The aim of the Learning Outcomes Framework is to free schools and learners from centrally-imposed knowledge-centric syllabi, and to give them the freedom to develop programmes that fulfil the framework of knowledge, attitudes and skills-based outcomes that are considered national education entitlement of all learners in Malta. The LOF is thus intended to eventually lead to more curricular autonomy of colleges and schools, so as to better address the learning needs of their students. (p. 1)

This could eventually result in empowering students to contribute to the sustainable development of their country. However, this kind of change would depend very much on efforts made that would expand the appropriate education and training of teachers. As discussed above the implementation of the Learning Outcomes Framework was suspended as it became apparent that the country was not yet prepared to take on such a change and educators needed more training about the whole process. The Directorate for Learning and Assessment Programmes has recently issued a circular to educators stating that the implementation of the Learning Outcomes Framework will commence in September 2018 in all Kindergarten 1, Year 3 and Year 7 classes (MEDE, 2018b).

Pillay and Elliott (2005) contend that we cannot generalise and say that decentralisation is the best option for all SIS. In some cases, a centralised model of education may be the only option because of limited resources and the smallness of the state itself. For example, some of the countries in the South Pacific consist of islands that are spread quite far apart over huge tracts of ocean – as in the case of Kiribati or the Federated States of Micronesia – to the extent that a centralised model would clearly not be a valid option. However, at the same time, national resources and population size may be so small that the country would still benefit from a centralised, rather than decentralised, management structure. Farrugia (1991) states that, in the case of Malta, where the constituent islands are not as widely separated but have limited resources, a centralised system is still able to respond quickly to mobilise local communities for meetings and taking decisions. Having said that, it seems that the decentralisation of the education system in Malta since 2005 has worked well (LOF, 2015).

Cultural impact on curriculum

Culture and its impact on the curriculum are also important factors that influence education in small island states. From history we know that societies and their cultures change through time. Some traditions persist or evolve, but others get phased out and new ones take over. Some small countries such as Fiji in the South Pacific, Trinidad and Tobago in the Caribbean and Mauritius in the Indian Ocean are not ‘monocultural’: these particular three all have a strong Indian ethnic presence in their populations (Pillay & Elliott, 2005; Srebrnik, 2000). Many SIS depend on other developed countries for their economy (e.g. tourism) which seems to imply that ‘global culture’ cannot be blocked out. Pillay and Elliott (2005) argue:

... with information technology creating a borderless world, it is impossible to sanction the internet. Therefore, the issue of traditional local and western cultures is not about which culture to adopt. Rather it is about how to provide a balance between the two so that the people from small developing countries still maintain an identity and yet can actively participate in the emerging global cultures. (p. 95)

This means that those SIS that have been following a curriculum inspired by their former colonisers, may have an advantage in being better able to navigate a globalised world. However, these same SIS also need to rethink and re-plan their curricula to better suit specific *local* circumstances and development needs (Lee & Hayden, 2009). A national curriculum needs to be an ongoing process which may however, present a challenge to small island states because of their limited resources (Pillay & Elliott, 2005). Curricula can no longer be developed on the basis of current importance or past models; they also need to be able (as it were) to see into the future. Curricula need to portray a pedagogy through which individuals are encouraged to keep an open mind to change (Lee & Hayden, 2009; Pillay & Elliott, 2005). I would further argue that since the world is fast becoming a global village,

one cannot avoid the influences of Western, Chinese and Middle East culture and pedagogies. The question is, how well a country can adapt these international curricula into its own island culture and traditions making it more relevant to learners.

Education policy makers in small island states need to consider moving away from the top-down system, where it is assumed that every school is the same and that what works for one school should work for another (Nieuwenhuys, 2013; Viruru, 2005a). The challenge is to move to a school-based model where “every school is unique and has a personality and culture of its own” (Pillay & Elliott, 2005, p. 102). Top-down education systems and their checklist of competences put pressure on early childhood education, and the educators of higher grades accordingly place high expectations on young children who are still in their developing stages. This is unfortunately leading to the ‘schoolification’ of early childhood education (Woodhead & Moss, 2007).

To date, I have found various accounts of the specific literature pertaining to primary, secondary and tertiary and adult education in small island states, with very few articles dealing explicitly with how early childhood education unfolds in SIS. Many have argued that the condition of being a small island state has an impact on the above-mentioned sectors of education (Jules, 1994; Martin & Bray, 2011; Mayo, 2010; Sultana, 2006). My study explores whether or not the same condition might also have an impact on early childhood pedagogies and practices in these same states. The literature reviewed here suggests that this could be the case: the educational system of SIS face imported curricula in contexts where educators may be insufficiently trained, expertise is hard to come by, pedagogies are crafted at a central level, and where decisions may be driven by person specificity.

The next section of the literature review will discuss the impact of postcolonialism on small island states, and in particular on their educational systems.

Postcolonialism

Postcolonial Theory

This section of the literature review briefly discusses the definition and critique of postcolonial theory and its impact on Small Island States (SIS). The main focus of this section is a review of the impact of postcolonialism on education in SIS and with special reference to the Caribbean and Malta.

There has been a steady stream of literature about postcolonialism, ever since the official ending of colonialism in various former colonies around the world and mainly in the period 1944 - 1984 (Hickling-Hudson & Mayo, 2012). Tikly (1999) defines postcolonialism as a universal ‘condition’ or change in political, economic and cultural provisions that “arises from the experiences of European colonialism, both in former colonised and colonising countries” (p. 605). Viruru (2005b), argues that postcolonialism is concerned with: “addressing the legacy of colonialism imposed by western attempts to dominate the globe over hundreds of years” (p. 8). In its widest sense, postcolonialism is an epistemological critique concerned with “challenging the unquestioned Eurocentric ways of looking at the world and seeks to open up intellectual spaces for those who are termed ‘subalterns’” or alternative approaches to knowledge and practice (Nieuwenhuys, 2013, p. 20). During the long period of (mainly European) colonialism, the colonised have been referred to by the colonising powers as having no voice or agency. They were seen as largely agreeable to becoming civilised if they were under the guidance of the ‘enlightened European race that God would have singled out for this task’ (Nieuwenhuys, 2013,

p. 4). Nieuwenhuys goes on to emphasise that: “For the very project of colonial transformation to be at all possible, the colonised needed to be perceived as traditional and incapable of change” (p. 5). A subtler way of defining postcolonialism is that of a slow and long *process* of detachment from the colonial experience, rather than the mark of a specific new era (Crossley & Tikly, 2004). These authors argue that colonialism is not ‘over’ once decolonisation starts. Rather, it leaves behind impacts on cultural, economic, political and educational issues. This research study set out to investigate precisely this lingering impact, if any, on early childhood education in small island states. Bhabha (1994) contends that one cannot consider decolonisation as the ‘past’ and that the newly independent countries are not just living a liberated ‘present’, since the colonial experience lingers on, often in subtle ways. As Zammit (1981) states about Malta’s decolonisation:

...it would be unrealistic to expect these events to signal the actual termination of the influences of former colonial policies on Malta’s social life. These are likely to remain with us – even if imperceptibly – for some time to come. (p. 211)

Although Zammit was writing over three decades ago, it still holds true today where fragments of colonial influences continue to be felt in Malta’s social and political fabric. Baldacchino (2010b) also contends that:

[The] suggestion that colonialism, characterised by country-to-country occupation, is now “post” and therefore “over” is seen as fundamentally flawed and fails to engage with both persisting forms of military subordination as well as other, more subtle, forms of neo-colonial supremacy. (p. 3)

Postcolonial theory usually highlights the physical and symbolic violence, disadvantages and discriminations that the citizens of ex-colonised countries have had to endure. There is, however, a very limited literature about the specific

experience of colonialism and postcolonialism in small island states. Indeed, unlike mainstream postcolonial theorists, there are also clear advantages for some small island territories in forgoing sovereignty and remaining attached to their colonising powers. Baldacchino (2010b) mentions various advantages available to small jurisdictions in being affiliated to a larger country. These include the “free riding” given to them by the protection of the flag (e.g. international security, law and order and currency); and the municipal oversight that sheds regulatory legitimacy with particular reference to offshore finance which will attract more foreign investors to the gaming and banking sectors. Baldacchino (2010b) continues to argue that it will also give the island/territory:

...the seamless connectivity with the labour market of a larger, richer country (which allows the metropole’s tourists to visit and support the domestic economy while ensuring freedom of movement for the islanders for employment, residence, or education in the metropole, even if as a backup option); and the potential bailout in case of persistent budgetary shortfalls, maladministration, natural disasters, and other (including military) threats. (p. 4)

It seems that a number of subnational island jurisdictions have opted for a degree of autonomy but not sovereignty. Tokelau, a non-self-governing island territory in the Pacific, is one particular case. The registered voters of the island voted against independence in two referenda that took place in 2006 and 2007 (Baldacchino, 2010b). One voter’s comment for not wanting independence states: “Life as a New Zealand colony has brought many benefits to the country. There is no poverty, no unemployment and full literacy” (Connell, 2008, p. 164). Tokelau is not an isolated example of an island/territory that opted for non-sovereignty. According to referenda statistics during the last four decades, *all* the following small island territories have rejected independence: Niue (1974 and 1999), the Cook

Islands (1974), Mayotte (1976), the Dutch Antilles (1993 and 1994), Puerto Rico (1967, 1993, 1998 and 2012), U.S. Virgin Islands (1993), Bermuda (1995), Sint Maarten (2000), Bonaire (2004), Saba (2004), Curaçao (2005), and St Eustatius [Statia] (2005) (Baldacchino 2010b). The sequence of decolonisation in the past seven decades shows a clear relationship between the year of independence and the size of the population: “the larger the population base of a territory, the earlier has been its achievement of independence” (Baldacchino, 2010a, p. 47; see also Baldacchino 2004). Thus, so far, many more small island territories could have become SIS, but have deliberately chosen not to. Colonialism may be so deeply engrained in such territories that their publics and political elites lack the will, vision, desire or motivation for sovereignty.

From what has been discussed above, it seems that there is quite a persuasive case to be made for autonomy without sovereignty, especially for islands with a small population. As Connell (2003) contends: “In an uncertain world, a substantial degree of autonomy, where culture and identity are respected and protected, reasonable access to employment and services exists, and security is guaranteed, has weakened the strength of the claim to independence” (p.141).

Clearly, the colonial experience in small island contexts has been so long, deep and intimate that their citizens continue to embrace colonial practices, languages and mind sets and even colonial rule in some cases.

The next section will discuss the impacts of postcolonialism on small island states, including cultural and social contexts.

Impacts of Postcolonialism on SIS

This section briefly describes postcolonialism and its impacts on SIS with regards to social and cultural issues as well as early childhood education.

According to the famous Kenyan writer Ngugi Wa Thiong'o (1986), colonialism not only imposes 'social production' but it also dominates the mentality of the colonised population:

Colonialism imposed its control of the social production of wealth through military conquest and subsequent political dictatorship. But its most important area of domination was the mental universe of the colonized, the control, through culture, of how people perceived themselves and their relationship to the world. Economic and political control can never be complete or effective without mental control. To control a people's culture is to control their tools of self-definition in relationship to others. (p. 16)

In many SIS various characteristic features of economic, social and political life became strongly established during the years of colonial domination. In specific cases, the colonisers were more interested in the strategic location of the territory rather than in the local affairs of its inhabitants. As in the case of Malta, the efficiency of the British military operation there depended critically on civilian sympathy, consent and cooperation. This led to the British colonisers, who ruled Malta from 1800 to 1964 to get deeply involved in 'managing local affairs' (Sauer, 2015; Zammit, 1981). This in turn produced many social and material reforms that not all the inhabitants necessarily agreed with. Some of the reforms included reorganising the civil administration and excluding Maltese people "from all but the lowest offices" (Zammit, p. 199). These were to be replaced later on by an emerging middle class of Maltese who were schooled under a British system and in the English language and who had acquired a certain loyalty towards the British, and so were deemed more trustworthy. Moreover, the exclusion of Maltese from high

position in the military service and the dockyard – the main employer at the time – created unwanted tensions:

The exclusion of Maltese [people] from high positions in the military service and in the dockyard continued throughout the period of British rule and this provided a constant source of friction and resentment among some aspiring Maltese individuals, though the majority were generally complacent and submissive. (Zammit, 1981, p. 199)

Decolonisation leaves behind trails of what had been created by the colonisers and which may prove hard to dislodge. As discussed in the previous section, it is not an easy and clear-cut job for newly independent territories to perform a ‘root and branch’ overhaul, detaching themselves from the colonial experience; nor do they necessarily wish to do so. This pervasive lingering of the colonial experience, post-independence can create a ‘culture of dependency’ even after the colonisers leave (Sauer, 2015). It may prove difficult for the now independent countries to “challenge and emerge from their dependent economic status” (Hickling-Hudson, 1989, p. 97).

Take, for example, in the case of the Republic of the Marshall Islands. Even though it has been an independent state since 1986, colonial influence and relationships continue to exist, particularly in the form of ‘donor-nation’ support (Hezel, 2001). Its educational system is largely a creation of colonial legacy and history. Funds from local sources do not even cover personnel salaries, let alone other expenses (Sauer, 2015). In cases like these, financing required for educational reform is highly dependent on funding sourced from donor countries: “...donor funding has created challenges for a Marshallese educational reform that seeks to embrace the educational values of Marshallese culture and meet the needs of Marshallese society” (Sauer, 2015, p. 132). As Kupferman (2004) notes: “An

American system of education has been imposed upon the [Marshall Islands] and on a culture, that does not readily adopt US ideas of education as its own yet is forced to by dint of economic-political realities” (p. 42).

The Marshall Islands offer an interesting example of how western curricula impact education in SIS. These islands were colonised successively by Spain, Germany and Japan, before becoming Trust Territories administered by the USA. Spain brought with it the Jesuits and the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart who established their schools in the Marshall Islands and ran them according to their values and beliefs, ignoring the culture and traditions of the Marshallese. When the Germans came, they insisted that such schools should now assist “in the Germanisation process of the islands” (Sauer, 2015, p. 134; see also Farrugia, 1991). Finally, Catholic educators were expelled from the Marshall Islands upon the arrival of the Japanese colonisers who opened up their own schools based on the Japanese language and a cultural curriculum that focused on increasing Marshallese loyalty to the Japanese emperor (Sauer, 2015). Hezel (2002) contends that it is therefore no surprise that: “...in time, schools became strange places to many community members. They were not only strange places but teaching values and beliefs contradictory to island lifestyles as well” (p. 7).

My literature search identified items that referred to the impact of postcolonialism on very young children in developing countries. Pearson (2015) acknowledges how local policies on ECE in many such countries have nevertheless been heavily informed by Western contexts.

Gupta’s (2015) research about postcolonial urban India shows how “philosophical and pedagogical boundaries that are defined by diverse cultures and

ideologies might be navigated in the practical implementation of an early childhood curriculum” (p. 260). Her research findings highlight a “complex and multifaceted curriculum” (p. 261), influenced by various cultural, historical and social elements. These include: a curriculum based on Ancient Indian beliefs mixed with curricular elements adopted from Euro-American education; and “a highly structured academic curriculum mandated by the government and historically rooted in the educational policies of the British colonial administration” (Gupta, 2015, p. 261).

Another study carried out in New Zealand analyses the bicultural early childhood curriculum framework Te Whariki and how this particular curriculum strives to maintain a balance between indigenous culture, neo-liberalism and neo-colonialism in early childhood education (Pacini-Ketchabaw & Taylor, 2015). The authors argue that Te Whariki is an example where both local and global economic and market pointers help shape the educational policy of ECE.

When I narrowed my search to small island states, I was led to two scholarly articles: Viruru (2005a) and Nieuwenhuys (2013). Viruru discusses how, in spite of the influential nature of the ideas that postcolonialism has to offer and its relative consequences to young children’s lives, the literature only talks about a “slight if any impact on the field of early childhood as an academic discipline and even less on the daily practices of early childhood educators” (Viruru, 2005a, p. 8). This author goes on to explain how the idea of colonialism has been mainly modelled on specific authoritative and oppressive models of child rearing. Some prevailing principles of how children allegedly grow, learn and develop have become “another of colonialism’s truths that permit no questioning, and that imposed unhesitatingly upon people around the world for their own good” (Viruru, 2005a, p. 16).

On the other hand, Nieuwenhuys (2013) contends that the backbone of the drive to colonise was formed by the idea that Caucasians were the chosen ones pre-ordained to subjugate darker skinned people in faraway countries. The ongoing belief was that of a “civilising mission” (Nieuwenhuys, 2013, p. 4) that the colonised needed to be rescued and educated about their “alleged abuses, such as child marriages and infanticide that primitive or oriental men would visit upon children (and women)” (Nieuwenhuys, 2013, p. 4). No wonder that Christian missionaries were an integral component of this mission. Nieuwenhuys adds that “colonialism and childhood are inseparably harnessed together for interpreting human life as a trajectory leading towards increasing and endless perfectibility” (p. 5). It was only when both the child and the colonised could be seen as “vulnerable, passive and irrational” beings that the educated colonisers could justify their implementation of their noble cause (Nieuwenhuys, 2013, p. 5).

Clearly, the impacts of postcolonialism, both tangible and intangible, run deep in formerly colonised countries. Moreover, they may run even deeper in small island states.

Impacts of Postcolonialism on Education

The implications of the impact of postcolonialism on education in Small Island States are numerous, as will be explained in more detail below. However, Tarc (2009) argues that: “Postcolonial studies are slow to come to education, in part because postcolonial studies threaten to undo education, to unravel the passionately held-onto thought and knowledge of the modern Western-educated student and scholar” (p. 195).

Small Island States exist in a co-dependent world, and most of them function within the influence and shadow of a colonial past. Their governments struggle with limited human resources and challenges of scale to aspire to higher standards of living, themselves often based on Western definitions of development (Bray et al., 1991). These authors also contend that the “education systems [in SIS] are structured according to familiar patterns, with pre-primary education at the base and higher education at the apex” (p. 16) adopted from their colonisers’ educational models (see also Crossley & Tikly, 2004). Colonial education has been effective in disseminating a particular form of education along with its accompanying disciplinary framework (Crossley & Tikly, 2004).

As discussed in the first section, SIS are usually heavily dependent on foreign trade. This may in turn influence the structure of the education system, in that people may be required to learn foreign languages, sometimes to the detriment of local ones. A case in point is Malta, where Maltese is the native language. Since it is only spoken in Malta, people have to learn other languages to be able to communicate and engage with people from other countries. Maltese became the official language in 1934 together with English and Italian (Camilleri Grima, 2018; Zammit, 1981). In 1964, Maltese was:

Declared the national language, and co-official with English in the Constitution of Independence from the British Crown, a status that was retained in the Constitution of the Republic of Malta in 1974. (Camilleri Grima, p. 33).

Maltese was once the main language spoken in homes amongst family members, while the English language was taught from a young age at school. However, things have changed in recent years, in that English is being spoken in many homes to children as soon as they are born, to the detriment of the Maltese

language. We have unfortunately ended up with significant numbers of Malta-born children who cannot speak, read or write proper Maltese, even though they are Maltese nationals (Camilleri Grima, 2012). The latest census of Population and Housing shows that 90% of respondents residing in Malta claimed to speak Maltese very well, and 78% claimed that they spoke English very well (National Statistics Office, 2014). The census shows that 80% of the Maltese population is considered as bilingual in Maltese and English. Camilleri Grima (2018) states that:

Maltese is undoubtedly the first language of the vast majority of Maltese, who are undeniable exposed to English on a daily basis through the media and within society at large. Maltese predominates as a spoken medium in government administration, including Parliament and the Law Courts, but much written official and non-official correspondence takes place in English. (p. 34)

Cutajar (2008) contends that, even academics in Malta obliged to publish and communicate with global audiences, have subscribed to the ascendancy of the English language: “we write in English, use First World concepts, methodologies and epistemologies and are constantly aware of how our work might be received outside Maltese shores” (p. 35). I am born and bred Maltese, and I am writing this thesis in the English language as a student with a British university. What may be surprising, even shocking, is that I would also have had to write my thesis in English had I registered as a student with the University of Malta, Malta’s only local, public university. Only theses that deal with linguistic issues are typically allowed to be written in languages other than English (Camilleri Grima, 2018). The author states that:

While Maltese is flourishing in an elevated style in the literary field, and is used on a daily basis in politics, in the law courts, in parliament and in the media, the same cannot be said for schools and in particular with reference to the University of Malta. Few dissertations are written in Maltese and the

PhD regulations are clear: English must be used except for a thesis in areas of study involving a language that may be written in that language. (p. 40)

Crossley and Tikly (2004) state that: "...colonial education has also facilitated the use of English and other 'global' (read European) languages as the medium through which discourses in comparative education are most often conducted" (p. 149). Thiong'o (1986) stresses that: "The choice of language and the use to which language is put is central to a people's definition of themselves in relation to their natural and social environment, indeed in relation to the entire universe" (p. 4).

The inevitable need to accommodate global and local identities in SIS has a considerable impact on language use and policy, both in classrooms and society at large. Thiong'o (1986) in his book *Decolonising the mind: The politics of language in African literature* talks about when Kenya was taken over by British colonisers who imposed their language on the colonised citizens, with English becoming the formal language for education. Thiong'o says that, if people were caught speaking Gikuyu (a local language) in the vicinity of the school, they would be subject to corporal punishment: "three to five strokes of the cane on bare buttocks – or was made to carry a metal plate around the neck with inscriptions such as I AM STUPID, or I AM A DONKEY" in capital letters (p. 11). At other times, the culprits were fined a sum of money that they could hardly afford. My own sister (aged 5 at the time) went to a nuns' English-speaking church school in Malta where she was fined one penny each and every time she was caught speaking in Maltese. Our parents always spoke Maltese to us at home and so it was quite difficult for my sister to speak in English all the time at school, especially when she was not understanding what the nun was saying to her. Such monetary sanctions may no longer exist today.

However, church, state and independent schools in Malta adopt a range of language policies, some of which continue to privilege the use of the English language over Maltese.

A factor that impacted education in the Caribbean during the colonial era was the introduction of missionary schools. MacKenzie (1993) argues that:

The missionaries and colonists often came from the same country as each other, almost always the same continent, spoke the same language, played the same games, worshipped the same god, enjoyed the same privileges, held dear the same culture. Further, they set up schools that trained low-level workers needed to sustain the economies of colonial territories and their metropolises. (p. 62)

The feelings and thoughts about these schools varied from negative to positive experiences. Chinua Achebe (1958) describes the positive impact of Mr Brown, a missionary in West Africa in his influential novel, *Things Fall Apart*. The scene is set in the Nigerian village of Umuofia:

Mr Brown's school prodded quick results. A few months in it were enough to make one a court messenger or even a court clerk. Those who stayed longer became teachers; and from Umuofia labourers went forth into the Lord's vineyard. New churches were established in the surrounding villages and a few schools with them. (p. 128)

On the same lines, when MacKenzie (1993) interviewed Grenadian Minister for Education, Mr George McGuire, he argued that:

Without missionary schools there would have been no schooling. People would not have learned to read and write. Knowledge is power – it builds bridges, it irrigates fields, it saves lives. Missionary education did not oppress people. It liberated them. (p. 46)

On the other hand, some saw mission schooling as an instrument of negative impact and even as damaging value systems. One such example is given to us by

MacKenzie (1993) where he quotes a radio commentary from July 1986, reminding Tanzanian listeners that:

Mission schooling supported imperialism. We should remember not what they gave us but what they took away from us. Educating children is, in principle, fine and worthwhile. But there is a question to be asked: what were they being educated for? They were being educated for subservience, they were being educated to turn their backs on their own past and their own peoples. (p. 46)

The jury is still out as to whether or not missionary work sprang out from the same ideological fount as colonial administration. However, these were both integral parts of a usually shared 'Westernised' legacy, in most cases removed from the cultural experiences of the native population (MacKenzie, 1993). This also reflected in the educational systems that the missionaries brought with them. MacKenzie goes on to say: "The establishment of a school in the Western mould, staffed by teachers trained in Western pedagogies and implicitly committed to the value system of an alien culture, could not hope to leave intact the indigenous character of those destined to receive its education" (p. 54).

The education system may well be the most undesirable legacy of the colonial experience of SIS, with its incapacitating lethargy enclosing and constraining local initiative (Brock, 1988). A leading Caribbean researcher contends pithily that: "the most intractable problem of dependent societies is the colonised condition of the minds of the people" (Beckford, 1972, p. 235).

Thus, it becomes clear that educational policy issues surrounding language use, curricular development and pedagogical styles have been, and are still being impacted by, the long and deep colonial experience of small island states. This

research study focus promises to offer insights to answering one of my research questions regarding the colonial impact in early childhood education in SIS.

The next section will give a brief description of how post colonialism impacted the education systems in the Caribbean and Malta. Within the Caribbean, a special focus will be on Grenada, an independent island state and former British colony which compares well in land size, population, and colonial history with Malta. Barbados is also being included in this section because it is a similarly sized small island state to Malta and Grenada; moreover, it was my experience in this country that first led me to acknowledge and then critically question the impact of the colonial experience on the practice of ECE in SIS.

Impacts of Postcolonialism on education in the Caribbean

Decolonisation is a process involving the handover of power and an attempt by the newly independent citizens to make do with the relics of “cultural and psychological dependency” (Johnson, 2002, p. 27). This transition is perhaps best manifested through a country’s educational system. Johnson (2002) argues that: “Decolonisation in this sphere typically meant a rewriting of curricula and syllabi in an effort to end the curriculum dependency which was a feature of the colonial experience” (p. 27). Hall (2013) agrees with Johnson in that: “Decolonisation is more than constitutional independence. It involves the reversal of the process of European imperial expansion with all its political, economic, social, cultural and racial consequences” (p. 6).

Hall also argues that the decolonisation and independence of the Caribbean was believed to provide a new identity to its citizens and that it would lead to a new “Caribbean man [sic] that would be imbued with a distinctive identity” (Hall, 2013,

p. 6) who would be armed with such skills and aptitudes that s/he could manage and resolve the challenges of the newly independent country. In Hall's opinion, this could be achieved mainly through education.

Jules (2010) contends that education in the Caribbean in the last 25 years has been through a number of changes and reforms in recent decades. Unfortunately, there were only a few instances when these reforms sought to deeply rethink the meaning of education in a way that reflected the re-shaping of the post-independence Caribbean. Jules (2010) argues that:

The unfortunate reality is that the postcolonial project in education has never fundamentally questioned the colonial inheritance. We have accepted and expanded education systems whose organising principles and structural frameworks have assumed that a principal function of education is to sort and classify people. (p. 7)

Elementary education which focused on the basic teaching of reading, writing and arithmetic, was purposely designed for the black lower classes. Secondary education was at first intended for the upper and upper-middle class (Jules, 2008). These were modelled on the British grammar schools and their mandate was to prepare students for entry into UK universities where most of them followed professional law or medical degree programmes. It also catered for a "small minority of the eligible population in most colonies into the 1960s, [which] prepared students for local employment in the middle levels of the civil service and the commercial sector" (Johnson, 2002, p. 28). Greenhalgh-Spencer, Castro, Bulut, Goel, McCarthy, & McCarthy, (2015) agree on the fact that schools in the colonial era were set up to cater for different social strata.

Barbados is a case in point. It is a small island state in the Caribbean: 34 kilometres long and 22 kilometres wide, covering a land area of 430 square

kilometres. Most of the state secondary schools in Barbados were founded by grants which were intended to educate white children on the island (Ministry for Education, Youth Affairs and Culture, 2000). Elementary schools were set up by the Anglican, Moravian and Methodist Churches to “give a Christian education to the slaves in the period preceding emancipation” (Ministry for Education, Youth Affairs and Culture, 2000, p. 1). The first public preschool was opened in 1960 for children aged three to four. Compulsory primary and secondary education up till the age of 16 was introduced in 1983, through an Education Act (UNESCO, 2010). In 1984, the government encouraged schools that had the space and facilities to start admitting children aged between three and five. A new national curriculum at the primary and secondary level was implemented through a phased process beginning in 2000 (Ministry for Education, Human Resource and Development, 2008). Early childhood education (ECE) has continued to expand over the years through an acceleration of training for educators and an increase in construction and implementation of ECE curriculum materials (UNESCO, 2010).

Barbados is a postcolonial country that has deeply invested in an ideology of ‘meritocracy’ – as part of its decolonisation project – which then continued in its school systems (Greenhalgh-Spencer et al., 2015). Barbados brands itself as a tourist haven and a place of postcolonial heritage with a desire to prove to the globalised world that it has moved “beyond the old class-race-nation oppression” (Greenhalgh-Spencer et al., 2015, p. 158; see also Scheyvens & Momsen, 2008).

Greenhalgh-Spencer et al. (2015), interviewed students in a Barbadian elite school, Old College (OC), one of nine schools in a global ethnographic study extending over nine countries (Argentina, Australia, Barbados, Cyprus, Hong Kong, India, Singapore, South Africa and the UK). It analysed their responses to reflect

“the classed lives and strategic class moves” (p. 157) of these students. Greenhalgh-Spencer et al. (2015) contend that:

Traditionally [OC] catering exclusively to the white planter-mercantile elite, the school only became public after Barbados won its independence [1966]. The school prides itself on being meritocratic; on its student body as being chosen based on ability, not on family. There is evidence of a large cross-section of wealth distribution at the school...a flow of social class among these students; students of variable wealth and family social standing, but all of whom have access to the resources that come along with attending the highest regarded school in the region. (p. 158)

The authors go on to say that students attending OC are still regarded as elite and members of the upper class. During interviews, students all agreed that it was a “great place to learn or continue the habit of using ‘proper’ English” (p. 167). One has to note here that English was associated with upper class people whereas the local Bajan dialect was associated with the working classes (a situation that is reproduced in the language-social class relationship and dichotomy in Malta, Grenada, and possibly in various other SIS). When Greenhalgh-Spencer et al. (2015) interviewed OC alumni who are now parents of students attending OC, most of them admitted that they were always spoken to in English at home by their parents as this not only granted them entrance to the college but also helped them to work their way up the social ladder. Two parents, referred to as Ms T and Ms L in the study, said: “My mother would never allow us to speak Bajan in our home” (p. 167) and they went on to say that they did not like it when their daughters were around students who spoke Bajan, as this encouraged them to start speaking Bajan at home which was unacceptable for these parents. Greenhalgh-Spencer et al. (2015) also contend that:

The Bajan dialect was cast as inferior; inferior because the dialect tended to link in with racial status – darker bodies were more likely to us Bajan. With

this as the backdrop, focusing on the use of dialect by many OC alums [sic] becomes particularly illuminating. (p. 167)

Having said all this, the same group of people who placed themselves as users of proper English, as elite, and as people who have had a high standard of education, can still be found promoting themselves online, as “alum of Ole Kolij School” (Greenhalgh-Spencer et al., 2015, p. 168). The word ‘*kolij*’ is the Bajan word for ‘college’ and is used as a marker of the move toward decolonisation. While the Bajan dialect can be connected to lower class status, in some instances it “can also be positioned as a marker of national fervour and as an activity meant to expel the oppressor” (p. 168). Even though Barbados may want to prove to the globalised world and to itself that it has moved away from the colonial era and its epistemological oppressions, the impact of colonisation is still probable in OC.

Greenhalgh-Spencer et al. (2015) contend that:

As contemporary postcolonial actors, the OC students use the British inherited aspects of uniform, crest, heraldry and Standard English both strategically and tactically in intra-group distinctions within the school and in their external relations with the communities outside. (p. 170)

Another small island state that experienced colonialism in the Caribbean is Grenada. It consists of three small inhabited islands with a total area of 318 square kilometres and a population of just under 108,384 in 2018 (World Population Review, 2018). In the mid-seventeenth century, Grenada like many other Caribbean islands, was taken over by the French and then later, in the eighteenth century the British took over the island and maintained control until Grenada became fully independent in 1974 (Hickling-Hudson, 1989).

In Grenada, education is modelled on the British system and is free and compulsory between ages 6 and 14 (UNESCO, 2010). However, although universal primary education has been on the minds of Caribbean government for many years, it was during the World Conference on Education for All in 1990 that this was made official (Miller, 2014). In Grenada, pre-primary school was introduced in 1962 as a private endeavour, assisted by the government (UNESCO, 2010). The Education Act responsible for early childhood care and education programmes was amended in 1976. Pre-school education was included in the national primary education system by the government in the 1980s (UNESCO, 2010). At this time, a more structured system was introduced whereby pre-primary and nursery schools were regularised (Hickling-Hudson, 2006).

Just like Barbados, a major characteristic of this former colony is the socio-economic stratification of its inhabitants. Most of the peasant, wage-labouring and unemployed people were descendants of African slaves brought to Grenada by the French and later the British colonisers. These people were considered to be at the lowest levels of society and most of them were illiterate, suffered malnutrition and poverty (Hickling-Hudson, 2006). At the top of the social hierarchy, one could find a small elite. According to Hickling-Hudson (1989): “This elite included the salaried, educated middle class and an even small minority consisting of those who owned substantial land and business enterprises most of which were tied to powerful, privately owned British and North American firms” (p. 97).

As in other British colonies in the Caribbean, the educational system relegated the majority of the population to low quality elementary schools. These included estate workers and peasants. On the other hand, a minority studied in a school that modelled the British ‘grammar’ school system (Hickling-Hudson, 1989).

It functioned this way for a reason: it prepared people to work and serve their colonisers. As Manley (1974) states: “Postcolonial societies inherit the gross inequalities of the colonial system along with a view of the world that tends to the acceptance of this arrangement and an education system which works to perpetuate it” (p.132).

As with Barbados, and as is indeed the case of many postcolonial countries, the majority of the educational curriculum in Grenada was largely alien, unsuitable and unrelated to the specific realities and development needs of the country. This was because it was based on Western or Eurocentric curricula. Hickling-Hudson (1989) states that the curriculum in former British colonies “tended to be bookish, largely imported from Britain, expository, impractical and scarcely relevant to local conditions” (p. 101). The author goes on to say that the humanities curriculum, for example, was planned according to a Eurocentric standpoint that eventually led to the British examinations that the students had to write. She strongly argues that: “Eurocentric education is stratifying and racist. It suppresses knowledge and distorts learning and persuades Europe and its diaspora of their putative superiority” (Hickling-Hudson, 2006, p. 215). Coard (1985), a Grenadian politician, also stated that:

We inherited an education system that...was totally disconnected to the requirements of earning a livelihood, building an economy, improving the material standards of living of the working people, and generally improving the economic and social welfare of the people. (p. 10)

Although such a Eurocentric curriculum may have been challenged in the decolonisation process, some things remain true to their historical roots, nurtured by traditions left by the imperial power (Hickling-Hudson, 1998) and embraced by contemporary economic and political elites. For example, the examination system

remains an expensive one, which marginalises students who cannot afford its fees

(Hickling-Hudson, 2006). The author states:

...we should ask how far it [the examination system] clings to aspects of past colonialism in that it excludes ways of knowing other than those based on academic literacies, [and] does not engage with the oralities and folk forms of our region. (p. 211)

Grenada's dysfunctional education system drastically changed with the revolution that took place in 1979, led by Maurice Bishop and his colleagues in what became known as the New Jewel Movement (NJM). This revolution lasted four and a half years (1979-1983) and was considered a substantial event in the history of educational change in the process of decolonisation of the Caribbean (Hickling-Hudson, 2006). The country was determined to become "involved in planning and implementing many new projects in agriculture, small business and education" (Hickling-Hudson, 2006, p. 256). The revolutionary government did follow its mandate and restructured formal and non-formal education systems, allowing a definitive break in Western imported pedagogy. A larger budget was allotted to education which helped increase the number of spaces in secondary schools. Subsidies for clothing, food and books made it possible for more children to attend schools. Unregulated centres and unqualified private child-minders were replaced by a structured system of child care centres and pre-primary or nursery schools (Hickling-Hudson, 1989). Further training for teachers, upgrading of most of the unkempt schools, and "preparation for taking school-leaving examinations set by the Caribbean Examination Council rather than British examination syndicates" (Hickling-Hudson, 2014, p. 529) were all part of the educational reform of the NJM revolutionary government.

Important and positive changes were achieved during the Grenadian revolution period until October 1983 when there was a violent coup d'état, Bishop was executed, and the United States (fearing a second Cuba on its doorstep), led a multi-national military intervention into the country. A military government was formed shortly after this invasion (Bigelow, 2013). It started to dismantle the educational reforms that had taken place during the revolution, and foreign teachers were arrested and expelled by U.S. officials (Zunes, 2013). However, as Hickling-Hudson (2014, p. 530) states: "Some of the educational changes endured and have provided the basis for people to continue striving for a better society".

Schools that were set up in the colonial era usually imparted instruction in the language of the coloniser. This language was English in both Barbados and Grenada. The primary examining bodies in these countries, along with Malta, were the Oxford and Cambridge Examination Boards (Johnson, 2002). As McCarthy (2005) puts it: "We [the natives] were the subject-objects of British cultural suzerainty" (p. 417). Schools' text books had to relate to what the examinations would be about. The majority of them were, of course, in English, prepared by European authors and written for English boys and girls and not by or for non-English publics. Local awareness started to rise amongst educators and policy makers that some things had to change – not just the British curricula but also the examining body itself. In 1972, the Caribbean Examinations Council (CXC) was established (Johnson, 2002). Hall (2013) states that the Council "came into existence as part of the process of decolonisation" (p. 6) in the Anglophone Caribbean. To ensure that the CXC did become an instrument of decolonisation, its mandate was to provide the Caribbean region with "syllabi of the highest quality; valid and reliable examinations and certificates of international repute for students of all ages, abilities

and interests” (Hall 2013, pp. 6-7). Johnson (2002) quotes W.G. Demas, secretary-general of the Commonwealth Caribbean Regional Secretariat, as saying:

The ill effects on West Indian education in General and Secondary school examinations run by alien examining bodies and based on syllabi developed overseas and prescribed for use in the region have for long been glaringly obvious. Some of the features of a system imposed on the region from outside from colonial times cannot be tolerated in this age of West Indian cultural and intellectual independence. (p. 50)

Over the past forty years, a major factor of decolonisation was the inclusion and mainstreaming of Caribbean topics and subjects in the curriculum. However, Jules (2010) argues that much more needs to be done when reforming the educational system. The quality of education needs to be taken into consideration as well. He believes that the quality of teaching in secondary schools will not achieve the expected standards if the quality of primary schooling is not also upgraded. In a rare reference to ECE, Jules goes on to say that:

Primary education is stymied in the absence of attention to early childhood development... inattention to early childhood development is impacting performance in primary; the deficits in primary education, translate into weak performance at secondary and the absence of core competencies required for excelling at tertiary education. (Jules, 2010, p. 8-9)

Jules (2010) also makes an important remark about how globalisation and the “essence of internationalisation” (p. 9) hinders small island states from having an educational system that is exclusive of the dominant global regime. He believes that small states are faced with the “perils of globalisation” as well as the “challenges of overcoming educational deficits” that are part of the legacy of colonialism (Jules, 2008, p. 203). His advice to the Caribbean population is to “think local and act global” (p. 11). But, this is much easier said than done.

In summary, the history of educational policy and practice in the post-independent Caribbean SIS can be described as a continuous struggle for local relevance, while maintaining global reach and scope. For small countries, opening up to the wider world is especially inevitable, and being competent in at least one regional or international language is critical. With information technology advancing at a rapid pace, and thus creating a “borderless world” (Jules, 2008, p. 95) it is nearly impossible to keep cultures from merging and interacting with each other. Small island states, with their open economies and vulnerabilities, may be the most open of all jurisdictions. Yet, this global ‘turn’ should not be allowed to occur at the cost of local dialects, local languages, local development paths, and locally relevant knowledge.

Moreover, this Caribbean challenge of ‘acting global and thinking local’ resonates closer to home. Imagine my surprise, as well as distress, at having examined this literature and finding myself repeatedly acknowledging that what was happening in the island Caribbean was also unfolding in a small Mediterranean island state, half a world away. These kinds of realisations continued to strengthen my commitment towards using a small island state focus to my analysis and equipping this with a critical postcolonial lens. The relevance and similarity between the Anglophone Caribbean and Malta will become clearer in the next section.

Impacts of postcolonialism on education in Malta

Primary education in Malta only became obligatory in 1946 for children between the ages of 6 and 14. That is a full century after most European countries had made elementary education available to all. Secondary education in Malta accessible to all, came even later, in 1970. The pre-primary compulsory sector (including 3 and 4-year-olds) started providing for 4-year-olds in 1977 and for 3-

year-olds in 1988 (Sollars, 2002). As for tertiary education, there were still just 400 university students in 1984 (Sultana, 1997). The number of students has increased significantly since then – from 6200 in 1995 to 11,500 in 2018 (University of Malta, 2018). One might ask: Why so late? Sultana (1997) believes that a number of factors account for this delay:

...chief among these [factors] being the colonial status of the islands under the British, the reactionary influence of the anti-reform party of the 1880s, whose adherents saw education as a threat to their cultural and class interests, and the fear of an equally reactionary church that derived much of its power by feeding on popular ignorance and which conflated education provisions under British rule with Protestant proselytism. (p. 336)

Having said all this, and in spite of the tardiness of educational development, according to Sultana (1997), Malta compares well with other small island states like Cyprus, Fiji, Grenada and Barbados, whose characteristics are similar to Malta in that they have a low manufacturing capacity, limited natural resources and a similar scale of population. All four island states were British colonies and they secured their independence around the same time: between 1960 and 1974 (Sultana, 1997). The flipside of this however, is that as in most developing countries, where development in educational systems occurred later than in industrially developed nations, Malta's fast-tracked growth in educational services may have been achieved at the expense of quality provision (Sultana, 1997). Hallak (1990) also notes:

...Even though it is difficult to compare different societies at different times, it can be said that enrolment and literacy grew at much faster rates in the developing countries in the three decades between 1950 and 1980 than in industrialised economies at similar stages of development. However, this rapid expansion brought problems of increasing costs and low quality that assumed crisis proportions in many countries in the 1980s. (p. 23)

Needless to say, the quality of education in Malta has greatly improved across the board with a revamping of the National Curriculum Framework and Learning Outcomes for levels 1 to 10 recently underway (Learning Outcomes Framework, 2015). Another positive step in education as described by Sultana (1997, p. 343) is:

The trend to make curricula more responsive to the local situation with a number of textbooks by Maltese authors reflecting Maltese and Mediterranean concerns being introduced in schools, and with the launching of 'local' end-of-cycle examinations in the form of the MATSEC (Matriculation and Secondary Education Certificate) initiative that permits teacher input in assessment and Maltese rather than British control over the curriculum, which was the case when local students sat for U.K. General Certificate examinations.

This brings us also to the issue of how foreign curricula impacted the culture of ex-colonised small island states. Vygotsky (1978) and Lave (1991) have argued the significance of cultural context in learning and have suggested that it should be the fundamental theme in education reform. However, the colonisers brought with them their own curricula and imposed these on their subjects irrespective of whether they related to local cultures and traditions. Mazrui (1995) talks about a history of dependency because of colonialism and how this is also tied in to colonial systems of education. Mazrui studied colonial education in Africa and concluded that there were a number of factors that brought about this dependency. These include: the language of instruction used; the cultural background of the instructors; the curricular structure; what books could be found in the library and the pedagogic requirements (Mazrui, 1995). The University of Malta is similar to what Mazrui found in Africa in that it 'perceives itself as an extension of major European universities' (Cutajar, 2008, p. 32). According to Sultana (2008) because of our postcolonial mentalities: "We fail to value the indigenous knowledge and wisdom

we have in our own region, preferring instead to work exclusively with universities and academics in metropole countries.” (p. 19)

Cutajar (2008) and Camilleri Grima (2108) remind us that English is the language of instruction at the University of Malta, and test papers and assignments have to be written and answered in English (with a few exceptions). The majority of texts found in the University of Malta library come from “First World, English speaking countries” (Cutajar, 2008, p. 32; see also Sultana, 2008). Practically all the scholarship produced by the academic staff of the University of Malta is published in the English language (University of Malta, 2015). Whereas the universities of a number of small states and territories focus on the celebration and study of local culture and teach in the local language – such as Faroe Islands, Greenland, Andorra and Iceland, none of whom were former British colonies – it seems that the University of Malta feels a stronger obligation to its cosmopolitan calling than to its local one (Bonnici, 2018).

The Maltese Islands were a British colony for over 160 years. Recently, inspiration for educational reform has also been sought from models and practices derived from Reggio Emilia (Italy), Finland, Ireland and New Zealand. However, it would be fair to state that the Maltese population still looks mainly to “Western countries, especially English-speaking ones, to help us in our political and cultural self-definition” (Cutajar, 2008, p. 31). Cutajar also argues that, even after the departure of the British in 1964:

Maltese politicians and bureaucrats did not try to break their links with the past, but adopted and appropriated the political, social, cultural and economic structures and discourses reinstated in the Maltese Islands by the British. (Cutajar, 2008, p. 31; see also Sultana & Baldacchino, 1994)

To sum up, the situation in Malta has an uncanny resemblance to that in the Anglophone Caribbean. The language of instruction, educational curricula and textbook selection have been strongly impacted by colonial practices and their lingering effects post-independence. As a result, local culture and the Maltese language have been devalued and suffer low esteem (Camilleri Grima, 2018).

This literature ties well with my research question as to whether the postcolonial factors that have impacted primary to tertiary education are also having an effect on early childhood education practice in small island states. I earnestly hope that my study can contribute to narrowing this gap in the literature.

Meanwhile, this postcolonial critique of education in small island states is driven by research and observation that almost exclusively focus on education from primary level onwards. Indeed, as I have found out, very little research seems to have been conducted about the impact of postcolonialism on early childhood education. When research about primary, secondary and tertiary education started appearing, the early childhood education sector was either non-existent or still in its incubation stage in most countries, hence its late arrival as a focus of critical inquiry. The next section of the literature review will offer a brief outline of the history, policies and practices of early childhood education in general and with specific reference to Malta and Grenada, the two small island states which I have chosen as my case study sites.

Early Childhood Education

The first section of this literature review discussed the benefits and challenges associated with small island states and how these have impacted on their education system during the years. The second part of the literature review drew on

postcolonial theory and examined the impacts of colonialism on the education systems in and of small island states. This review was undertaken with special reference to Malta and to Barbados and Grenada in the Caribbean, since these were the island regions originally targeted as possible venues for the execution of my fieldwork with regards to this study.

My literature search has identified a gap in knowledge around the impact of postcolonialism on early childhood education. There are numerous books and peer reviewed journal articles about primary, secondary and tertiary education in small island states where the challenges and benefits of being ‘small’ and ‘islanded’ sovereign jurisdictions are discussed. However, I could only find a few articles about how this might specifically impact early childhood education in such small island states. Do the factors that influence primary to tertiary education in small island states identified in the literature (an obligation towards role multiplicity; close-knit communities; scarcity or lack of human and material resources; and the clash of global and local culture) apply also to early childhood education? Considering that a top-down approach is implemented in education in both Malta and Grenada (where the upper grades put pressure on lower grades to emphasise ‘academic readiness’), this approach would also influence the pedagogy and practice of early childhood education (Jules, 2010; Woodhead & Moss, 2007).

This section offers a very brief overview of the history of early childhood education (ECE) in the general context. This sets the stage of what follows, that is a brief history of ECE in Malta and Grenada which have been specifically chosen also because of their similarity with regards to population; timeframe of their independence and area size. These two countries have also had a long history of British colonialism which was elaborated upon in the previous section. The last part

of this section relates back to the challenges faced by small island states in primary to higher education and how these are similar or different to those confronted in early childhood education.

Definitions of Early Childhood Education and Care

The period of time in the life of an individual incorporating birth through the age of seven is referred to as *early childhood* (OECD, 2001; WHO, 2009). Early childhood is considered as the time where most learning takes place, and the way this learning is acquired will impact short-term and long-term achievements and development (Ministry for Education and Employment (MEDE), 2013). Nutbrown's (2006) research in children's thinking pedagogy, together with Cypel's (2013) neuro-science and brain development research in the early years contribute to a greater appreciation of early childhood education and care (OECD, 2007).

Image of the Child

Children were once considered 'little adults': childhood was a necessary stage that an individual was required to work through before reaching adulthood (Feeney, Moravcik, Nolte, & Christensen, 2010). According to Feeney et al. (2010): "physical punishment, repetitive, rote learning, and harsh treatment of children were very common" (p. 6), and, in most countries education was usually only afforded by wealthy families for their children. I would also argue that presently, physical punishment is still legal in certain Caribbean island states including Grenada (Global Initiative, 2016a; Steele, 1974). Nowadays, there is a common belief and practice that the early years of a child are an important stage where the brain functions at its best (Cypel, 2013; Hedges, 2015; Mustard, 2010).

Research also shows that children are not empty vessels to be filled by educators but have a mind of their own filled with ideas, schemas and knowledge gathered through their everyday experiences (Nutbrown 2006; Mukherji & O’Dea 2000; Piaget, 1990). Rinaldi (2006) argues that:

There are many images of the child, and many images of childhood. We need only think of psychoanalysis or the various branches of psychology and sociology. Though these theories are quite different, they tend to have one recurring aspect in common: the deterministic identification of the child as a weak subject, a person with needs rather than rights. (p. 123)

However, Rinaldi (2006) did not agree with this image of the children and stressed that the Reggio Emilia approach sees the child as: “strong, powerful, and rich in potential and resources, right from the moment of birth” (p. 123). The Reggio Emilia approach philosophy also describes the *image of the child* as one who is competent, knowledgeable, interested in and capable of exploring complex and abstract ideas (Edwards, Gandini & Forman, 1998).

Considering the above research and others, I dare to question if all those involved in ECE hold this image of the child. My experience of over 23 years as an early childhood educator and now lecturing in the early years, has shown me that what ECEs practice is not necessarily what they preach. Grieshaber and McArdle (2010) contend that early childhood educators may think that they are following a child-centred approach, for example, but due to their position of power they may unconsciously inhibit or restrict children’s interest and choices. My study seeks to examine whether the pedagogy claimed to be practised by early childhood educators in small island states, with particular reference to Malta and Grenada, is guided by the above image of the child: a competent being who wants to explore and discover the world around them. The above image of the child also poses the question about

which pedagogy is best to achieve this: didactic instructional learning or child-centred learning, or maybe a balance of these two learning methods? These will be discussed in the next two sections.

Didactic instructional Pedagogy

Learning can be defined as “the process of gaining knowledge” (Pritchard, 2009, p. 2). The United Nations also contends that play and learning are two rights which all children around the world should benefit from (UNICEF, 1991. See also Newell, 1991). Theorists like Piaget, Vygotsky and Moyles look at pedagogy in the early years as learning through play and experience (Broadhead & Burt, 2012; Brock, Dodds, Jarvis, & Olusoga, 2009). However, there are other theorists such as Montessori and Skinner who believe that learning should be teacher-directed and that children learn through instruction (Bruce & Meggit, 2007; Driscoll & Nagel, 2010).

A didactic instructional pedagogy is where the educator pursues prescribed (set) planning which usually follows the same pattern from year to year. Unlike child-centred pedagogy, didactic instructional approaches do not emerge from a child’s interests and children are not given an opportunity of hands-on learning, but rather the educator determines what the children need to learn. Walsh (1989) argues that a prescribed curriculum in the early years makes it look more like formal schooling. Early childhood education has become more formal and academic oriented on an international level (Pyle & Luce-Kapler, 2014). Research shows that recently, early childhood educators are making use of didactic teaching methods more than child-centred pedagogy, even though such methods are actually more suitable for older students (Lillard, 2013; Zigler & Bishop-Josef, 2004). Grossman (2007) contends that “young children spend their time on worksheet paper and

pencil tasks” in kindergarten which is not necessary beneficial to a child still at a developmental stage of exploration and discovery through every day experiences. Didactic instructional pedagogy confines children, aged between three and five, to be seated most of the day and listen passively to the educator without engaging in activities (Lillard, 2013). As early as 1987, Elkind claimed that “short-term academic gains would be offset by long-term stifling of children's motivation and self-initiated learning” (Elkind, 1986, p. 3). A study by Hart, Burts, Durland, Charlesworth, DeWolf and Fleege (1998), reports that children whose kindergarten experience was based on didactic formal and instructional pedagogy had lower work-study habits, were less eager to follow instructions and had shorter attention spans. Similarly, Miller and Almon (2009) believe that learning difficulties may be initiated by the high levels of stress and tension associated with academic success. I would also argue that this level of tension and stress may also lead to early school leavers who by the end of compulsory schooling would have had enough of the stifling educational system. A case in point is Malta where the rate of early school leavers is on the rise (Eurostat, 2015; MEDE, 2014); one in five students in Malta leaves school to seek a job at the end of compulsory schooling: the highest in the EU (Borg, Camilleri, Caruana, Naudi, Vella & Raykov, 2015; Schraad-Tischler, Schiller, Heller & Siemer, 2017). This is almost the same as in the UK, at 18% (Paton, 2012). Robinson (2010) argues that the cause might be because we are still holding on to an educational model that started off in England during the industrial revolution. This kind of education is more about conformity rather than learning and functions more like a factory (Robinson, 2010). This relates well to one of my research questions which seeks to discover whether British colonialism in Malta and Grenada left a lingering impact on the education systems of these countries. It seems

that England has moved on from the above didactic mode of teaching in the early years to a more child-centred approach where the basis of learning is focused on the needs and interests of individual children (EYFS, 2017). My research will try to uncover why early childhood education in ex-British colonies finds it so hard to move on to fully implement a child-centred approach in ECE. But first, the benefits of a child-centred approach will be discussed.

Child-centred pedagogy

Child-centred pedagogy is tailored around children's needs (Brock et al., 2012) as well as their interests and abilities (Pyle & Danniels, 2017). Here, the child is central in education: the child *is* the curriculum. Learning is contextualised and takes place while playing and through real life experiences (Wood, 2008). Wood and Attfield (2005) claim that when implementing a pedagogy of play: "The curriculum is conceptualised as integrated experiences rather than discrete subjects, with a wide range of activities leading potentially towards multiple outcomes, which may not always be predetermined" (p. 33).

Van Oers and Duijkers (2013) contend that: "Play opens a way to a child-centred approach to children's learning" (p. 514). Pyle and Danniels (2017) point out that play not only helps children grow holistically, but that child-centred activities help children score higher in upper grades, and benefit children's personal adjustment (Dunn & Kontos, 1997).

According to Chung and Walsh (2000), child-centeredness has over 40 meanings which have evolved through time. However, despite this evolution, child-centeredness can be traced back to the origins of the progressive movement and child development theory (Chung & Walsh, 2000; Tzuo, 2007; Weber, 1984). The

pioneering theories in child development – namely, Jean Piaget’s (1971) cognitive constructivist theory and Lev Vygotsky’s (1978) social constructivist theory – have deeply influenced early childhood educators’ beliefs and practices and identified the importance of setting up a stimulating environment and interacting with children (Meade, 2000). Although both theorists had a constructivist view towards children’s learning and development, they also had some different ideas as to how these could be achieved. Piaget (1971) believed that children constructed knowledge through their contact with the environment and the assimilation of their previous experiences (Kail, Cavanaugh & Ateah, 2006). On the other hand, Vygotsky believed that children and their social environment co-constructed the learning (Vygotsky, 1978). In other words, both society and the individual had important roles to play while interacting with each other.

Therefore, the role of the educator in a child-centred pedagogy is vital. An educator needs to be a flexible planner (Greve, 2013) going beyond what the curriculum dictates. The early childhood educator (ECE) needs to be a skilled observer so as to establish ways to offer learning opportunities that cater to the needs of the child (MEDE, 2012; Tarman & Tarman, 2011;). According to Wood and Attfield (2005), educators also need to be good communicators; show enthusiasm in what they do as this will enable children to engage more fully in the learning; and be reflective of their planning in order to fully cater to the needs and interests of the children in their care. Moyer (2001) contends that when children’s interests are included in the planning phase, higher levels of motivation and engagement can be observed.

There are of course individuals who critique the child-centred approach. Langford (2010) draws upon feminist, postmodernist and post-structural theories to critique the child-centred approach. She argues that a child-centred approach constructs an individualised child and denies the influences of gender, ethnicity and social class on who the child eventually becomes. She also contends that early childhood professionals should also be “at the centre of a pedagogy that is a democratic space for all” (p. 113). I agree with this plea and believe that this can also be achieved in a child-centred approach where the children are viewed as “active learners” (Ryan & Grieshaber, 2005, p. 99) and the educators use their knowledge about children’s development to offer appropriate learning opportunities for the children based on their interests.

Norquay (1999) claims that the discourse involved in child-centred pedagogy limits and moulds how educators discuss social difference in their practices. She contends that it “is very much a White-centred discourse” and that “it shares many attributes and effects of White privilege” (p. 194). She argues that Whiteness is considered the ‘norm’ in such instances and excludes White people from any form of social difference. Norquay (1999) believes that the refusal to acknowledge social difference is maintained through a child-centred approach by educators who see themselves as “neutral overseers and facilitators of children’s learning” (p. 194).

Booker (2005) also critiques a child-centred approach but from a different perspective. She conducted research in “an informal and explicitly child-centred classroom in a small and welcoming multicultural school in a poor neighbourhood” (p. 117) in the United Kingdom. She talks about the Bangladeshi children who attended this particular classroom and could not fit into this more progressive way of

learning, arguably because of their cultural background. Similar to Langford (2010), Booker (2005) argues that a child-centred approach results in individualism. I tend to disagree with this statement however, and rather believe and have experienced the opposite. In fact, through practising this approach, I can suggest that in a child-centred environment children are encouraged to work together as a team on a topic that has cropped up through their interests. Reflective teachers practising the project approach in a child-centred classroom plan learning opportunities to get the children to work together on different topics, reflecting the varied cultures and environments of the children (Gandini, 2011; Sargent, 2013). Ongoing research supports an early childhood practice that encourages independence in children while giving them the proper tools to become capable learners as they continue to progress through their education (Sargent, 2013).

When I first started as a kindergarten educator in Malta 1998, I was taught to follow the constructivist theories of child development. However, when it came to practise it, I remember finding it difficult to abide by these theories as the school's policy was based more upon the teacher-directed way of teaching. It was hard to go against the flow and with time, I admit that I was implementing a more didactic instructional approach to learning. When my family and I emigrated to Canada in 2003, I experienced a different way of teaching in the early years. Here, I was exposed to a child-centred approach to learning and I could, with time, see that it was more effective. I learnt to appreciate that learning through play and child-centred planning engaged the children more in their learning and it also resulted in less behavioural problems since the children were doing what they were most interested in. Through my experience and experimentation of both the above pedagogies, I now believe that one needs to integrate both pedagogies and find a

balance between child-centred and didactic instructional pedagogies. I agree with Tzuo (2007) who argues that: “Vygotsky’s theory seeks to find a balance between teacher-directed and child-initiated activities. Teachers assist children and give them challenges in order that children may attain the top level within their zone of proximal development” (p. 35).

In conclusion, the main difference between didactic instructional and child-centred pedagogies lies on the focus of how much ‘freedom’ is given to the children with “respect to their learning initiatives, and the nature of the teacher’s control over them” (Tzuo, 2007, p. 33). This study does not seek to find out which of these pedagogy is the best suited for young children. Rather, it seeks to uncover what elements are influencing the pedagogies and practices of early childhood educators in ECE and to see if educators follow and implement the pedagogies that they claim to believe in. Moyles and Worthington (2011), in a study conducted in eight English reception classes found that there was a disconnect between the importance the educators claimed that they gave to play, and what was actually going on in their classrooms:

It would seem that whilst the rhetoric of EYFS (as evidenced in the interviews) is strongly in favour of play and meaningful activities for children, few teachers appeared able to sustain this in their pedagogy and practice. (p.2)

The next section will give a brief global historical overview of ECE and then goes on to discuss ECE in Malta and Grenada as pertaining more specifically to this study.

A Global Historical Background of ECE

Early childhood education is founded on the philosophies of John Amos Comenius, John Locke and Jean Jacques Rousseau. The practices and methodologies that followed from these were inspired by the work of people like Pestalozzi, Froebel, Montessori and Steiner. Freud, Piaget and Erikson offered and established theoretical frameworks for such practices (Elkind, 2015; Nutbrown & Clough, 2014). Although one may notice differences in the approaches recommended by these individuals, they all share a common principle: that early childhood education and practice “must be adapted to the maturing needs, abilities and interests of the child” (Elkind, 2015, p. 1).

Kammerman’s (2006) research about historical developments in several countries, suggests that, in much of Europe and North America, “and even in several developing countries such as China and India” (p. 3), the beginnings of kindergartens and nurseries dates back to the 19th century, often basing their philosophy on the same models: Froebel, Pestalozzi, Montessori, and “the activities of missionaries” (Kammerman 2006, p. 3). Infant schools in Britain date back to 1825. The main aim of these infant schools was to gather up children of poor families who were left out in the streets to fend for themselves (May, Kaur, & Prochner, 2016; Nutbrown & Clough, 2014; Prochner, 2009). It was believed at the time that infant schools – and later on kindergartens – were sure to prevent “lives of crime” (Prochner, 2009, p. 9). The British Education Act in 1870, set compulsory schooling at age five where the first two years of elementary schooling were intended for babies and infant classes. The babies classes’ main purpose was to take care of children while mothers worked. However, classes for older infants started being offered more formal learning (May, et al. 2016; Prochner, 2009). During this period

of time, teachers were required to start preparing these young children for the infant class, apart from taking care of them (Prochner, 2009). Prochner in his book *A history of early childhood education in Canada, Australia and New Zealand* talks about this particular British model of teaching that was transferred to these ex-British colonies. This relates well to what I am seeking to research in my study as to what impact, if any, did colonialism have on ECE in small island states. It is clear in Prochner's analysis that colonial rule did leave an impact on early childhood education and on children from as young as two-years-old. I would argue further that this might also be the case in Malta, and elsewhere, where pressure from upper grades is seeping down to kindergarten settings (Jules, 2010; Miller & Almon, 2009; Woodhead & Moss, 2007) where young children are being prepared for formal schooling which in Malta, and same as in England, starts at the young age of five with some of the children being as young as four years nine months when they start (Dee & Sievertsen, 2018). Even the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS, 2017) which promotes a play-based curriculum, ends up promoting formal schooling:

However, whilst the EYFS alludes to a play-based curriculum, it is located within an increasingly utilitarian ideology, where early childhood is conceptualised as a site of preparation for formal education. (Chesworth, 2016, p. 295; see also Moss, 2013)

Kammerman (2006) states that, from the very start, there was a distinction between kindergartens for educational purposes and day nurseries to provide care for children. Day nurseries and infant schools were considered to provide an inferior form of education and care as it was targeted towards children coming from poor working families. Middle and upper-class children were usually cared for at home in England having 'nannies' to take care and educate them (Kammerman 2006). The author goes on to stress that this resulted in a "pattern of fragmentation between

early education as an enrichment programme and day care as a “protective” service”

(p. 11). According to Kamerman (2006), a significant advancement for ECEC took place during the 1960s:

...the end of colonialism, the establishment of independent states in Africa, the dramatic increase in female labour force participation rates, the extensive developments in child and family policies in Europe and the U.S., the debate between care versus developments as the critical issue in the ECEC field. (p. 3)

Payler and Davis (2017), in their work: *Professionalism: Early years as a career* draw on the work of Van Laere, Peeters, & Vandebroek (2012) to explain the issue of how education and care are perceived. Education seems to focus on the learning, while “care is subordinate or even ‘inferior’ to learning” (Van Laere et al., 2012, p. 535).

The first world survey of ministers for education carried out by UNESCO (1961) states that as early as 1939 the need for childcare facilities was acknowledged due to the growing number of mothers joining the workforce. It also states that it valued preschool and that it should be made available to all children. This was more pronounced during and after World War II when more women started joining the labour force, replacing absent males. These women asked that their children be provided with affordable, decent quality childcare while they worked (Kamerman, 2006; UNESCO, 2016; Barnett & Nores, 2012). It suffices to say that in Malta, even after all these years, childcare centres are still in high demand because of more mothers joining the workforce and that the government has established the year 2020 as the target date by which high-quality childcare education would be available and affordable to all children in Malta (European Commission, 2014).

As the ECE sector developed and gained favour amongst parents/guardians of young children, pressure started to be felt to prepare children for formal education, as discussed earlier. This started creating tension in educators and parents to push their children, even if not yet physically or cognitively developed, to work harder to achieve ‘school-readiness’ (Dee & Sievertsen, 2018; Palmer, 2016;). Palmer (2016) argues that since governments usually have only four to five years in office and during which time they can leave their mark before the next election, these usually end up overseeing short-term reforms in education. According to Palmer (2016), this has meant: “tests and targets, resulting in top-down pressure for an ever-earlier start on formal instruction” (p. 25; see also Jules, 2010; Woodhead & Moss, 2007).

School-readiness

The issue of whether or not children in preschool are being prepared for formal schooling has become an issue for an increasing number of early childhood stakeholders (UNICEF, 2012). Papatheodorou and Potts (2012) agree that the issue of school readiness has been debated for a long time and is open to more than one interpretation, and state that the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) too, focuses on school readiness even though “it promotes a play-based approach whilst at the same time requiring practitioners to monitor and assess children’s progress towards prescribed early learning goals” (Chesworth, 2015, p.143). Moss (2012), points out that in England school readiness was the main focus of a review of the EYFS commissioned by the Department for Education in 2010. It was announced by the Department for Education, that they wanted ‘to shift the focus to getting children ready for education’ (Department for Education, 2010, p. 1). From this review it results that the EYFS “defines what providers must do...to ensure [children] are

ready for school” (Department of Education, 2012, p. 4). Dahlberg, Moss and Pence (2007) contend that school-readiness is conventional, and takes the learning, knowledge and the socio-environment of the child for granted:

Starting life with and from nothing – as an empty vessel or tabula rasa...to be filled with knowledge, skills and dominant cultural values which are already socially determined and ready to administer – a process of reproduction or transmission. (p. 44)

Moreover, empirical studies are showing that children who were entering school at the age of five were lacking academic and/or social skills that were deemed necessary to succeed (Brown, 2018). Although logically one would think that school readiness was appropriate at this young age, Brown (2018) states that it failed because:

[It has] to take into account the complexity of the construct itself as well as the multiple factors that affect children’s growth and learning across all of their developmental domains during childhood and later life. (p. 287)

If children are pressured into areas of development that they have not yet achieved for the sake of school-readiness then they are more likely to feel incompetent and at times refuse to engage in this learning, fearing failure (Newcombe, 2012). Moss (2016) also contends that school-readiness is to: “[ready] children – to learn, to enter school, to achieve predetermined outcomes, to progress sequentially” (p. 360). He goes on to argue that this in turn:

...applies a reductionist, fragmented and narrow approach [to learning], which is more about taming, controlling and predicting than creating learning based on movement, experimentation and meaning making. (Moss, 2016, p. 360)

There are various definitions of what school readiness means, as is discussed further in Chapter Four. For the purpose of this study, I draw on Meisels (1999) who

identifies four views of the construct of school readiness as I feel that the empiricist view is best suited to describe the situation in Malta and Grenada to date:

1. Idealist/Nativist view

Meisels describes this as ‘a within-the-child phenomenon’ (p.50). In this view the family, teacher and school are absent and do not have an impact on the child’s school readiness.

2. Empiricist view

‘Something that lies outside the child’ (Meisels, 1992, p. 52). Here, the family, teacher and school programmes play a very important part in preparing children for formal schooling. This view provides children with the necessary knowledge, skills and experiences needed for school. My study suggest that Malta and Grenada tend to adopt this view of school readiness where young children are being prepared for school using methods that might not always be developmentally appropriate (Dee & Sievertsen, 2018; Elkind, 2015).

3. Social constructivist view

This view of school readiness ‘looks to the setting for its definition of readiness’ (Meisels, 1999, p. 49). Here, the child, is viewed as being dependent on the social context s/he lives in and interacts with. So, a child can be seen as ready for school in one family or community, but not in another. Miller, Cameron, Dalli, & Barbour (2017) extend this notion to a global context and state that “being ready for school in one nation may look very different in another nation” (p. 288).

4. Interactionist

This view frames school readiness as a co-construction of “the child’s contribution to schooling and the school’s contribution to the child” (Meisels, 1999, p. 49).

The interactionist view takes into account the knowledge, skills and experiences that children bring with them and combines these with what learning opportunities the educators offer the children. This does not necessarily put pressure on the child to perform, but rather builds on their strengths and encourages them to progress smoothly to the next step of development.

Various ECE policies have been adopting this interactionist mind-frame by building these policies around the interests of the child and through a child-centred approach (EYFS, 2017; MEDE, 2012). However, historically, the nativist view has been the formal marker of school readiness across the globe where readiness is determined by the child’s age, in most cases 5 years of age (Miller et al. 2017).

The World Bank (2016) points out that only 21 out of 194 countries in the world start formal schooling at age five (see also Crossley, Bray & Packer, 2009; 2011). 19 out of these 21 countries are ex-British colonies (Prochner, 2009): the exceptions are Myanmar and Nepal. Malta, Grenada and the United Kingdom are included in this list (Table 2.1). This was an interesting find for me as it relates to one of my research questions as to whether or not there was (still is) an impact of colonialism on early childhood education in small island states, including the nativist view of school readiness starting age. It could be that, in Malta, Grenada and the countries listed hereunder, school starts early because that was how it was introduced to them by the British, and perhaps this policy was never seriously

questioned. Wood (2004a) contends that in England the average school-starting age “has shifted from ‘rising five’ to ‘just turned four’” (p. 363).

Country	
Antigua and Barbuda	Pakistan
Australia	Samoa
The Bahamas	Sri Lanka
Belize	St Kitts and Nevis
Dominica	Saint Lucia
Grenada	St Vincent and the Grenadines
Ireland	Tonga
Malta	Trinidad and Tobago
Mauritius	United Kingdom
New Zealand	

Table 2.1: Formal school age starting at five years in the UK and former British Colonies.

Source: World Bank (2016).

However, evidence suggests that it would be more beneficial for children to start formal schooling a year later (Dee & Sievertsen, 2018). There are two main advantages to children starting school one year later (when they turn six years old). One advantage is ‘relative maturity’, where children have quite a “variety of developmental advantages relative to their classroom peers” (Dee & Sievertsen, 2018, p. 2). Another advantage is that “formal schooling is more developmentally appropriate for older children” (p. 2). Research also shows that children who start formal schooling at an age later than five years, benefit from a longer period of play-based opportunities that helps improve all areas of development including linguistic, cognitive, physical, social and emotional (Vygotsky, 1978; Whitebread, 2011).

Conclusion

Differing views of education will be with us for many years to come because, in part, these depend on educators' training and background, their world view and their personality predispositions (Elkind, 2015). Although there may be various, and sometimes even conflicting views, about education, Elkind (2015) stresses that we should "...view education as a process of individualisation, socialisation, or some combination of the two and still employ age-appropriate materials and practices to attain these [educational] goals" (p. 218). The European Expert Network on Economics of Education [EENEE] (2018) also points out several benefits of early childhood education and care (ECEC). In agreement with Elkind (2015), EENEE states that apart from the child's individual benefits such as: improved health; better chances of completing high school; improved education and higher earnings, there are other benefits that extend to the family and society. ECEC also "enables the labour market participation of mothers and single parents" (p. 11), thus contributing to the country's economy.

This section briefly touched upon historical facts related to the emergence of early childhood education and research about its principles and practices. The development, change and continued research in this sector has social and welfare issues at heart. These were some of the factors that pushed the development of early childhood education, along with the increasing number of women joining the work force, the recognition of children's needs and research-based knowledge to "develop ways of providing opportunities for young children to learn" (Nutbrown & Clough, 2014, p. 10). All this and more has helped to shape the present-day policies and practices of early childhood education in many countries across the globe and remains a work in progress.

Early Childhood Education Provisions in Malta

Schools which catered for the under four-year olds date back to the 1960s in Malta. These were usually run by Catholic religious' orders (Gerada, 2002). Then, similar to the rest of Europe and North America, the need to set up childcare centres on a national scale came about in the 1990s when there was a greater demand for both parents to work outside the home (Gerada, 2002; MEDE, 2013). According to Gerada (2002), the key motivator behind the introduction of the first public day care centre in 1998 was:

- To encourage more mothers to enter or re-enter the workforce, and
- To provide mothers with children aged one to three with childcare service.

The process was a slow one and there were only a handful of childcare centres by 2001. However, these steadily increased to 115 fully registered childcare centres to date (2018), (Government of Malta, 2018). Since there is no legal obligation for owners to register a childcare centre in Malta, there still could be services being offered to parents which are not being monitored by the Ministry for Education and Employment (MEDE, 2013). It was only in 2016 that the childcare sector started forming part of the Ministry for Education and Employment. The Ministry for Social Services used to cater for this sector before that. The change is suggestive of a shift in focus from mainly supervision and care to education and development (Baldacchino & Baldacchino, 2017).

When it comes to children between the ages of three and five and which is usually referred to as pre-school or Kindergarten, these are considered to be part of the education system; however, it is not compulsory (Sollars, 2002). Sporadic early childhood education was provided by the Catholic church in Malta since the late 19th century, but it was not available to all (Borg & Mayo, 2015). Free kindergarten

education was introduced in 1975 on a voluntary basis. This resulted in kindergartens opening up in schools all across Malta. At this time, kindergarten was only made available to four-year-olds. It was only in 1987, following a change in government, that universal kindergarten education was introduced to three-year-old children (Borg & Mayo, 2015). According to a Ministry for Education and Employment (2013) report: “Starting compulsory school age in the year a child turns five, places Malta amongst a small group of European countries where formal education starts early” (p. 18) (See also Table 2.1). The only other European country that starts compulsory schooling early is Cyprus, along with England, Scotland and Wales within the UK (Eurydice, 2013). It is interesting to note that Malta and Cyprus are in line with the British system of early compulsory school age. Maybe, this is due to the fact that both countries had been under British rule for so many years, as discussed in the previous section. Kindergartens being attached to a school have certainly had an effect on the ‘schoolification’ of young children in the prospect of getting them ready for compulsory education (MEDE, 2013). State and church kindergartens operate for about six hours a day, whereas independent kindergartens are open for shorter hours, generally three to three and a half hours a day. Extended services against additional payment are offered by some private settings.

The first National Minimum Curriculum was introduced in 1989 (Borg & Mayo, 2006). An updated version of the National Minimum Curriculum document was published in 1999. The first early years policy document for Malta was introduced in 2006 (Sollars et al., 2006). The latest document published by the Ministry for Education and Employment was a National Curriculum Framework (NCF) for All (MEDE, 2012). The NCF of 2012 incorporates the Early Years Cycle

(0 to age 7) while, in the previous documents, the Early Years were considered from ages 5 – 6. The NCF’s pedagogy promotes: “observation, experimentation, trial and error, exposure to stimulating environments and highly contextualised settings” (Borg & Mayo, 2015). This document is still in use (2018). A more recent document: *The Learning Outcomes Framework* was published in October 2015 (LOF, 2015) with the intention of being implemented in September 2016. This framework was based on the previous NCF but at the same time it gave more flexibility to educators to reach outcomes according to the interests and needs of the children in their care. However, this plan was aborted as Malta’s largest teachers trade union, the Malta Union of Teachers (MUT, 2016) objected to this implementation, stating that: “unless there is a new Sectoral Agreement between the Government and the Union, the MUT cannot accept the introduction of LOFs and will be directing its members accordingly” (MUT, 2016, n. p.).

After consultations with stakeholders and practitioners, various amendments were applied to the LOF document and in February 2018, the Ministry for Education and Employment issued a directive saying that there will be a piloting process of the learning outcomes framework starting in September 2018 in Kindergarten 1, Year 3 and Year 7 (Form 1) (MEDE, 2018a). Unfortunately, the amendments applied for the early years levels changed the flexibility of the framework into a long checklist which educators felt more comfortable with. As one of the LOF early years validators myself, I can say that this goes against the philosophy of the framework which sought to move away from checklist practices so as to take into consideration the authentic assessment of each child. This was also one of the driving forces that guided me to my main research question about what elements influence the pedagogy and practice in early years settings.

As one can see, the early years sector in Malta has had a recent history of rapid change, especially since 2012. This may lead to caution and fear of the unknown in educators and it will take some time to shift the mind-set of educators whose pedagogy has been unchanged for quite a number of years.

The next section will review the Early Childhood Education provision in the Caribbean with special reference to Grenada where possible, since this is the country that is included in this study together with Malta.

Early Childhood Education Provisions in the Caribbean

Early childhood care and education in the Caribbean region were first recorded in the late 1700s in St Kitts and Nevis. The schools were intended for children aged from three to eight years and were established by the Moravian and Methodist Churches with the intent to evangelise the slaves (Williams & Charles, 2008). Both churches believed that individuals should learn how to read in order to be able to read the Bible for themselves (Williams & Charles, 2008). In 1837, Barbados opened its first infant school in the capital, Bridgetown. It accommodated two hundred children within the age range of two to four years (Williams & Charles, 2008).

During British rule, a version of the ‘short-term’ system modelled by Henry Ashworth in England for factory workers was replicated in the Caribbean (Prochner, 2009, p. 41). These schools were specifically designed to reproduce work routines, training students for industrial discipline (Blouet, 1991). This fitted perfectly with the schooling of slaves who were provided with basic care and education before they went out to work in the sugar fields as full-time workers (May et al., 2016; Prochner, 2009).

Legislation was passed in 1850 for infant schools to be opened in the rural areas of Barbados. One hundred and twelve of these infant schools were established by 1900. Charles and Williams (2006) contend that:

Today most countries [in the Caribbean] have some level of pre-school education in place. However, it is only in Barbados, Grenada and St Kitts and Nevis that the government is the major provider of pre-school education. In the other Caribbean countries, early childhood provision is mainly private-sector driven, with very little or no government involvement. (p. 18)

From the very start, the whole education system in these schools was classroom based and priority was given to reading, writing and arithmetic. According to Williams and Charles (2008), the situation has not changed much in the twenty-first century: “pre-schools today resemble these committed beginnings and the determination to succeed in teaching basic skills to very young children is reflected in the modality of whole group instruction” (p. 18).

The Caribbean Plan of Action for early childhood care, education and development was established for a five-year period (1997-2002). There were varying rates of implementation and development of ECE and country action plans across the Caribbean (Samms-Vaughan & Davies, 2008). In spite of this unevenness across countries, an advancement in this sector was still noted: “the Education for All Global Monitoring Report 2007, which focused on early childhood, recognised the Latin American and Caribbean region as leading the developing world in the provision of pre-school education” (Samms-Vaughan & Davies, 2008, p. 1).

In Grenada, public day care facilities were introduced in 1958 and, by 1962, nurseries were offered as a private venture with the sponsorship of the government, while some pre-schools were run by religious orders (Hickling-Hudson, 2006). It was only in 1982 that early childhood settings started seeing a more structured

system whereby these settings were regulated. The 1976 Education Act has been implemented for many years throughout the education system in Grenada. This has been reviewed in 2004 (UNESCO, 2010).

As in other countries including Malta, the Caribbean was affected by key shifts in women joining the workforce during the post-war period (Davis, 1997). During this time, the pre-school services in the Caribbean saw rapid growth. However, this also brought about demands for a more “custodial form of care rather than pre-school education” (Williams & Charles, 2008, p. 18). Presently, pre-schools in these countries still reflect this duality: safe-keeping of children and education.

Similarities can be noted between early childhood education in Malta and Grenada. These comprise such elements as non-compulsory schooling for three to five-year olds, rapid growth in this sector and a perseverance in following a British model of education where what happens at secondary level affects primary level and what happens at primary level subsequently effects pre-school and childcare centres (Jules, 2010). It is also argued that deficits that are not seen to at ECE level impact on students’ performance at primary level and this in turn effects the secondary level which can then result “in the absence of core competencies required for excelling at tertiary education” (Jules, 2010, p. 9). One aspect of my research seeks to find out if colonial lingering is contributing to this top-down educational model, which in turn impacts the pedagogy and practice of early childhood education.

Conclusion

The literature discussed in this chapter captures the key points related to my study: reviewing the strengths and weaknesses of small island states (SIS) as well as

outlining the features of postcolonialism, and how these link back to education systems in general. These features are likely to exercise some influence on the pedagogy and practices of early childhood education (ECE) in small island states. My literature search identified only scant critical scholarship about early childhood education as it might unfold in an SIS context. Nevertheless, this literature review has helped me formulate an observational framework and suggest the questions for my eventual interviews, focus groups and questionnaire. This literature review supports the relative arguments that unfold in the analysis chapter of the thesis.

Another outcome of the literature review is the identification of key theoretical concepts, selected from each of the three areas of inquiry and which will be carried forward throughout the study, guiding methodology and analysis. Postcolonial theory provides a lens through which to critique current practices of education, while appreciating the long and stubborn shadow of history. Island studies and small state studies, on the other hand, help to nuance this impact of colonialism, which is longer, more intimate and heavier in such small jurisdictions. Finally, the literature has identified how early childhood education is still in its early days of professionalisation: children, as much as parents and educators, are often still struggling to find the appropriate template on which to build a best practice for ECE.

In the next chapter, the methods used for data collection and analysis of this research will be discussed and critiqued.

Chapter 3 - Research Methodology

My research focus is built on an epistemology grounded in the early years grassroots of education. I find this to be a welcome departure from a prevalent, contemporary, 'top-down' model which, as I have witnessed and observed, tends to drive the views and interpretations of local educational practice by the expectations of the next, higher levels of formal education. This model, I argue, also conditions the behaviour and expectations of early childhood practitioners and parents from small island states.

My epistemological stance is to connect three established spheres of knowledge and which have, so far, had little overlap in the literature: early childhood education (ECE), small island states (SIS) and postcolonial theory.

This theoretical perspective emanating from the three key concepts in my literature together with my previous assumptions helped me to narrow down this study to the following research questions:

1. *What elements influence the pedagogy and practice of early childhood education (2 to 5-year-olds) in small island states?*
2. *What impact, if any, has colonialism had on early childhood education in small island states, and how is that impact manifested in the current postcolonial epoch?*

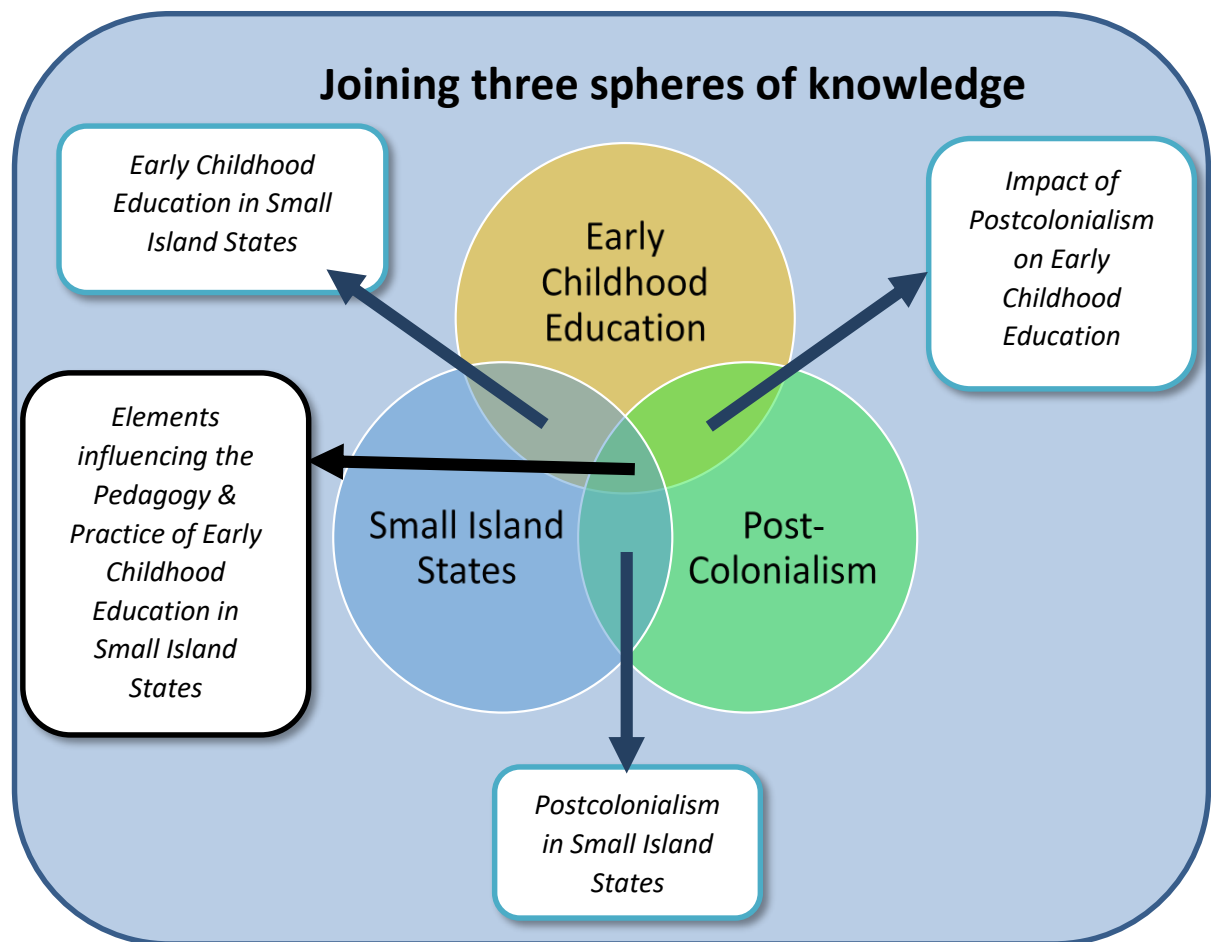


Figure 3.1 – Joining three spheres of knowledge

For my data collection, I chose to draw upon the principles of the convergent design as described by Creswell and Clark (2011) resulting in a mixed method approach whereby I am combining five different methods of data collection using both qualitative and quantitative paradigms. The philosophical assumption for analysis purposes is a pragmatic one whereby only the methods will be mixed, not the paradigms, as this best answers my research questions and allows me to overcome limitations of using one method design (Creswell & Clark, 2011; Creswell, 2009; Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). The convergent design helped me synthesise results from both the qualitative and quantitative paradigms to develop “a more complete understanding of a phenomenon” (Creswell & Clark, 2011, p. 77).

A graphic representation of the mixed method approach used for this study is included below (See Figure 3.2).

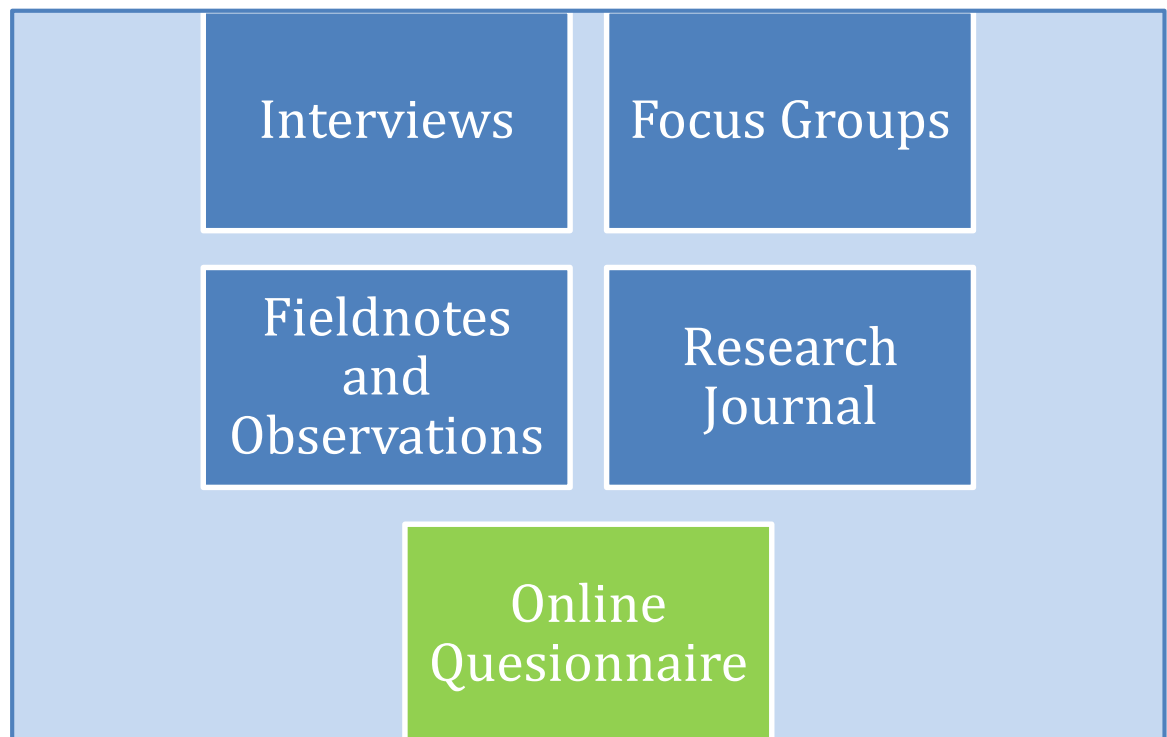


Figure 3.2 – Mixed Method Approach. Blue denotes qualitative and green denotes quantitative data collection.

The qualitative part of the research enabled me to address my research questions by connecting me with the interpretations, understandings and feelings of parents and early childhood educators. Qualitative research is designed to collect a great deal of data from a small number of individuals or groups of people with particular characteristics. According to Bouma, Ling & Wilkinson, (2009), some research questions “are best answered by gathering rich, deep, descriptive data from a small number of participants” (p. 93). Part of my fieldwork was set in early childhood and kindergarten settings where I conducted 112 hours of semi-structured observations in which fieldnotes were recorded, nine interviews and four focus groups with parents. This qualitative approach also provided me with contextual understanding through my own observations in the educational settings. Bryman and

Teevan (2005) argue that, “one cannot understand the behaviour of members of a social group other than in terms of the specific environment in which they operate” (p. 155). I have also used insights and experiences recorded in a reflective research journal that I kept throughout my data collection as part of my analysis and discussion chapter. This captured precious data that were not necessarily being witnessed or recorded through the interviews and observations.

The other part of my data collection involved some quantitative research consisting of an online questionnaire which was distributed via email to individuals residing and/or working in the 27 small island states identified for this research (Table 1.1). These 27 countries were chosen based on the criteria of having a current resident population of less than one million. The questionnaire consisted of three open-ended and 13 close-ended questions (Appendix 14). This research instrument was included in the research design to secure a broader picture of what people in small island states thought about early childhood education, including some respondents who were not necessarily directly involved in the education sector.

A convergent research design (Creswell and Clark, 2011), was best suited for my research as I wanted to give an amalgamated interpretation of the data collected through the five data sets used for this study. In a convergent design, one would use the same individuals for both qualitative and quantitative paradigms if the ‘intent is to compare’ (Creswell 2009, p. 181); however, this does not apply to my research since the online questionnaire was targeted to reach all the 27 small island states across the world while the qualitative data set were aimed at a specific set of early childhood professionals and parents of young children. As suggested by Creswell and Clark (2011), the catchment group for the quantitative method is larger than that of the qualitative one and similar concepts were assessed in both data sets, which

sets were collected concurrently, but are mutually exclusive. Using the convergent mixed method approach helped me to widen my understanding and answering of the research in question (Creswell, 2009).

Another reason for using mixed methods was to facilitate triangulation, whereby I combined data from both qualitative and quantitative paradigms to address my research questions (Creswell & Clark, 2011). According to Bryman (2006), resorting to different methods and techniques adds to the credibility and trustworthiness of research and taps the strengths of both sets of methods. “There is more insight to be gained from the combination of both qualitative and quantitative research than either form by itself” (Creswell, 2009, p. 203).

I do acknowledge that there are challenges when using this mixed methods approach: it requires an extensive data collection; it is time consuming to analyse; and it expects the researcher to be knowledgeable in both methods (Creswell, 2009). However, since the purpose of using the convergent mixed method was to mix the five different methods of data collection rather than the qualitative and quantitative paradigms, this was not a concern.

I have conducted this research from a pragmatic and interpretative perspective, since I want to understand the research problem and the questions being asked, according to the participants’ perspective and frame of reference (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2010). My research design includes two country case studies comprising of Malta and Grenada. These two particular countries were chosen primarily because of the similarities in land area, each consisting of an archipelago of three inhabited islands. Both form part of the Commonwealth, and both countries have been colonised by Britain for about 200 years. Another reason for choosing

these two countries is that their citizens both speak the English language. It would have been difficult to conduct interviews and focus groups if I had chosen to conduct my study in small island states that do not speak English. I have no knowledge of French, Portuguese or Icelandic which are the languages of some of the other small island states, so Grenada was a better option in this case. I chose Malta, because I am a Maltese citizen myself and have lived there for most of my life.

Hence, my research design will include interpretative case studies both in Malta and Grenada. Such an approach uses a variety of data sources and allows me as the researcher to explore individuals or organisations within their context (Baxter & Jack, 2008). One of the advantages of this approach is that:

Case studies not only help to explore or describe the data in a real-life environment, but also help to explain the complexities of real-life situations which may not be captured through experimental or survey research. (Zainal, 2007, p. 4)

My research design consisted of two country case studies, intended primarily to build a deep description of what was going on in the particular group I was working with (Bouma, et al., 2009). Having said this, the analyses of the findings will entail a certain degree of comparison between Malta and Grenada. Bouma, et al. (2009) suggest that, by using more than one case study one can better evaluate/analyse what is impacting these case studies. In this study, I was dealing with two different countries with diverse cultures but at the same time with general similar criteria. If my findings result in a relationship between the variables of my research questions in both Malta and Grenada, then the dependability of the research would be enhanced. Baxter and Jack (2008) also suggest that, “this [approach] ensures that the issue is not explored through one lens, but rather a variety of lenses

which allow for multiple facets of the phenomenon to be revealed and understood” (p. 544). In line with this statement, I used the convergent mixed methods approach including a semi-structured online questionnaire in my research design.

Methodological triangulation used in my research design helps in combining data collected from the online questionnaires to the data from interviews, focus groups, research journal and personal observation/fieldnotes (Flick, 2009). This triangulation has helped to reinforce the credibility of this study by showing that the outcomes of the questionnaire largely correspond to the data collected from the interviews, focus groups and observational research conducted in kindergarten and childcare settings in Malta and Grenada (Cohen, et al., 2010).

Ethical Approval

Before going to Grenada, I had contacted via email, and gained written approval, to conduct research in a state kindergarten through the Permanent Secretary at the Ministry for Education (Appendix 17). I also wrote an email and gained written approval from the director of a private childcare centre in Grenada (N. Smith [pseudonym], personal communication, September 12, 2016). When I arrived in Grenada I set up a meeting with both parties involved in my research. I do acknowledge the fact that there were some ethical issues that I had to face while in Grenada: I was Caucasian, and this could have impacted on the reaction and attitudes from participants involved in my study; and some form of corporal punishment encountered in one of the settings, which was against my values. However, to counter act these ethical issues I made sure that during the initial meetings I made it clear to the principal of the school and the director of the private childcare setting that my role was that of a researcher conducting observations in the respective classes. I told them that I was in no way judging them and/or their

practices and that I could not give them professional advice in my role as a researcher. However, in appreciation to the Ministry for Education for granting me permission and helping me gain access to these settings, I gave two separate presentations to both private childcare educators and to state kindergarten educators. This was organised by the Ministry for Education. The presentation was not related to my research: it was about the schemas of play in young children. Regarding corporal punishment, I respected the fact that this was legal in Grenada and that educators thought it to be an adequate way of maintaining order and discipline in their setting. At no point in time, did I comment on what I was observing, even if this made me feel uncomfortable.

Upon securing ethics approval from the University of Sheffield (Appendix 15), I contacted via letter, and gained written approval, from an independent school in Malta which gave me its informed consent to conduct my pilot study there. This helped me evaluate my research methodology and the questions that I had planned to ask in order to target my research questions. I also obtained ethical approval from the Ministry for Education in Malta to conduct research in one state kindergarten (Appendix 16). I contacted the director of a private childcare centre, to get her permission to conduct my research there. This permission was also granted.

I formulated informed consent letters (Appendices 1 -10) which I distributed to all my participants. In the consent form, issues like anonymity of respondents, privacy and confidentiality, minimisation of harm, and consent to record interviews and focus group meetings were addressed, as well as the safe keeping of data collected. In the case of Grenada, I sent the consent forms to a contact person there and he disseminated them to the state kindergarten and the private childcare centre accordingly. This helped me gain time, since my time in Grenada was limited to four

weeks. Once I got there, I could immediately start my research as all the necessary consent forms had been signed and collected. For the online questionnaire, I included an informed consent letter at the beginning of the questionnaire and once the respondents had agreed to that they were given access to the questions.

Methodology Used

After obtaining ethical approval from the University of Sheffield, I formulated an online questionnaire based on my research questions while drawing on and adapting a few interview questions used by Sultana (2006) in one of his research studies pertaining to small island states (Appendix 14). After piloting the questionnaire, I made some minor amendments to two questions in order to clarify the content. The questions in the online questionnaire are not exhaustive to the subject matter. I was conscious of keeping the responding time to not more than ten minutes to hopefully attract more participants in answering and sending back the questionnaire. However, I did give the option in almost all questions where the respondent could opt to click on 'other' if they disagreed with the statements given in the questionnaire. This was then sent out through the list-serve of the International Small Islands Studies Association (ISISA) of which I am a member and Newsletter editor, to various individuals who reside and/or work in the 27 small island states as defined in my study. The list-serve is available to all members, so I sent an email to all individuals on the list-serve giving them information about my doctoral study and the online questionnaire. I supplied the link to the questionnaire in the email. At the beginning of the online questionnaire was a letter of informed consent, clearly stating that by clicking on the 'start' button, the individual would be consenting to the use of the data inputted in the questionnaire. By means of this questionnaire, I obtained a more comprehensive view of what participants (including individuals not

necessarily in the field of ECE) think about early childhood pedagogy and practice in the early years on small island states; while acknowledging that my respondents were by no means representative of the populations of the 27 SIS I was studying. As stated in Chapter Two, I did make it a point to search about the early childhood education policy in each of the 27 small island states. I made use of the online country reports issued by UNESCO. In some cases, there was no formal ECE policy as was later acknowledged by respondents of particular small island states. This adds to the degree of credibility of the responses. The questionnaire also helped me formulate the semi-structured questions for the interviews (Appendix 12) and focus groups (Appendix 13) which were based on similar questions. Next, I piloted the three other methods of research that I used for this study, namely: observations, interviews and focus groups in a local school in Malta. The pilot study helped me to confirm and/or amend the observational framework (Appendix 11) as well as the questions for my interviews and focus groups.

Before travelling to Grenada, I read and researched about the history/culture and education system in place in that country. In January 2017, I went to Grenada to start my data collection for this study. Upon arriving in Grenada, I made appointments with the director and the principal of the private childcare and state kindergarten setting and discussed my research. Before embarking on my fieldwork, I spent a day at both the childcare and kindergarten setting to acclimatise myself with the setting, staff and children. An important ethical issue pertaining to children's involvement in research is that of obtaining informed assent from the children (Nutbrown, 2010; Phelan & Kinsella, 2013). Phelan and Kinsella contend that: "the child's assent or willingness to participate is sought in addition to informed consent by the parents" (p. 83), and that this needs to be done in a

language that the children understand. I spoke to the children about the reason I was going to be in their classroom for a while and asked if they would allow me to be in their classroom. I told them that I was writing a story about them and their educator/s. The children agreed that I could watch them play and learn during their day at the setting and take notes of what they were doing. I also spoke to them about me taking photos of both them working and their classroom. They consented to this and looked forward to seeing the photos that I took during my observations.

As Nutbrown (2010) explains, one has to build a sense of trust between the researcher and the “guardians” (p. 11) when asking for their consent to let their children be participants in a research study. So, to this effect, in the consent forms sent to parents, I asked their permission not only for their child to take part in the study but also for me to be able to take photos of their children working and of the classroom environment while offering to answer any queries they may have about their child's participation in the research. I also stated that the photos that I would be taking were to be used only to help with my data analysis and that I would try, as much as possible, not to get the children's faces in the photos, as this was not relevant to my research. All parents gave me permission to all the above. Moreover, I also invited the parents to take part in the focus group meeting that formed part of my data collection. A summary of the data collection methods used can be viewed in Figure 3.3.

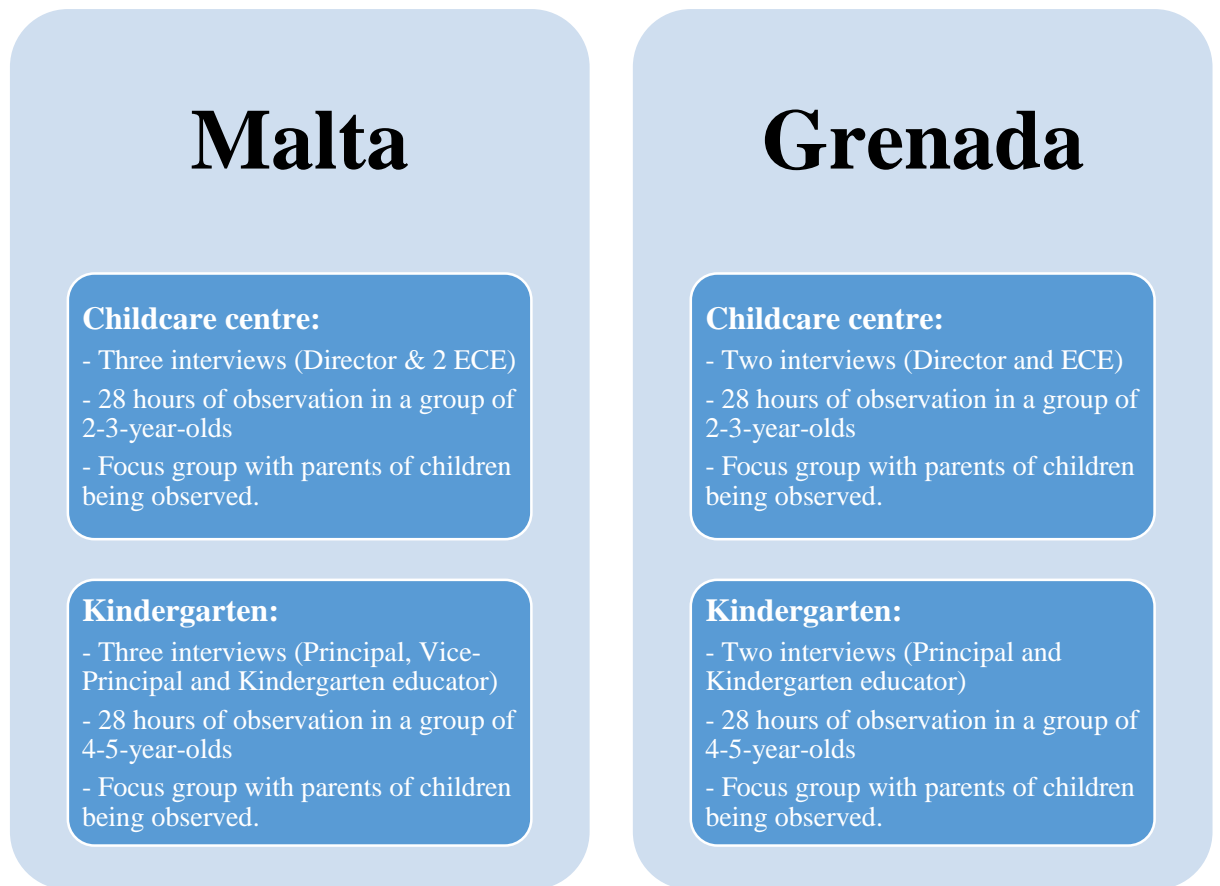


Figure 3.3 - Methodology

During my four weeks' stay in Grenada, I conducted observations in one childcare setting and one kindergarten classroom. I conducted observations and recorded fieldnotes for approximately seven days in each setting (four hours a day, in each of the two settings) totalling 56 hours of observations. Sometimes, the duration of the observations varied and continued until saturation of the information required was reached. This was based on an observational framework that I had formulated (Appendix 11). I conducted interviews alongside the observations: one with the director/principal, and one with the educator/kindergarten teacher of the two settings being observed, for a total of four interviews. The interviews were semi-structured and lasted between 30-40 minutes each. I also conducted two (one-hour) focus groups in Grenada. The participants of the focus groups were parents of the same childcare/kindergarten group of children that I observed. I also made sure

to send the transcribed interviews and focus groups transcripts back to the participants for their approval before heading back to Malta.

When I got back to Malta, in February 2017 I used the above same research methods to collect data for my study in a state kindergarten and a private childcare setting. Two minor differences were that in Malta I conducted two extra interviews. In the state school, the vice-principal was also the coordinator of the kindergarten classes, so I saw it fit to interview her; moreover, her views were pertinent to my research. In the private childcare setting, there were two educators with the group that I was observing and they both agreed to being interviewed. Transcripts from focus groups and interviews were also sent to participants for confirmation in Malta.

Data Collection

As discussed above, I applied a convergent mixed-methods approach for the data collection of my study as I felt that it would best suit my study and the research that I wanted to conduct in order to answer my research questions. This consisted of five components: observations and fieldnotes; interviews; online questionnaire, focus groups and a research journal. The first four will be discussed in more detail below.

Observations and fieldnotes

I conducted systematic on-site observations and kept fieldnotes in childcare and kindergarten settings in Malta and Grenada (four settings in total). This helped to enhance the dependability of the study (Bouma et al., 2009) as more than one setting was used in different contexts. I developed an observational framework based on the literature that I had read and reviewed about the impacts that

postcolonialism in small island states had on primary, secondary and tertiary education and the current literature about ECE (Appendix 11). This included:

- Pedagogy:

What kind of pedagogy is the educator implementing? I was looking to see if the educator was using a teacher-directed approach whereby s/he had pre-planned activities and the children did as they were told (not a lot of space for children's creativity; emphasis on the end-product rather than the process of learning) or a child-centred approach which research has suggested that is more beneficial to the children as discussed in the previous chapter, or perhaps a balance of both.

- Language of instruction:

I was interested in finding out if the language of instruction was their native language or the colonial language, and whether such a linguistic difference existed.

- Language of interaction:

I wanted to find out if this was different from the language of instruction. Was the native language more likely to be used by children and adults to communicate and interact with each other or was the colonial language still the predominant one?

- Educator-child interaction:

In this respect, I was looking to see what the educator-child interaction was like. Was it one that encouraged children to share their ideas and knowledge, or was it one where the educator was the more knowledgeable individual and children only did what they were told? I was also looking to see if the

educator invited and accepted the involvement of the children in the learning process.

- Physical Environment:

What does the class environment look like? Is it cluttered or is there space for children to move around? What do the charts on the wall show? Do they have local content in their books and charts or are they bought from other countries? Does the environment offer the children learning opportunities and choices?

This framework was constructed to help me focus on issues related to my research questions (Bouma et al., 2009). However, it was not restrictive, and I was always on the lookout for other instances that might prove useful to my research. Such instances were recorded in my research journal.

The data from these observations and fieldnotes consisted of detailed notes about the practice and pedagogy of the settings being studied throughout a period of time (a total of 112 hours). Photographs were also taken of the classroom environment and children's activities to help with the analysis stage. Even when a saturation point (Burgess, 1997; Cohen et al., 2007; Patton, 2002) based on my observational framework was reached prior to the end of the observational period – around seven consecutive days in each of the four settings – I continued observations for a few more days, to help improve the credibility of the data that had been previously collected. The observations were mainly of the 'non-participant/direct' type as this gave me the ability to observe the setting's environment, children's and adults' behaviour and activities with as little interference as possible (Bouma et al., 2009; Bryman 2016). This is important in my study because, as an individual who has spent a number of years as an early

childhood educator, I have my own biases, values and beliefs about this sector. To somehow counter-balance this bias, I used two other methods of data collection in each setting: interviews and focus groups.

I was fully aware that my study involved different degrees of cultural familiarity in two different countries. This automatically led me to engage with my research fields and participants differently. In the case of Malta, I was familiar, even too familiar with the policy and methods of early childhood education, as well as the language and culture of the settings. When I was in Grenada it was different: I was first and foremost a Caucasian and thus stood out in the settings that I conducted my research in. I do acknowledge that I felt uncomfortable and self-conscious at first, especially during the observation period: I could never be unobtrusive in these settings. Even though I had lived in another Caribbean island state (Barbados) for several months before coming to Grenada, I still had to acclimatise myself to the different culture, language and way of living. Based on the above, I felt that it was not possible for me to be just an observer in the setting. Instead, I agree with Coffey (1999) who argues that, instead of trying to “place oneself on the participant-observer continuum”, one should be “actively reflexive” of what is going on in the settings one is in (p. 36). So, I tried to interact as little as possible in the settings during my observations so as not to influence in any way the actions of the children or the educators.

Interviews

I conducted ten in-depth, semi-structured interviews of 30-40 minutes each (Bryman, 2016). I chose semi-structured interviews because, although the list of questions was specific to the research topic, the interviewees still had a “great deal of leeway in how to reply” (Bryman, Teevan & Bell, 2009, p. 160). Bryman (2016)

adds that, where you have multiple case studies, as in my case, it is advisable to have some form of structure to the interview guide as this can then ensure cross-comparability during the analysis of the data. For this reason, the interview questions were derived from the research questions of the study and the literature about the topic. They were also related to the online questionnaire which will be discussed later on in this chapter (Appendix 12). The interviews for this research study were directed to educators rather than policy makers as I wanted to hear their views and perspectives about ECE policies, and make recommendations as to how these can improve the practice of ECE.

In the childcare settings, I interviewed the director and one educator in Grenada and the director and two educators in Malta (two directors and three educators in total). In the kindergarten setting, I interviewed the principal and one educator in Grenada, and the principal, vice-principal and an educator in Malta (two principals, one vice-principal and two educators in total). I used this iterative method so as to add more dependability to the data being collected (Bouma, et al., 2009). I used a voice-recording device to capture each interview (with the consent of the respondents) as this method allowed me to maintain better eye contact with the interviewee. Bryman, et al. (2009), states that it is important to record interviews for “detailed analysis required in qualitative research” (p. 162). This also captures the true version of the interviewees’ replies. I then translated the interviews into English in the case of Maltese interviewees, and transcribed the interviews from both countries. After listening carefully to the recorded interviews more than once, I started to selectively transcribe the interviews pertaining to the parts that were relevant to the research questions rather than ‘verbatim’ in the interest of time (Bryman, et al., 2009). These transcripts were sent for approval to the participants

before I started the analysis. This ensured that the transcripts reflected what the interviewees actually wanted to say and not my interpretation of what they said (Creswell, 2009). To make up for my bias as a researcher and an educator, I did not interfere or suggest any answers during interviews or focus group sessions.

Focus groups

Focus groups were chosen as part of the data collection of this study because they allowed me (as a researcher) to better understanding not only of *how* people feel but also *why* they feel the way they do about an issue (Bryman, 2012). Bryman et al. (2009) contend that focus groups make it possible “to elicit a wide variety of perspectives on an issue” (p. 168). One advantage of focus groups is that the participants get to review each other’s views and experiences as opposed to individual interviews (Bryman, 2012; Clough & Nutbrown, 2012) and in so doing, also transition towards a convergence of ideas. However, I do acknowledge that there were certain limitations to conducting a focus group:

- I had less control over what went on in the focus groups and how the discussion unfolded as opposed to when I conducted the individual interviews.
- The focus groups generated a lot of data which proved to be time consuming to transcribe and analyse.
- It was occasionally hard to identify who was speaking when listening to the recordings, so I devised a method whereby I gave each participant a piece of paper with a number on it. I asked them to put up the number each time they spoke, and I took note of who was answering a particular question in that instance. They could also choose to say the number before starting to speak.

I found that this technique also helped me to analyse the data more objectively, as I did not ask for their names. I only had the numbers, so I could not connect a name to a face.

- Group dynamics proved to be a problem with some of the focus groups. Some participants needed encouragement to join in the discussion while others had to be reminded that other participants needed to express their views as well. However, I did not try to push participants who were silent too soon because, as Clough & Nutbrown (2012) state: “they [the silent participants] might well have been participating whilst silent, engaged in listening and reflecting on what they heard” (p. 87).

A total of four focus groups were conducted, each involving a selection of a small number (six to eight) parents of children from the observed childcare and kindergarten settings. Peek and Fothergill (2009) argue that in many circumstances small focus groups would be sufficient. In my case, it was better to have such small groups as it was more manageable to keep the group focused on the topic being discussed. Through the pilot study of the focus groups, I concluded that it would be a good idea to ask participants to select a checkbox provided in the consent form, depicting whether they wanted to attend the focus group or not. Another amendment was to ask participants who choose to attend to supply me with their email address and phone number so that I could contact them to set up a date (Appendix 13).

When I collected the consent forms, I picked the most preferred time by parents, and contacted them by phone to confirm the date and time with them. On the day of the focus group, in the case of Malta, I sent them all a text message as a gentle reminder. I did not need to do this in Grenada as they had been reminded by their child’s educator. All four focus groups were held in the childcare or kindergarten setting as

that proved to be the most convenient. I audio-recorded each focus group, with the permission of the participants, so as to capture what the parents were saying. A limitation of recording a focus group is that recordings may include inaudible comments of participants who are not close to the recorder device (Bryman, 2016). Having a small group counter-balanced this and helped with the recording and transcribing of each focus group.

Participants were recruited by the key informant in each childcare/kindergarten setting (Bryman, 2016). This method was implemented since I only needed six to eight parents. The key informant knew the prospective participants well and so they were carefully chosen to take part in the focus groups based on the criteria that I set out for them. I compensated for possible ‘dropouts’ by recruiting ten participants for each focus group (Bouma, et al., 2009; Bryman, et al. 2009;). On average, in both countries six participants showed up for each of the focus groups.

Each focus group was about one-hour duration and posed a few semi-structured questions to stimulate discussion: (seven questions in total) (Bryman, 2016). These questions dealt with parents’ perceptions about early childhood education in their country and whether postcolonialism, smallness and ‘islandness’ (Conkling, 2007, p. 191) have impacted on the practices and pedagogies of such settings. The questions were based on the research questions being explored. The participants were encouraged to discuss amongst themselves the questions being asked, with little or no interference from me. My only intervention was to refocus the participants’ attention when the discussion was going off topic. However, I needed to be careful when doing this because as Bryman, et al. (2009) state: “it is necessary to be careful, [when redirecting the group’s focus] because what may

appear to be digression may reveal something of significance” (p. 171). I chose to conduct focus groups among parents as I wanted to explore their reactions when they interacted with each other and, as stated by Bryman (2016): “construe the general topics in which the researcher is interested” (p. 503). I was also interested in examining if the parents’ perspectives were similar, or otherwise, to those of the educators. Using focus groups as part of my data collection allowed me to develop an understanding of how the participants felt about my research topic and gave parents a chance to air their views.

Online Questionnaire

Another method of data collection used for this study was an online questionnaire which was aimed at collecting a wider view (Bryman, et al., 2009) about the elements that might influence early childhood education in small island states (SIS). According to Bryman (2016) and Lumsden (2005), online questionnaires have a number of advantages over structured interviews. Some of the advantages include: “cost, speed, appearance, flexibility, functionality, and usability” (Lumsden, 2005, p. 1. See also Murthy, 2008). The questionnaire in this study set up with Google Sheets, was intended to reach individuals residing in small island states in 27 countries and so this method proved to be more appropriate for this task than structured interviews (Appendix 14). Bryman et al. (2009) contend that: “...[a] questionnaire is especially advantageous if a sample is geographically dispersed” (p.71). Murthy (2008) also agrees that online questionnaires can reach global respondents when it would not otherwise be practical to reach such respondents with mailed questionnaires. It was much cheaper and efficient for me to use an online questionnaire to gather information and opinions from a broader pool of participants.

As with all other methods of data collections there are several disadvantages when using online questionnaires. These include: non-response, sampling and measurement errors (Lumsden, 2005). In my case, I tried to compensate for non-response with paying more careful attention to the sampling of the participants to whom the questionnaire was sent out by email. Lumsden (2005) explains that, the risk of non-response with online questionnaires is no different than if one sends them by mail or conducts them through a telephone call (p. 1). However, I had the advantage of being a member of the International Small Islands Studies Association (ISISA) and also the Newsletter Editor of this association. I had access to, as an ISISA member, a listserv of prospective participants that I could choose from and some of whom I had been acquainted with during past ISISA conferences that I had attended. Having said that, I did not have immediate access to participants in all the 27 small island states that were the targeted population of this study. I had to keep on looking for new contacts as I wanted to make sure that I had at least one respondent from each of the 27 SIS. For this reason, the data collected from these questionnaires was left open till the analysis stage, up to which point I had received a response from all the participating countries. The chosen participants did not necessarily comprise of only parents and scholars, but also included other individuals residing on SIS. This was purposefully done so as to give me the opportunity to get a much broader insight on my research questions.

Throughout the designing of the questionnaire, I kept consulting the guidelines set out by Bryman (2016) and Lumsden (2005) for an effective online research instrument. I also drew on and adapted Sultana's (2006) sample questions that were used in his research studies amongst SIS participants, as explained in more detail in Chapter Two. I used mostly short close-ended questions with a multiple-

choice style. The questionnaire also included three open-ended questions to obtain the participants' opinions. Apart from the questions pertaining to the study, demographic details were also asked for. Since some of the participants came from ex-French colonies and were unlikely to read English, the questions were translated into French for these SIS (Appendix 15).

Some additional disadvantages of online questionnaires are that the questions cannot be further clarified for participants and their meaning might not be self-evident, even if they appear to be very clear and concise; some questionnaires will only be filled in partially and abandoned in the course of being completed, and the inability of the researcher to know who actually answered the questionnaire. Bryman et al. (2009) state that: "one can never be sure whether the designated respondent or someone else answered the questions" (p. 72). I received questionnaires that were partially completed where participants had the option to opt out from answering the open-ended questions. For the closed-ended, multiple choice questions I provided the option of clicking 'other' if respondents did not agree with the statements provided, as well as a 'don't know' button in the case of other questions. Piloting the questionnaire on more than one person helped to ascertain that, as far as possible, the questions were clear and easily understood. The questionnaires were sent for piloting in four other small island jurisdictions, apart from Malta. Lumsden (2005) stresses that online-questionnaires need to be pilot-tested so as to eliminate anything that does not work properly. After piloting the questionnaire, I made minor amendments to some of the questions, mainly to clarify their meaning. The questionnaire was distributed by email to selected participants in small island states. These could then forward the questionnaire link which I included in the email to other contacts that they may have if they themselves did not feel comfortable to

participate in the study. I chose to use what Bryman et al. (2009, p. 72) call an “email survey” as opposed to a “web survey” since I was dealing with a small group of participants. I opted for this method also because it made it more personalised than a web survey. Sheehan and Hoy (1999) state that email surveys are more suited for: “smaller, more homogeneous groups of online user groups,” (p. 1). After two weeks of emailing the questionnaires to the participants, I sent a reminder email which elicited some more responses. In some cases, the response was quick to come but, in some other cases I either had to send a further reminder or find new contacts to approach. It proved to be quite a challenge at times to locate even one respondent from certain remote SIS, so it was a great satisfaction for me when I finally got at least one respondent from all the participating 27 small island states.

Sampling

The sampling method for the above data collection is purposive sampling. I used what Hood (2007, p. 152) calls a ‘generic inductive qualitative model’ which does not involve the iterative style of analysis. Bryman (2016) refers to this type of sampling as ‘generic purposive sampling’ (p. 422). This kind of sampling is done purposively but does not necessarily generate theory (Bryman, 2016). For this study, the participants were selected purposively according to certain criteria such as age and educational settings. In the case of Malta, a specific state kindergarten was chosen because the children in this school came from multi-cultural backgrounds and different social classes and is situated in the south of Malta. The private childcare centre was chosen in central Malta where the social background is slightly more affluent than that of the south, as I wanted to explore the similarities and/or differences social class might have on the pedagogy being practised. In the case of Grenada, it was more a case of convenience sampling whereby the participants in

the kindergarten were chosen for me by the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry for Education in Grenada and the private childcare setting was suggested to me by a colleague who lives there. This was the best option available to me in order to be able to benefit from introductions and establish contact with these two settings. Convenience sampling was also used in choosing the educators to be interviewed and the parents to participate in the focus groups: the educators interviewed were the ones leading the group of children being observed and the parents were the ones of these same children. A purposive sample was used for the online questionnaire: it was sent to participants who resided and/or worked in the 27 small island states already identified based on their resident population counts.

I acknowledge that the kind of sampling being used for my study will not result in a generalisation of the findings. However, it should provide a sound indication of what went on in four childcare/kindergarten settings in two small island states and what impacts their pedagogy and practice (Bouma, et al., 2009).

Data Analysis

The convergent mixed-method analysis used in this study is a technique that can ‘mix’ together the paradigms of quantitative and qualitative data sets (Creswell & Clark, 2011, p. 203). However, I chose to mix the data collection methods rather than the qualitative and quantitative paradigms. During this process, I analysed the quantitative and the qualitative data separately using the appropriate methods. For the online questionnaire, I used Microsoft Excel ©® graphs to analyse the results of the close-ended questions. I then used NVivo 11 ©® software to help code the three open-ended questions in the questionnaire. This method was also used to code, categorise and draw themes from the interviews and focus groups and my fieldnotes, observations and research journal (Sinkovics, Penz, & Ghauri, 2008). Following a

formalised computer procedure will enhance the trustworthiness and quality of the findings. Sinkovics, Penz and Ghauri (2008) argue that:

Computer software helps and supports researchers in the analytical process of coding and analysing textual data, makes data easily accessible to collaborators and thus strengthens credibility, replicability and substance of research results. (p. 709)

Findings from these data sets were then converged in the interpretation stage of the analysis. Creswell and Clark (2011) claim that, by using these procedures in a convergent mixed-method analysis, the researcher: “represents, interprets and validates the data and results” (p. 203).

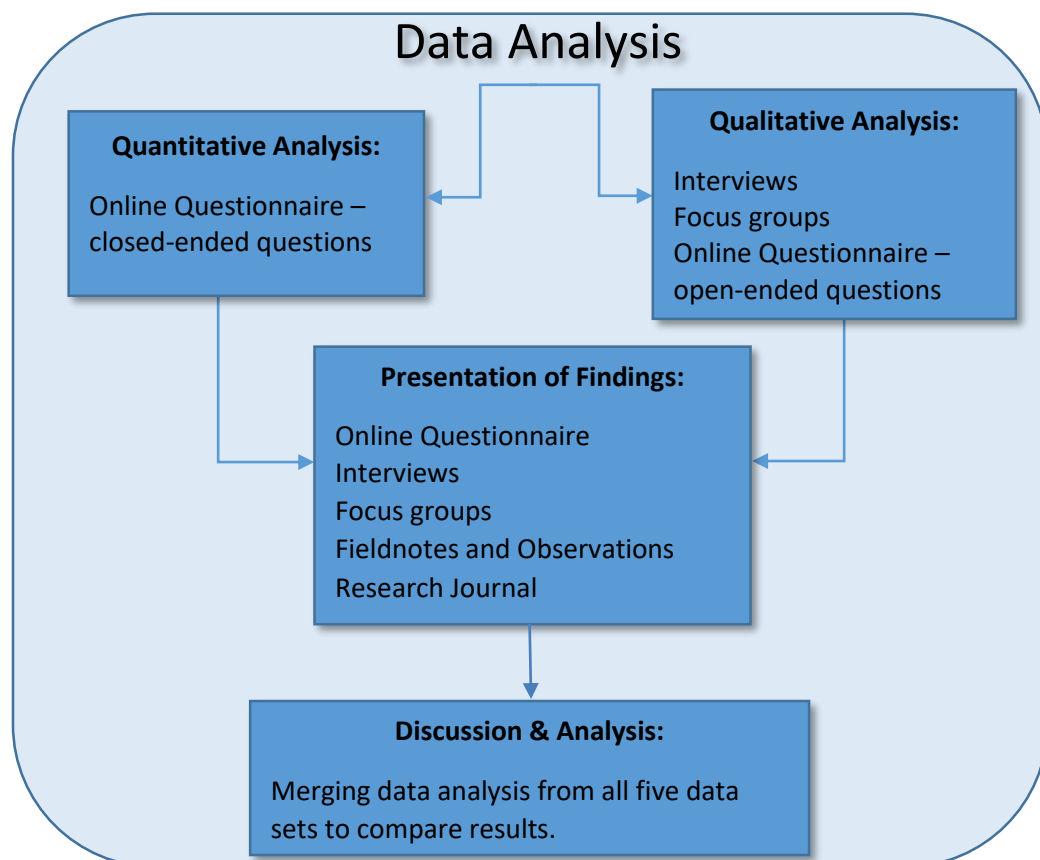


Figure 3.4 – Data Analysis

For the qualitative part of my study, I decided that the best way to analyse my data would be by conducting content analysis where fieldnotes/observations and research journal, transcripts from interviews and focus groups, together with the data

collected from the open-ended online questionnaire responses, were explored in more depth, resulting in the coding and categorising of data. Themes relating to the research questions were then explored as they emerged during the data analysis (Charmaz, 2009). As Pope, Ziebland and Mays (2000) state: “In most qualitative analyses, the data are preserved in their textual form and ‘indexed’ to generate or develop analytical categories and theoretical explanations” (p. 114).

To help with coding purposes, I employed the use of NVivo 11 software. This helped me to identify patterns arising from my data more rigorously and in a shorter period of time (Pope, Ziebland & Mays, 2000). NVivo also helped me discern similar themes and/or categories. For the quantitative part of my data analysis, namely the closed questions of the online questionnaire, I used simple graphs/charts using Microsoft Excel. I then integrated these graphs/charts with relevant themes emerging from the interviews, focus groups, fieldnotes, observations and my research journal as appropriate.

Interviews, focus groups, open-ended responses and observations

After reading through the transcripts of the interviews and focus groups for a number of times, I highlighted responses that pertained to the research questions of this study. I uploaded all the transcripts and the open-ended questionnaire responses using NVivo 11, opening separate folders. I then created four folders (interviews, focus groups, observations and questionnaires) under ‘Nodes’. As I went through each transcript and response, I started creating themes as they emerged in relation to the research questions I needed to answer. This was a long process since I had ten interviews, four focus groups, three open-ended responses from 64 participants, as well as 112 hours of fieldnotes/observations. However, with the help of NVivo 11, it proved to be more straightforward than the manual colour coding that is sometimes

used for qualitative research (Charmaz, 2009). As I read through these transcripts again, I focused on categories that came out of the various themes. I repeated this analytic process three times to narrow down my focus to just major relevant themes and categories. For the observations, I uploaded all the data gathered and then created themes based on the framework that I had compiled prior to starting my observations (Appendix 11).

Questionnaires

Since the questionnaires consisted of both close and open-ended questions, I had to use different methods to analyse the findings. Having used Google Sheets to create the online questionnaire the data were automatically gathered into graphs. However, the data can also be viewed in a Microsoft Excel sheet. After examining the graphs created by Google, I exported the findings into an Excel sheet, then created my own graphs which were thus more accurate and better related to my study than those automatically generated which were more generic. This was also due to the fact that, in some cases, more than one individual from a specific small island state responded to the question and I wanted to group these respondents according to their respective country. This kind of data is not generated by Google Sheets. The three open-ended questions of the online questionnaire were analysed by means of NVivo 11, as explained above.

Conclusion

This chapter has described in some detail the convergent mixed-methods research design deemed to be the most suitable to answer my research questions. The manner in which ethical approval from concerned entities has been sought, explained and secured is described in this chapter. Sampling and data collection

techniques are also reviewed. Graphical images have been added to provide a clearer picture of the methodology and data analysis implemented in this study. This articulation helps to clarify the techniques deployed in my research, and the motivation towards their selection.

Chapter Four, which follows, will present, analyse and interpret the main data collected from this mixed methods approach in response to the first research question.

Chapter 4 – Elements Influencing the Pedagogy and Practice of Early Childhood Education on Small Island States: Analysis and Discussion of Findings

Introduction

This study set out to explore the elements that influence the pedagogy and practice of early childhood education (ECE) in small island states (SIS). It also sought to examine the extent to which colonialism may have impacted the pedagogy practised in four early years settings located in two small island states. This thesis also contributes new knowledge to address (at least in part) a gap in postcolonial literature with regards to ECE in SIS. Whilst various researchers have written about how postcolonialism has impacted education at primary, secondary and tertiary levels (Atchoarena, et al., 2008; Bray, & Packer, 1993; Crossley, & Tikly, 2004; Jules, 2012), there is only a small number of articles and books that address how post colonialism could also impact ECE in small island states (Cannella, & Viruru, 2004; Grieshaber, & Cannella, 2001; Nieuwenhuys, 2013; Viruru, 2005b). Chapter Two showed how this literature gap proved to be a challenge, both with respect to formulating a framework for my data collection in this thesis, as well as, later on, to compare current literature about the topic of this thesis to the findings of my data collection.

Malta and Grenada were purposely chosen for this study as both are small island states with a resident population of less than one million. They are also very similar in land area, each comprising an archipelago of three inhabited islands, both forming part of the Commonwealth and each having experienced British colonialism for some two hundred years. It is, however, important to acknowledge various points of difference between the two countries. Grenada has a much smaller population (107,850) than Malta (420,521), as well as a lower level of economic development:

a gross domestic product of US\$ 12,900 per capita for Grenada, versus US\$ 35,600 for Malta, as listed in 2016 (Trade Economics, 2017). Other differences include: Malta gained its independence in 1964 while Grenada became independent in 1974; Malta switched from a monarchical to a republican constitution in 1974 as opposed to Grenada and its post-independence monarchical constitution, which continues to recognise Queen Elizabeth II as its Head of State.

This chapter will present, analyse and discuss the research findings of this study in answer to the first research question:

What elements influence the pedagogy and practice of early childhood education (2 to 5-year-olds) in small island states?

Chapter 5 will then present the analyses and discussion of the research findings resulting from this study in answer to the second research question:

What impact, if any, has colonialism had on early childhood education in small island states, and how is that impact manifested in the current postcolonial epoch?

Thematic analysis using NVivo was adopted in order to analyse the data collected through observations/fieldnotes, interviews, focus groups and an online questionnaire. The research method used to elicit these findings was through two situational, interpretive case studies using coding as described in Chapter Three.

Pseudonyms will be used for all participants, followed by the first letter of their country's name – G for Grenada; M for Malta – in the interviews and focus groups. A fictitious name was given to all the four settings, and pseudonyms used to protect the identity of the participants and the individual settings. For the online questionnaire, responses will be identified by country of origin followed by a

number (e.g. Malta 14), 14 being the order in which the person responded to the questionnaire – in this case, the individual was the 14th person responding the questionnaire and resided in Malta. This is being done since more than one respondent from the same country answered the questionnaire in some cases. I spent seven consecutive days in each setting, observing relationships involving children among themselves and with their educator, also at the same time noting the language being used for instruction and communication and taking fieldnotes about the environment, routine and activities taking place in each setting. Each visit lasted for four hours a day, with a total of 112 hours of fieldnotes/observations carried out in four early childhood settings (a state kindergarten and a private childcare setting, both in Malta and Grenada). Ten interviews were carried out: with two school principals, one assistant principal, two childcare setting directors, two kindergarten educators and three private childcare educators. Each interview lasted around 45 minutes. Four focus groups with parents of children who were invited for my observation sessions (two in Malta and two in Grenada) were conducted. Each focus group took around one hour. On average, six to eight parents participated in each focus group, and included both mothers and fathers. The online questionnaire was distributed via email to 100 individuals who resided in all 27 SIS from around the world whose resident population does not exceed one million. Sixty-three individuals responded to the questionnaire and these included at least one participant from all the 27 small island states.

This chapter is divided in three sections:

- a) Demographics and statistics of online questionnaire

b) Elements influencing the pedagogy and practice of ECE in SIS:

Emerging themes in response to research question one

c) Conclusion

Each section will discuss the findings derived from the analysis of data collected both in Malta and in Grenada, and presented either collectively or by country, as relevant. Demographics and statistical findings obtained through the online questionnaire will be presented first. Recurring themes derived from fieldnotes/observations, interviews, focus groups, the online questionnaire and my research journal will be collectively analysed and discussed in the light of the relevant literature summarised in Chapter Two, as appropriate. Comments and statements from participants' responses and extracts from fieldnotes and observations and my research journal will be added to supplement themes, and thus deepen the understanding of the findings when relevant (Corden & Sainsbury, 2006; Patton, 2015). Connections are made between these statements and the established literature where and as relevant in order to connect the findings of this study to the wider field.

Online Questionnaire

A template developed by Sultana (2006) was drawn upon and adapted for my study to be used as a framework when formulating the online questionnaire. This questionnaire was distributed via email to 100 individuals residing in small island states (SIS) around the world that met the criteria of having a resident population of less than one million. This amounted to 27 countries. 64 individuals responded to the online questionnaire; this included at least one individual from each of the 27

countries. In some cases, more than one respondent from the same country participated in the questionnaire as the table below shows:

Number of Respondents per Country	Small Island States (N = 27)
1	Antigua & Barbuda; Barbados; Cyprus; Dominica; Iceland; Kiribati; Maldives; Nauru; São Tome' & Príncipe; Samoa; Seychelles; St. Kitts & Nevis; St Lucia; St. Vincent & the Grenadines; Solomon Islands; Tonga
2	Marshall Islands; Palau
3	Bahamas; Fiji; Micronesia; Tuvalu
4	Grenada
5	Comoros; Vanuatu
6	Malta
11	Cape Verde

Table 4.1: Number of Respondents to the Online Questionnaire, received from each small island state (N = 64).

The one country that was not represented in the responses for many months after all other responses had been received, was Nauru. Apparently, it is currently a criminal offence in the country for anyone working with children to give information about them: this development is connected to the Immigrant Detention Centre that Nauru operates on its soil on behalf of the Australian Government (Longbottom, 2015). However, I kept on trying to find a contact from Nauru. In June 2017, I attended an international island studies conference in Kangaroo Island, Australia, where I presented the preliminary findings of my doctoral studies. An individual who was present, approached me after my presentation and told me that she had a relative who lives in Nauru and that she was ready to contact her and pass on the online questionnaire on my behalf. Unfortunately, due to the restrictions in Nauru discussed above, this relative could not help me as she worked in education.

She did however, pass on the online questionnaire to a Nauruan friend of hers who eventually sent in the responses.

In some instances, it was quite a challenge to establish contact with individuals hailing from various small island states, especially where the population was quite small, or remote (Nauru, Kiribati, Samoa, Tuvalu) and in one case the questionnaire was translated into French (Comoros). (See Appendix 15).

Demographics of Respondents

Sixty-four individuals from 27 small island states took part in the online questionnaire. The largest age cohort of participants included ages between 41 and 55 (43%). The age cohort between 25-40 years was 36% of respondents, while participants aged above 55 were 21% of respondents. There were no participants who were less than 24 years of age.

The occupations of respondents were varied but tended to deal with education. These included: teachers, lecturers, early childhood educators and kindergarten assistants; school principals and private early childhood settings' directors; social workers, a UNICEF communication officer, education officers, consultants, an art producer, an accounts clerk, a journalist, a banker and an architect. This diversity served one of the purposes of the online questionnaire which was to reach a broader circle of individuals including persons who might not be educators and so might have a different perspective on early childhood education.

Statistical Findings from the Online Questionnaire

Ministry responsible for early childhood education

In some countries, early childhood education, especially for the 0-3 years age bracket, does not form part of the Ministry for Education's portfolio. Research

suggests that, when this is the case, ECE is not usually given its due importance and is not on the priority list of the government's agenda (Felfe & Lalive, 2018). When placed within the remit of the Minister responsible for social policy or social services, childcare (and in some cases even kindergarten) tends to be considered as a social benefit rather than having any educational value: this was one of eight key conclusions reached on the basis of a review of ECEC in twenty countries (OECD, 2016). Payler, Meyer and Humphris (2007) write about how inter-professional learning can benefit different agencies "working within services for children" (p.158). This inter-professional learning can also be implemented in countries where early childhood education is split between two ministries as reported by respondents of this study. However, professionals coming from different ministries and backgrounds might not necessarily have the same "understanding of some of the key concepts in child development" (ibid., p. 158), which could prove to be problematic when it comes to inter-professional learning. To counterbalance this, Payler, et al. (2007) contend that in the United Kingdom, for example, the Department for Education and Skills came up with a document that outlined six areas of competences that individuals working with children should have. This enabled people coming from different professions to work together for the benefits of the child.

Participants of the online questionnaire were asked which Ministry was responsible for early childhood education in the two age brackets of 0-3 and 3-5-year-old children respectively. Participants from all 27-small island states responded to both questions (Figures 4.1 and 4.2):

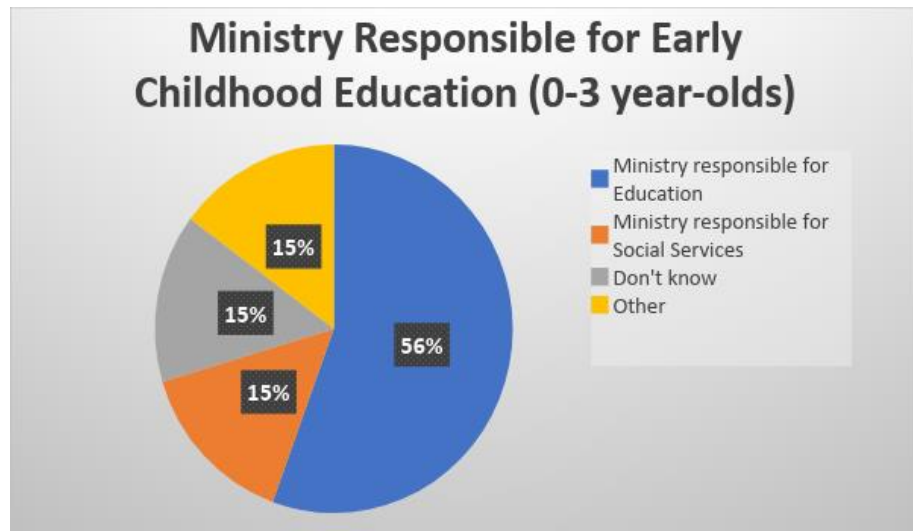


Figure 4.1 – Ministry Responsible for Early Childhood Education (0-3-year-olds). N = 27 SIS

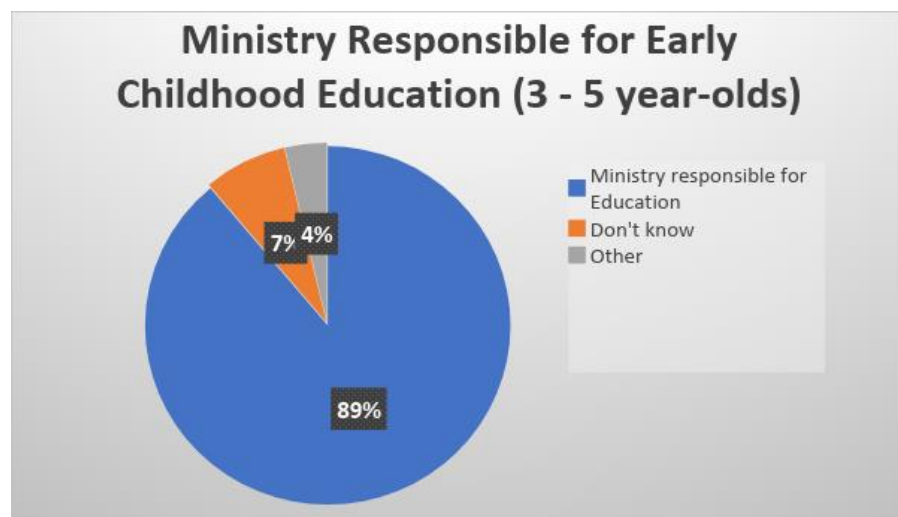


Figure 4.2 – Ministry Responsible for Early Childhood Education (3-5-year-olds). N = 27 SIS

Participants report that government responsibility for early childhood education for children under 3 years of age falls mostly under the Ministry responsible for education (55%). However, there are still some countries where it falls under the Ministry responsible for Social Services (15%). Respondents from four countries said that they did not know which Ministry ECE fell under while four other countries commented that the responsible Ministries were not listed in the questionnaire. The respondents from the Marshall Islands said that early childhood education for 0 -3-year-olds is the responsibility of the family or babysitters;

respondents from Palau said that early childhood education falls under the responsibility of the Community Action Agency; the respondents from St Vincent and the Grenadines said that ECE falls within the purview of the Ministry for Health, while in the Federated States of Micronesia it is a joint responsibility between the Ministry for Education and the Ministry for Social Services.

Looking at the findings in Figure 4.2, participants report that government responsibility for early childhood education for the 3-5 age bracket now mostly falls under the remit of the Ministry for Education in almost all SIS (89%). None of the respondents chose the Ministry for Social Services as their answer. This shows that small island states have come to acknowledge that early childhood education is an important factor and should be seen as essentially a learning activity rather than only dealing with taking care (babysitting) of the children. Malta's early childhood education (0-3) moved under the Ministry for Education as late as 2016. A document by the Ministry for Education and Employment (MEDE, 2015) shows that having the early years cycle under two different ministries only reinforced the split between 'care' and 'education' (p. 19). Being under one ministry helps with the standardisation of the regulation and quality of childcare provided and "is less likely to account for variations in child development performance" (Felfe & Lalive, 2018, p. 2). In fact, in Malta this move has brought about various improvements: the early years cycle now incorporates 0-7 years, rather than 0-5 years; the national standards of private childcare centres, which were last amended in 2006, are being revisited and re-evaluated and a learning outcomes framework that covers the early years cycle was constructed in 2015 (Government of Malta, 2006; Learning Outcomes Framework, 2015). Grenada's early childhood education (0-5), on the other hand, is under the Ministry responsible for Social Services. Respondents from only two

countries out of 27 stated that they did not know which Ministry was responsible for ECE in this age group.

The analysis of the remaining 14 questions pertaining to the online questionnaire will be presented and discussed in the following sections. These will be incorporated with the findings from the other data sets used for this study.

Two Country Case Studies – Malta and Grenada

As discussed in previous chapters, I chose to conduct my research in Malta and Grenada for four main reasons: I have an intimate familiarity with Malta and its ECE sector, since I am Maltese and have been involved with ECE in Malta since 1995; both countries were under British rule for more than a century; English is the official language in Grenada which enabled an easier collection of my data; and contacts were available to make my research in Grenada possible.

This section will give a contextual description of the settings that participated in my research in both countries. Since this information is country sensitive and specific, each country will be discussed separately. This section will also present a detailed account of how the focus groups were conducted and the rationale behind them.

Kindergarten and Childcare Setting in Malta

Purposive sampling was used to select the two participating childcare settings in Malta. I chose to include a state KG and a private childcare setting to give me a broader picture of the elements that influence their pedagogy and to be able to look out for similarities and/or differences. The state kindergarten (KG) setting was part of a primary state school in the south of Malta with a blend of social backgrounds which included a number of immigrants in the classroom, and the

average age of the children was four years. The school was situated on top of a hill overlooking a coastal town. It has a very welcoming entrance with a receptionist to help with all the enquires. The classrooms are well lit and spacious with a big yard on the second floor, and a smaller one on the ground floor. The school was clean and well maintained. The kindergarten class that participated in this study will be called *Ġellewża*. The classroom was spacious and consisted of three round tables, a puppet theatre, a dress up corner with a large mirror, a carpeted area, a math corner, a sink and an interactive whiteboard.

The second setting, which will be called *Perlina*, was a private English-speaking childcare centre in central Malta, a locality where the social status was higher than that of the state KG. This is a privately owned childcare centre which has been operating for over 30 years. It is situated in the basement of a big house with the owners living upstairs. It has a small and narrow yard for the children to play in. The classroom spaces are rather limited. The classroom I was observing for this study was divided in two areas, separated by a wooden gate. One side was for art, manipulative activities, and meal times while the other room was for activities like circle time, physical and cognitive activities. The average age of the children in this group was three years and included a couple of immigrant children.

Kindergarten and Childcare Setting in Grenada

For Grenada, both the state KG and the private childcare centre were chosen for me. The state school was selected by the Permanent Secretary at the Ministry for Education in Grenada, and the KG classroom that participated in my research from this school was chosen by the principal of that particular school; this school will be called *Sapodilla*. This was a rural school and the children came from different social backgrounds. The school was situated on a mountain and had a big open outdoor

space for children to run around in. Opposite the school buildings, in the school grounds, there was a small Catholic chapel. The kindergarten classroom that was chosen for this study was one big room split in half with furniture in between, accommodating two separate kindergarten groups. It had a home corner, building and blocks area, and a reading area. The average age of these children was four years and they were all native Grenadians.

In the case of the private childcare, which will be called *Callaloo*, the contact person who made my visit to Grenada possible was responsible for recommending this participating setting. The Director of the setting then assigned me a classroom of two to three -year-old Grenadian children, with mixed social backgrounds. The childcare setting was made up of three separate buildings: two small rooms on each side of another small room which is topped by the Director's house. It was on a main road going up a mountain. It had a small outdoor space which overlooked green pastures in the valley below. The classroom I was assigned to consisted of a small rectangular room, with two big tables, a home corner and a reading corner.

I started the data collection for this study in Grenada in January 2017, after having piloted my research methods in a setting in Malta. In all, I spent four weeks in that Caribbean country to better acclimatise myself with its culture, traditions and school systems. I also researched and read various items of literature about the country before my visit. Once I returned to Malta, I began my settings field work there, lasting another four weeks in total. During the data collection phase in both countries, I conducted interviews with educators and principals/directors, focus groups with parents, engaged in observations and kept fieldnotes simultaneously in both kindergarten and childcare settings.

Parents' Focus Groups

Four focus groups were conducted as part of the data collection for this study amongst parents of the groups of children that were being observed. Two focus groups were conducted in Grenada (one in *Sapodilla* school and one in *Callaloo* childcare centre).

These proved to be a challenge to set up, especially in the *Callaloo* setting. I was informed by the Director of the childcare setting that parents did not like to come for meetings after school as they had young children to look after and most of them were engaged in paid employment. Another reason, according to the director, was that some of them were not sure what the focus group was going to be about and what I would be asking them, so they were cautious about agreeing to participate. The director also suggested that parents might feel intimidated by the fact that I was Caucasian and so were not comfortable taking part. At the time I was visiting, there was a parents' meeting planned and the director offered me the opportunity to be present and she gave me ten minutes to explain what the focus group would be about. After some negotiation we did manage to agree on a date and time where at least six parents could be present for the one-hour long focus group. On the appointed day, five mothers and one father turned up at the meeting.

In the *Sapodilla* school setting, the educator herself reminded the parents about the focus group and ensured that they were attending. Ten parents were present for this focus group and it included eight mothers and two fathers.

Another two focus groups were then conducted in Malta (one in *Ġellewża* school and one in *Perlina* childcare centre). Acting on the advice of the Vice-principal of the *Ġellewża* school, I conducted the focus group during a Parents' Day

event. This proved to be more convenient for the parents as they would not have to go out of their way to attend, since they would already be at school. Five mothers were present for this focus group. In the case of *Perlina* childcare centre, the focus group took place in the evening after I had sent out an email to the parents for them to choose a date out of four options that would be convenient for them. Six participants attended, all mothers.

The purpose of these focus groups was to give a voice to parents' perspectives about the expectations for their children in early childhood education (ECE). These could be then compared to the educators' views and the findings from my own observations and fieldnotes. The focus group sought to deal with the parents' understanding of the issue of colonial impact, if any, on ECE and whether they felt that there were particular challenges in education because of the fact that they lived on a small island state. The views about the colonial impact can be compared to the interview participants' views while opinion about the impact of living in a small island state can be compared to the responses of the online questionnaire. During the focus groups issues about what constituted quality ECE were also discussed. This could then be analysed and compared to responses of interviewees and online questionnaires. During the actual focus groups, I gave each participant a random number written on a piece of paper and, whenever they took part in the discussion, I could then take note of who was answering the question being asked, without taking down any of their names. This helped compile the transcription of each focus group. Pseudonyms were then used for all participants at the analysis stage: I have given them typical local names, from Grenada and Malta respectively, followed by an 'M' for Maltese participants and a 'G' for participants from Grenada, for example: (*Lora, M*) would be a participant from Malta.

The focus group conversations were organised around seven semi-structured but open-ended questions which helped to start off discussions amongst the participants (Baxter & Jack 2008). The same set of questions were used in both countries, with two exceptions: question five, which included country specific details; and question six, which promoted a conversation about the language spoken at home in each country (Appendix 13). The findings from these four focus groups were analysed using NVivo as discussed in more detail in Chapter Three.

Elements that Influence the Pedagogy and Practice of ECE in SIS

Findings from four data sets: interviews, fieldnotes/observations, focus groups, and a research journal, used to collect data from four early childhood settings, will be presented, analysed and discussed in this section. These will be supported, where relevant with findings from responses from the online questionnaire collected from 27 small island states with 64 respondents. These findings are in response to the first research question for this study:

What elements influence the pedagogy and practice of early childhood education (2 to 5-year-olds) in small island states?

After careful analysis of the various data sets used for this study, these four main categories have been identified and will be discussed individually in this section (See Figure 4. 3):

1. Challenges of ECE on SIS
2. Professionalisation in early childhood education and for educators in this sector
3. A disconnect between rhetoric and practice of pedagogy

4. Rituals in the settings

Eleven different themes have been identified from the data, emergent from the four main categories. The explanation of the identification of these themes and categories is found in Chapter Three. See Figure 4.3:

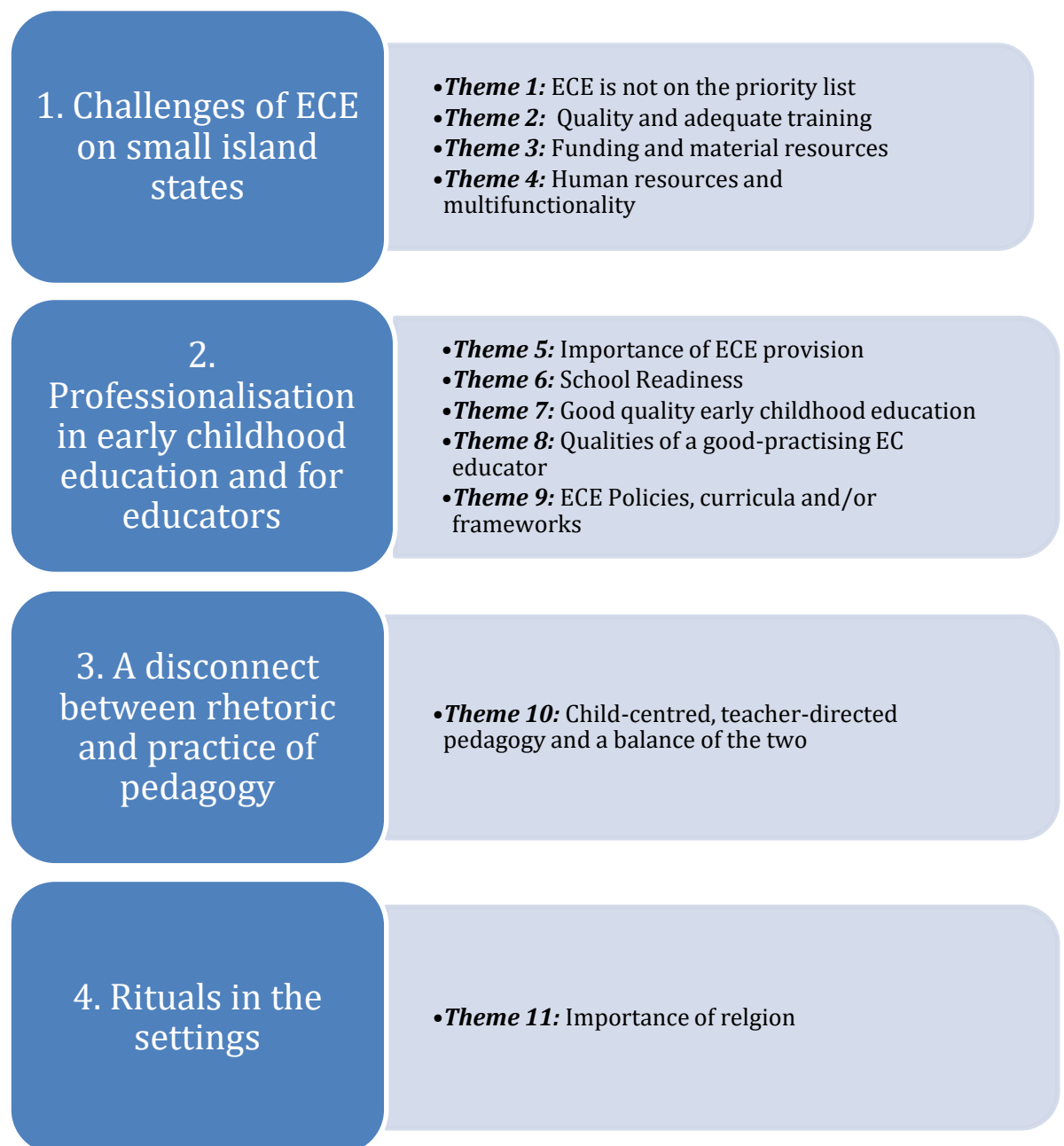


Figure 4.3 –Categories and themes in response to research question one

Themes derived from the above four categories will be presented in this section with quotations from respondents to substantiate the arguments being presented.

1. Challenges of ECE on SIS

There are various challenges that pertain to education in general on small island states. This issue has been discussed in some detail in Chapter Two. Sultana (2006) contends that some universal challenges in small island states include: the relative lack of funding for education; the lack of human resources, which necessitates a multiplicity of roles in the work force; and a lack of material resources. Bacchus (1993) argues that the lack of human resources frequently leads to individuals becoming ‘experts’ without however having the necessary qualifications. As one respondent from Vanuatu states:

Most kindergartens are provided by communities where the teacher is usually a relative of an influential person in the community. Regardless of their educational background, teachers are identified and selected based on whom they know or are related to and not on how qualified one is (Vanuatu 25).

Online questionnaire respondents and focus group participants were asked to discuss their thoughts about whether challenges, if any, facing early childhood education in their country were impacted by its relatively small size and island geography. In the case of the online questionnaire, 54 out of the 64 participants responded to this question, covering 24 of the 27 small island states. Twenty-five respondents agreed that there are challenges pertaining to ECE on SIS. A respondent from Cape Verde sums up the issue of challenges by saying:

Cape Verde is a country with nine islands / nine ‘sub cultures’, nine dialects, etc. Being an island is a challenge: image being nine (Cape Verde 49).

However, 29 respondents felt that small size and islandness had little or no impact on early childhood education in their country:

No, except in so far as the smallness impacts on the economy and the level of poverty of parents and their ability to get their young children to school, whereas the older ones can venture out on their own (Dominica 2).

No, not really. Of course, there are challenges to education but not sure these have anything to do with size (Malta 12).

No, they are partly determined by the educational and cultural system in place (Comoros 42).

No. Many of the problems faced in Antigua are also faced Caribbean wide (Antigua and Barbuda 20).

Such results should not be surprising: the challenges of small size and island geography tend to be less visible except to those who have the benefit and privilege of a comparative perspective. It is only by having experiences of, or ideas about, other (including larger and continental) states that the specific circumstances and effects of smallness and islandness are teased out and brought to focus (Baldacchino, 2008; Hey, 2003; Thorhallsson 2012). It is also worth noting here that different respondents from six SIS had mixed views about this issue.

Parents participating in two focus groups in Grenada had a different answer from the parents taking part in the two focus groups held in Malta. The Grenadian respondents perceived the main challenges on ECE based on the fact that they are a small island state to be lack or inadequacy of resources and staff. These concur with responses of the online questionnaire participants who also agreed that being a small island provided challenges to ECE in terms of untrained staff and inadequate resources. However, the findings of Maltese parents' focus groups show that in one group all six parents agreed that the main concern was competition; while

participants in the other focus group agreed that they did not see any challenges to education as a result of living on a small island state:

No, I don't think that there are any challenges because we are a small island. Ifhem, minn gżira żghira toħrog siġra. (Listen, big trees come out of small islands too). [The participant was eluding to the fact that great and smart people can come out of a small island as well]. (Iris, M).

No, I don't think that we have any challenges. I actually think that we are advancing in everything not just education (Ġanni, M).

I think that we have improved a lot. When you compare what I used to learn when I was young, and what goes on today, it is quite different. It has improved a lot, especially in state schools. (Tereža, M).

The comments above from Maltese parents might reflect the fact that they were in the age bracket of 26 to 34 years of age. They would not have experienced colonialism directly: even though, when they were growing up, and possibly unbeknownst to them, education in Malta still reflected a significant colonial impact. So, when they compared what they experienced at a young age to what their children are experiencing now, they saw very few challenges pertaining to living on a small island state.

The parents in the Grenadian focus groups were also in the 24-34-year age bracket, just like the ones in Malta. However, they did say that they think they experience quite a few challenges in their country because of its small island state status. Age might not be relevant here, but Grenada has an even smaller population than Malta and a lower GDP per capita. Another factor could be that Grenada has been an independent country for ten years less than Malta; so, any colonial impacts would have more likely persevered into the present.

The four themes emerging from this category will be discussed next: the low priority of ECE on the government's agenda; quality and adequate training; lack of

funding, human and material resources; and multifunctionality and competition on small island states. Each theme will be discussed individually.

Theme 1: Early Childhood Education not a priority

One of the challenges that respondents of the online questionnaire saw of significant importance was that early childhood education was not deemed to be high on the government's agenda:

The key challenge is that Early Childhood Care and Education (and Development) is not high on the agenda of the government. There is a lot of lip service paid but, ECCE in Vanuatu is very much community-owned and run – in turn leading to issues of affordability on the part of the parents. There are issues in terms of support to ensure ECCEs have the capacity (both human resources and technical) and resourcing (toys, books, sandpit, etc.) to be able to provide the child with the fullest learning and stimulating environment for their growth and development (Vanuatu 19).

Political will is missing which is essential to make ECE a priority on the agenda. Research proves that ECE is a wise investment affecting all facets of a country's wellbeing. (Federated States of Micronesia 29).

Early childhood education has yet a long way to go but it also requires more attention by the government as opposed to primary or secondary education (Samoa 39).

Currently, for the Solomon Islands, the Ministry is only focusing on children aged five and up. In their opinion, the three and four-year olds will be looked after by the community which I think will be a big challenge here (Solomon Islands 46).

The importance of improving quality education in the age group of 0-3 years, including professional staff, should be given more importance by the government (Malta 10).

Literature confirms the importance of early childhood education and how it improves students' later achievement (OECD, 2012; Felfe & Lalive, 2018; Sloane & Swift, 2000). A study conducted in Germany about the importance of sound early years policies, showed that support should be given to policymakers who are "lobbying for more extensive provision of affordable, good-quality early childcare in countries that currently provide little" (Felfe & Lalive, 2018, p.4). Research also

shows that young children's brains from birth to age five "rapidly develop foundational capabilities on which subsequent development builds" (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000, p. 5). However, as we will see later on in this section, early childhood education is not presently on the priority list of all small state governments as reported by respondents of this study. Having said this, findings show that there are instances where the government of a country has invested in ECE, but the mentality and culture of the country may inhibit the implementation of good quality education, as will be discussed under Theme 2.

Theme 2: Quality and Adequate Training

Online questionnaire respondents also viewed having good quality early childhood education as a challenge faced in their respective countries. Elements that were seen as hindering the achievement of such quality provision were: the island mentality; cultural norms; lack of funding for adequate staff training and a general lack of resources. Here are some of their views:

I would say yes, because although we are aware of high quality practices in Europe in ECEC [early childhood education and care], yet, we keep on practising a pre-primary approach. Our isolation and small island mentality makes us feel safe and without the need to change. We don't feel the pressure of having neighbouring countries who are excelling in the field. We visit other countries, observe good practice, are in awe of it, and when we get back to our island we simply dismiss the practice, as "impossible to emulate" and retreat back to our safe niche, accepting the status quo as the only way that works locally (Malta 4).

I believe there are challenges that we face as a small island, mainly that culturally we are still inclined towards a more prescriptive approach. Children are also very sheltered and not encouraged towards being independent learners. This is contrary to the concept of play in other countries who present children as having the right to choose their own play, making them active participants in their own learning. Foreign literature keeps us in line with other countries, yes, but at the same time some concepts in such literature remain foreign to us because of our island mentality. (Malta 10).

Yes, the geographical distance between islands makes it costly and challenging to train kindergarten teachers, especially when the qualified teachers do not want to move to the rural areas to teach. Moreover, since the kindies [kindergartens] are mainly community based, the remuneration for kindy [kindergarten] teachers are pitiful, resulting in kindies being manned by unqualified and untrained teachers who usually, at most, only complete year 10 education (Vanuatu 25).

Yes, the challenge is that we do not have many opportunities for training and sharing of good practice [in early childhood education] (Cyprus 65).

A challenge we are facing is looking for qualified teachers who have ECE degrees and/or with an Associate Degree with an Early Childhood Certificate which is mandatory. Because we are a small populated island, we have very little chances of finding anyone with expertise. Thus, we hire and require the teachers to attend all necessary courses, and once the teachers acquire their degree, the Ministry for Education recruits them to public schools. This has been going on for ages...it never ends (Palau 52).

From my own experience as an educator, I can concur and sympathise with the respondent from Palau: in the case of Malta, when our university students obtain their degree in education with a focus on the early years, most of them end up in the primary sector instead of in kindergarten, either because there is a lack of staff in those levels, or because it would cost the government a lot more in salaries to employ individuals with a degree rather than with a diploma. In fact, to make up for this, in Malta, at present individuals with an NQF level 4 (a diploma in ECE) certification are being recruited to teach in kindergarten. The practice is a far cry from a previous document that stated that by the year 2015 kindergarten educators should be in possession of a bachelor's degree. An agreement on the reform of the education system between the Malta Union of Teachers (MUT) and the government was described in a local newspaper (Malta Independent, 2007). This agreement had declared that:

By 2015, anyone who works with kindergarten children must be a qualified teacher with a degree and a warrant, as laid down by law. (Malta Independent, 2007, para. 17).

Findings from the parents' focus groups show that only Grenadian parents identified unqualified staff in the early childhood education settings as a result of being a small island state:

Yes, there are challenges. I will start with the first challenge of not having good qualified educators. Within the system, we have people who are not trained. Those are the people who end up in preschool. So, that's a critical challenge. (Neriah, G).

We don't even have the educational background to help children with special needs. In bigger countries, children with special needs are prepared to live a more independent life. Here, it is not like that. (Aaliyah, G).

Take for example the High Scope approach. Yes, we are taking on High Scope. It has its good and its bad, but are we really ready for it here? So, even the policy makers - they have a lot of say as to what happens in EC. I don't think that some of them really understand what EC is about. They need training themselves. Some of the teachers in the classroom need to be trained as well (Yolande, G). [This parent is also an educator].

The views of the above parents show some of the frustration of both educators and parents about the lack of qualified staff in ECE settings that they are encountering because they live on a small island state. This is in agreement with research that argues that small states suffer from a limited number of 'highly trained personnel' or 'specialists' (Bacchus, 1993; Sultana, 2006;). Farrugia (1991) also argues that the lack of human resources is a 'constant source of frustration in small countries' (p. 585). This is by no means an issue for just small island states: Payler and Georgeson (2013b) point out that, even in England, the early childhood sector has had a long history of relatively low levels of qualified staff (Waters & Payler, 2015). This inadequate level of qualifications was leading to low self-esteem in early childhood educators:

[Low levels of qualifications] influence both other professionals' perceptions of the knowledge and skills of early years staff, and early years staff's perception of themselves in relation to professionals from other agencies. (Payler & Georgeson, 2013b, p. 381)

The authors also contend that early childhood education in England is still struggling for “adequate funding, pay, conditions of service, qualifications and status” (p. 381). If this is still happening in a large and developed country such as England, one can only imagine the impact of these challenges in small, sometimes still developing, island states. The last comment by *Yolande* also concurs with the view of respondents from the online questionnaire who stated that ECE was not on the priority list of the government (Theme 1), and that early childhood education needed to be prioritised.

Theme 3: Funding and material resources

Lack of funding in early childhood education was another concern that emerged from both respondents to the online questionnaire and from focus group respondents. The general feeling was that governments did not invest enough in ECE also because presumably it is not a priority policy, as discussed under Theme 2.

Here are some excerpts from the online questionnaire respondents which show the frustration that these respondents feel because they either lack funds or lack trained staff to sustain early childhood education programmes in their respective countries:

Yes, to the extent that geography and size make the countries more vulnerable to risks from natural and man-made hazards which affect the ability of parents and the country to provide adequately for early childhood care. More often than not, the already small budget allocations for ECE are the ones cut when disaster strikes (Marshall Islands 22).

The Republic of Palau is currently receiving 100% operational and personnel costs from the US Aid for preschool age from three to five including the salary for all the staff. There is uncertainty of how long the funding will continue to support the programme for the children and parents in Palau and the unexpected could happen...with no more funds to operate the programme. Will the Republic of Palau be able to sustain and pick up the cost? (Palau 52).

The major challenge of our programmes resides in our ability to financially sustain the ECE programmes (Federated States of Micronesia 29).

When the country has limited resources for development, people's wages are limited, employment opportunities are limited, and transport cost has an impact on whether one travels on any given day to and from school or work. When you are employed to do a job, you may have to do all the related activities that produce the desired outcomes, because the state or other employers cannot afford to employ the support workers (Dominica 2).

Yes, mainly early childhood education is underfunded, and the staff overworked. Some [educators] are not even trained properly because of the lack of funds (Maldives 8).

This was also of concern to educators involved in this study, especially the ones in Grenada because, as I observed through my fieldnotes and observations, the lack of funding was also leading to a shortage of adequate materials for the educators to work with in their settings. The resources at both the state kindergarten and the private childcare setting were very limited. In one instance, a child in the class I was observing was sent to another classroom to borrow aprons and paintbrushes to use for a painting activity because her class did not have enough resources, or they were no longer fit to use. This was not a sharing arrangement, as the educator pointed out, but rather, a case of torn aprons and broken brushes that could not be replaced because of a lack of available funding. The educator also reported that some children might not have the money to buy materials needed for kindergarten (*Fieldnotes: January 18, 2017*). It was also observed that only a small number of toys was made available for the children to play with, some of which were broken. In my fieldnotes I noted that, in one setting in Grenada, the resources available for 18 children consisted of a small plastic garage, and a small plastic basin (30cm in diameter) with a few toys in it including: two dolls, one without a head and the other without an arm; a couple of blocks; part of a train track with no train; and a few other odds and ends (*Fieldnotes: January 23, 2017*). This situation

often resulted in children fighting over the few resources available which in turn led the teachers to reprimand and discipline the children:

After snack, children could play as they wished for a little while. Unfortunately, there are not a lot of resources to play with, so some children tried to use their imagination by going under tables and using chairs as trains. The teacher and the assistant in this setting reprimanded the children for doing this and sent them to sit at the table with a colouring book instead. (Fieldnotes: January 23, 2017).

According to McKee and Tisdell (1990), various small island developing states encounter similar challenges in education: namely, a limited number of school supplies, textbooks and unqualified or untrained educators. This is a condition that may be shared with larger, developing states:

Problems noted in education in the South Pacific islands include shortages of textbooks and learning aids, short supplies of schools and school buildings, underqualified teachers, lack of qualified and experienced educational administrators, and uneconomic teacher training programmes. These are problems in most developing countries. (p. 80)

It is tough and challenging for SIS to viably produce their own educational materials and resources (such as flashcards, reading and text-books and worksheets) because of the absence of economies of scale and a limited population. It is not cost-effective or realistic to produce these materials and keep them updated (Sultana, 2006). Jules (2012) contends that structural handicaps to the development of small island states usually includes: "... limited human and natural resources, nature of their economies, cost per capita of services and dependence on trade" (pp. 6-7).

Data in this study suggested that this predicament seemed to be more the case for the two childcare settings in Grenada than in Malta. This might be due to the fact that Grenada has a much smaller population as well as a lower level of economic development than Malta: so, it is less feasible for Grenada to produce and

finance its own educational material which would relate better to its children's needs.

In the case of Malta, its accession to the European Union since 2004 may have opened doors for educators to be able to secure more resources at competitive prices or to financially support production of local material. However, Malta still imports a considerable quantity of educational resources and these imported resources may still prove culturally and linguistically inappropriate to Maltese children. Sultana (2006) argues that educational materials and resources that are often imported from foreign countries tend to implicitly carry with them a foreign curriculum. They do not usually come in the native language of the SIS that is using them and may not comply with the traditions, cultures and beliefs of these states. This relates well to what Hickling-Hudson (2006) and Coard (1985) contend when they argue that curriculum material, including reading books, worksheets and textbooks, introduced by colonisers, were not always relevant to the country. One main difference that I have found through my analysis was that, in Malta, one can find readily available books written in Maltese, the national language, for children as opposed to Grenada. Some have been translated from foreign books, while others were written by Maltese authors depicting some aspects of Maltese culture. In Grenada, I did find books by Grenadian authors in bookstores. These were all written in English and were not necessarily related to the Grenadian culture (*Research Journal, January 28, 2017*). Here are some responses from Grenadian parents about the issue of inadequate or lack of resources in general:

Resources in terms of material, exposure to relevant materials, we still have dolls which are not necessarily relevant to our culture, those kinds of things, text books, reading books. We do have interjections of local books but not for ECE. I think that as a small island state, resources are a critical challenge. So, those are some of the challenges that are real (Neriah, G).

One of the challenges in terms of adequate resources is the lack of a proper playground. We know that gross motor skills are very crucial for the child at this level and we don't have the materials, we don't have the equipment, so sometimes we see children climbing the bannister, climbing the gate and we want to tell them to get down, we know it is harmful, that they can hurt themselves, but as teachers we step back because we feel that they have the need to climb and swing, that is why they do it because they have to develop their gross motor skills. They are not provided with the materials, so they make up their own. It's one challenge of a small island state (Aaliyah, G). [This parent was an educator as well as a parent in this focus group].

I think there are challenges in terms of the type of text and material. Sometimes, you can notice here that the teachers have to do a lot [of resources] themselves. They cannot rely on the government or the Ministry for Education to give them a lot of the things they need to teach with. So, I think that is one of the challenges of small island states. Our children should be getting better than what they are getting now (Blossom, G).

In fact, the educator in one Grenadian setting claimed that very often she made the resources herself in her own time or bought them out of her own pocket (*Observation notes: January 30, 2017*). During a conversation with the Director of the private childcare centre in Grenada, I was informed that parent fees to private service providers is minimal. The staff salaries, resources and costs of maintenance of the building must all come out from this source of revenue. She went on to say that, due to lack of funds, the building of another classroom in her centre had to stop mid-way (*Research Journal: January 27, 2017*).

Although no generalisation can be made from the findings presented above, there are common factors impacting small island states that are shared by many of the 27 participating countries and the 12 Grenadian parents that took part in the focus groups.

In contrast, two out of six Maltese parents participating in one of the two focus groups did not consider funding and material resources as a challenge that impacted education in Malta because of its size. What they perceived as the major

challenge was the competition amongst parents and children to achieve better grades in the hope of getting good jobs in the future:

I think it's because there is competition being on a small island and we try and drive our children to learn to read and write at a very young age. I don't agree that they should be doing this at this age, but it still happens. Even with respect to homework. They get a lot of it even at a young age (Antida, M).

Yes, we send homework with the KG2. I don't agree with it, but we do it. My heart goes out when putting it in their bag. It's the system I think, and I don't know if it will ever change. The sense of competition is always there, not just within the system but also amongst parents (Ines, M). [This parent is an educator].

Theme 3 discussed the findings of the study in relation to lack of funding and resources found in small island states. The next theme will present and discuss lack of human resources and its relation to multifunctionality.

Theme 4: Human Resources and Multifunctionality

Online questionnaire participants were asked to discuss if, living in a small island state resulted in multifunctionality amongst the country's labour force. Responses to this question were obtained from 53 out of the 64 responses to the online questionnaire, covering 23 out of the 27 SIS. According to Sultana (2006), multifunctionality: "...is a direct result of the nature of labour markets in small states, where some of the sectors have to perform the whole range of tasks that their counterparts do in larger states" (p. 32).

For the purpose of this study, I will be discussing the responses of those who agreed that they experience multifunctionality in their workforce (N = 40). The responses of those who said that they did not feel that they multi-tasked, did not elaborate on the subject or else said that presently they did not experience this (N = 13). These were not analysed further.

A factor that defines a small island state is the paucity or lack of human resources (Jules, 2012). It is important to acknowledge that human resources may be too scarce and valuable in SIS to be wasted, nor may there be enough and regular demand for certain tasks or skills to warrant all year-round employment. This in turn leads to multifunctionality, argue Bray and Fergus (1986). As one respondent put it:

Yes, being small and being an island are two facts that pressure you to be multi-tasked and creative...it's a survival attitude (Cape Verde 49).

Respondents reported that, in their opinion, the lack of human resources in early childhood education in SIS was mainly manifested in the pressures brought to bear on the teaching cadres. Here are some of the responses:

Yes, although each person is provided with a job description, it is still the norm that teachers often complain that they are pressured and have to take on the responsibility of others who fail to do their part (St. Kitts & Nevis 14).

Yes, [as deputy head] I work in: administration; fund-raising to support pupils; parents and community involvement; hands-on classroom management; and learning and teaching differentiation (Cyprus, 65).

Yes, because of under-staffing. On the other hand, some centres have a small amount of child enrolment, so it may not be necessary to employ persons for every area of work, so one has to multi-task (Grenada 18).

True, the major challenge across the Federated States of Micronesia has to do with the shortage of teachers. This reality alone reveals the burden and challenge imposed on service providers at any grade level (Federated States of Micronesia 35).

The above statements apply to multifunctionality in a rather general way. However, most of the respondents who opted to answer this question seemed to discuss preschool educators who, in their opinion, had to wear many hats in their line of work. Here are some of the respondents' views:

Yes. Depending on the place of employment. A pre-school teacher may find herself responsible for meal preparations or general cleaning as well as teaching her class (Antigua and Barbuda 20).

Yes, at times multi-tasking can be quite a challenging task especially for ECCE teachers. They have to supervise kids who really need their attention due to their young age and at the same time ensure that they are learning (Fiji 33).

Yes, we take on more tasks within the pre-school than we would in Australia [my home country]. We teach the children and also manage finances, training local teachers, registration, etc. In Australia, this would be split into different roles, e.g. teacher, director, accountant (Vanuatu 41).

The teachers not only teach in the classrooms, but they perform other tasks and responsibilities too inside and outside the classroom. They also become parents and judges, pastors, cooks, cleaners and councillors. (Tonga 16).

It is understood that there are times when we have to wear many hats. I am a Family and Community Service Manager with eight staff members. Sometimes teachers need emergency leave...someone has to step up and take care of the children in the classroom of that teacher. We scramble at times to find someone who is available to step in to help out. We would also help out in monitoring the children in the classroom or when riding the bus or cook if it is necessary. (Palau 52).

The above comments from the online questionnaire responses show that coming from a small island state can lead to multifunctionality due to a shortage of human resources or because of the limited or low enrolment of children in the early years and so, it would not be feasible to employ more workers when the ones already employed can multitask.

Another reason given by respondents as to why they have to multifunction at work is the lack of funds available, thus causing them to have limited resources especially in the education sector:

When the country has limited resources for development, people's wages are limited, employment opportunities are limited, and transport cost has an impact on whether one travels on any given day to and from school or work. When you are employed to do a job, you may have to do all the related activities that produce the desired outcomes, because the state or other employers cannot afford to employ the support workers (Dominica 2).

Yes, as there are constraints of high labour costs which largely affect small privately run early childhood providers which in turn leads to multi-tasking (Barbados 32).

Yes, limited financial and human resources demand well-coordinated team work and multi-tasking. However, the extent of needs at early childhood centres, coupled with long term delays in addressing critical problems, creates a culture of crisis management (St Lucia 37).

The responses above suggest that the lack of material and financial resources in small island states might be another cause for multifunctionality in the workforce. This will be discussed further on in this chapter.

The absence of professional experts in the education sector with special reference to early childhood seems to be of concern to some of the respondents of the online questionnaire. They reported that, because of this lack of expertise, people have to multitask and fill in these gaps, even though they might not be fully trained or qualified for the job. Sultana (2006, 2008) agrees that small island states tend to have limited numbers of highly trained personnel perhaps due to the limited population in some cases as well as economic and human resource issues. Here are some of the views of respondents on this matter:

There seem to be few people who are experts in the field [ECE] and this demands that these few people try to meet all the needs. For example, when a new project, change in curriculum or the like is suggested, there is always a lack of investment in human resources. Few experts are employed and most of them are part-timers (meaning that their main focus is on other work) (Malta 4).

One disadvantage is that, in a country where there is limited expertise, explicitly in early childhood education, professionals from other fields are roped in and thus ECEC may not necessarily be addressed correctly and appropriately. For any individual having multiple roles, there could be the issue of 'conflict of interest' – for example, designing programmes of study versus assessing programmes by other entities (Malta 11).

This is a feature of small states. There are insufficient resources and capacity to permit specialisation. Thus, persons in various productive sectors have to be multi-skilled. The result can be a loss of efficiency or quality of output (Iceland 31).

Yes, I greatly feel the pressure to multi-task because I know that this island does not have the other types of experts and I feel that I have to answer for

them – as I am the “best educated person” around (Federated States of Micronesia 9).

As the quotes above show, some of the participants viewed this lack of expertise as something negative because at times the persons will not necessarily be fully trained or qualified for the position that they occupy.

As a person who comes from a small island state, I myself have experienced this multifunctionality in my career, especially when I was in the field of early childhood education. As I advanced in my studies about early childhood education to further my career, I too was increasingly considered an ‘expert’ in the field of ECE.

Twenty out of the 40 online questionnaire respondents who chose to answer the question about challenges in education on SIS agreed that there is a lack of expertise, especially in the field of early childhood education, and this in turn has led to individuals having to perform more than one task:

Multitasking is a general situation in small island states. It is not possible to have specialised persons for all tasks (Malta 13).

There are insufficient resources and capacity to permit specialisation in small island states. Thus, persons in various sectors have to multi-task (Iceland 31).

Findings from the observations and fieldnotes carried out in four childcare settings in Malta and Grenada confirmed that the educators were not only teachers but also the cleaners, feeders, carers and administrators (*Observation notes:*

January/February and March/April 2017):

Children were playing with small blocks at a table while others were playing with playdough on another. The educator was carrying out an activity with a small group of children on the third table. One of the children playing with blocks had an accident and wet himself. The educator had to stop the activity

and take care of the child while also cleaning up after him (Fieldnotes March 6, 2017).

It was snack time. The educator helped the children take out their lunches and open up any containers that they were unable to open themselves. Since some of the children were under three years of age they needed some help with feeding, so the educator does that. She also cleans up the tables and sweeps the floor after they are done. On one instance, the Director of the centre came and stayed with the children during snack time so that the educator could have a break (Fieldnotes February 8, 2017).

Bray and Fergus (1986) contend that there are some small island states where the economy needs personnel to take on available jobs but there may not be enough skilled persons around to fill up these positions, so individuals will have to resort to multitasking. In larger states, you can have more specialised staff, so each person can stick to a narrow skill portfolio for most of the time, whereas in smaller states, staff have to be more multifunctional due to the lack of human resources. Moreover, such human resources as may exist, may need to be spread more widely and so more thinly on the ground.

2. Professionalisation in Early Childhood Education and for Educators

The need for the professionalisation of early childhood education and its educators is the second main category to emerge from the data collected. It stood out quite strongly as I analysed the data collected from the online questionnaire, the interviews with educators in the field, and focus groups with parents. As discussed earlier, there was a broad consensus that ECE was not a priority in most governments' agendas, and that, in a number of the small island states participating in this study, there was inadequate training for individuals employed in this sector. Here, the transition from "child-minders to professionals" was yet to take place (Baldacchino, Doiron, Gabriel, Roach O'Keefe, & McKenna, 2015, p. 1). A research study conducted in four childcare centres in Canada, stresses on the

importance of professionalisation in ECE and how educators can transition from child-minders to professionals through adequate training (Baldacchino et al., 2015). The traditional role of early childhood educators is being altered as educators are held accountable for a new set of expectations regarding their proficiency and knowledge about child development and the construction of stimulating educational environments and learning opportunities for the children in their care, as is also pointed out in research conducted in New Zealand by Dalli (2008). Sheridan, Edwards, Marvin, & Knoche, (2009) have also conducted a global meta-analysis of the literature about professionalisation in ECE and support the above argument. These expectations have generated a higher sense of accountability and responsibility on educators, who are now transitioning from traditional early childhood settings as places to ‘baby-sit’, to a new idea of early childhood education where learning takes place through play (Dalli, 2008; Simpson, 2010). Waters and Payler (2015) go on to argue that “one of the key factors considered to contribute to quality of early years education is the quality of its workforce, including levels of qualification and training” (p. 161, see also Siraj-Blatchford, Sylva, Laugarne, Milton, & Charles, 2005).

Early childhood education has gained momentum during the past decade and has attracted greater interest among service-providers, parents and policy makers. Yet, Britto, Yoshikawa and Boller (2011), in their study about quality of early childhood education in the global context, argue that more emphasis has been placed on building early childhood settings and making them accessible to all, rather than on the quality of the programmes implemented therein: “In the past, there has been greater focus on building access to ECD [early childhood development] programme

services with less emphasis placed on quality, particularly when programmes are taken to scale in low- and middle-income countries” (Britto et al., 2011, p. 1).

The same authors also argue that, due to a general lack of investment in ECE by governments, not all children have access to good quality early childhood education programmes and that, when there is a lack of funding, both the quality of programmes and the training of educators tend to suffer (see also Yoshikawa, McCartney, Myers, Bub, Lugo-Gil, Knaul, & Ramos, 2007). Global research on how to increase quality in early childhood settings, contends that the way forward is to secure quality ECE by having:

Enhanced staff development, increased quality improvement, appropriate measures of accountability, and expanded funding to serve more children and families (Shonkoff 2010, p. 362).

Payler and Georgeson (2013a) contend since 1988 the aim of the English government policy was to increase ‘professionalism’ and qualifications in the ECE sector (p. 46). Shonkoff (2010) also claims that further investigation, innovation and research are essential. These would “position current best practices as a promising starting point, not a final destination” (p. 362). Both good quality provision and research are important, as there is still more to be discovered about the impact of the early years’ experience on the developing brain (Shonkoff, 2010). Dalli, White, Rockel, Duhn, Buchanan, Davidson, and Wang, (2011) claim that: “the overwhelming consensus across research is that the role of the teacher is of primary significance” (p. 3). Therefore, it is critical that the educators are well-trained as the pedagogy introduced by the educator in these early years will continue to influence the lives of these children later on in life. As Fox and Rutter (2010), researchers from the US and UK, contend:

To borrow an analogy from economics, by investing early and well in our children's development, we increase the rate of return later in life and in so doing improve not only the lives of individuals but of societies as well (p. 36).

Samples of statements from respondents to the online questionnaire, as well as participants in interviews and focus groups, together with excerpts from my fieldnotes and observations, substantiate the above issues in the themes that follow, as relevant. Five themes that emerged after analysing the findings about professionalisation in ECE and for educators were the following:

- a) Importance of ECE provision
- b) School-readiness
- c) Good quality early childhood education
- d) Qualities of a good-practising, early childhood educator
- e) ECE policies, curricula and/or frameworks

Theme 5: Importance of ECE Provision

The issue of the importance of ECE provision was discussed during interviews with ten individuals (six in Malta and four in Grenada), including early childhood educators from the private childcare settings, kindergarten educators from the state schools, and directors and principals from both settings. A similar question was asked to the respondents of the online questionnaire. However, respondents of the online questionnaire were given a multiple-choice question and asked to choose one out of the following statements that was most relevant to them:

1. The provision of licensed early childhood education and kindergarten enables parents of young children to participate actively and more fully in the labour force.
2. Licensed early childhood education and kindergarten encourages children to socialise, interact and learn with and from other children.
3. Licensed early childhood education and kindergarten is a waste of time and money: children of a young age should stay at home.

Statement three was omitted for participants in the interviews. This statement was replaced with the following:

- To promote order and discipline from an early age

The rationale behind this different approach was that the online questionnaire was aimed at a more general public while the interviews were conducted with individuals who worked in the field of early childhood and the statements were meant as an invitation for discussion.

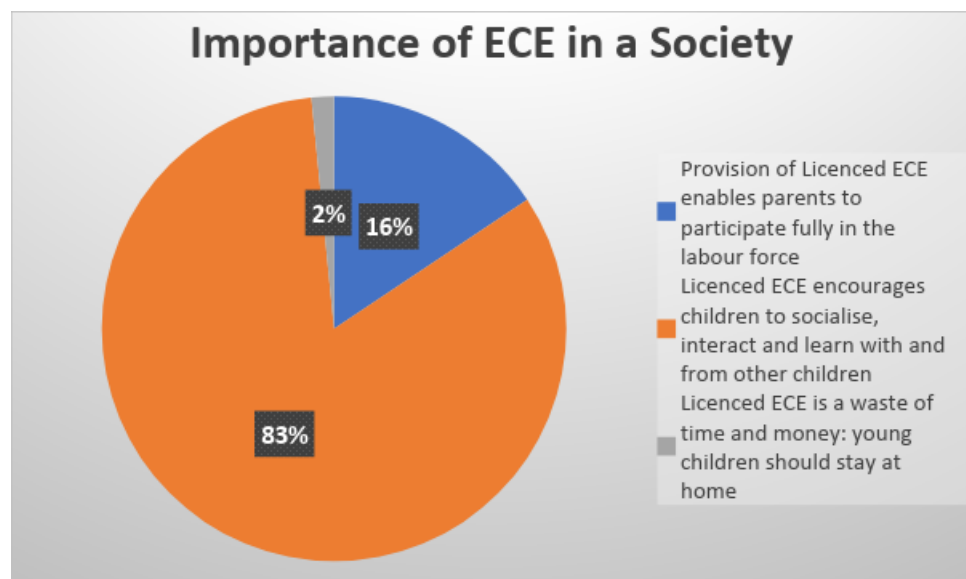


Figure 4.4 – Importance of ECE in society. N = 64 participants

Figure 4.4 shows the responses as percentages of the online questionnaire responses. Fifty-three out of 64 respondents (83%) chose the second statement and agreed that licensed early childhood and kindergarten does encourage children to socialise, interact and learn with and from each other. Ten respondents agreed with the first statement that the provision of early childhood education would enable parents to participate actively and more fully in the workforce (16%). Only one individual from the 64 persons who participated in the online questionnaire agreed with statement number three, that ECE was a waste of money.

Responses from educators, principals and directors from Malta and Grenada were similar to those of online questionnaire respondents. In fact, all ten interviewees agreed with the second statement, that of encouraging children to socialise, interact and learn with and from each other. However, in the case of interview participants, there were some participants who opted to choose more than one statement apart from the second one: three of them agreed that the first statement of enabling parents to join the workforce was important too.

Research shows that childcare settings were initially set up to cater for the increasing workforce and to enable women to join it (Heckman, 1974; Lascarides & Hinitz, 2013). The Government of Malta introduced a Free Childcare Scheme in 2013 to working parents/guardians and parents who were studying full time. The purpose of this scheme was to encourage more mothers to join the workforce after giving birth (Employment and Training Corporation, 2014). The Minister for Education, the honourable Mr Evarist Bartolo contends that: “The scheme, now in its third year, aims to increase female participation in the labour market” (Bartolo, 2017). So, it was surprising to note that although nine of the ten interviewees were

female, only three indicated that childcare settings in the society were important to enable females to join the workforce. *Lora M* suggests that:

For a country to have a work force that is continuously increasing, the more childcare centres we have the more women will have the opportunity to go out to work. But for me having a large workforce is not my main concern. It's what benefits the child that's more important.

Seven of the ten participants – four from Grenada – thought that the last statement (to promote order and discipline from an early age) was equally important. In fact, some of the interviewees pointed out that you could consider the three statements as progressive, one leading to the other.

One of the most important reasons for having a good quality, licensed early childhood setting is that it encourages children to interact and learn from each other (Black, Walker, Fernald, Anderson, DiGirolamo, & Lu, 2016). Vygotsky also believed that children learn mostly through their social interactions and through their culture (Chaiklin, 2003). Moreover, Felfe & Lalive (2018) in their study of Germany childcare settings and their benefits to children state that:

Boys benefit significantly more from attending ECC than girls across all development dimensions. In fact, ECC attendance reduces the gap between boys and girls in language and socio-emotional skills by approximately one-half and the gap in motor skills by approximately one-third. (p. 42)

The statements from interviewees that follow show that it was important for them that all children are offered an opportunity to access and benefit from early childhood education as this enabled the child to socialise, interact and learn from their peers. Here are some examples:

I find that number two forms the foundation for children. So, I think you have to encourage them to interact and socialise, apart from the other things that

you want them to learn. Because if they socialise properly they can go out in the workforce and produce good citizens (Shaniyah, G).

I think it is important because the KG or preschool setting will help the child to develop holistically. That really helps them to either improve or develop or gain some form of self-confidence. It helps them to be trustworthy and so on. It also helps, one key aspect, to develop their brain for learning. (Nadisha, G).

The child needs to socialise and interact with other children...They will get an experience in socialising, meeting other children that are like them. They sometimes speak faster, they learn the language faster and they learn through imitation (Deja, G).

I think it helps the children to build confidence and interact with other children. If a child is at home, they will not learn much, but being in an environment with other children and interacting, they learn to play and keep going from there (Tonya, G).

I think it's important for children at a young age, that they do not only go to school to learn but to interact with other children and to get on with each other. I think it is healthier than staying at home and all they do is watch television. (Dolor, M).

I chose number two. I think this is the one that struck me and I think is the most valid, not only in KG but also in the primary years, because we have children coming from different cultures and there is a need for them to socialise, to share things between themselves, to take part in team work and to have peer learning (Xandru, M).

I agree with number two because learning certain social skills when they are young, helps them to be aware of their surroundings and they have to learn life skills like sharing, empathy, being able to live with other people. I think the younger they are, the better they will learn (Lora, M).

The above comments show that there is a general agreement amongst participants from both Malta and Grenada. They all see early childhood education as important for children mostly to socialise and interact and to learn from each other. However, one can also note that participants from Grenada stress the fact that children should attend childcare settings or KG to be able to learn. *Nadisha G* specifically points out that: *“It prepares them for school, elementary school, KG, you know”*. Malta based participants were not as keen to emphasise this point. The issue of school-readiness will be discussed in the next theme.

Theme 6: School readiness

Bertram and Pascal (2002), who led the Accounting Early for Lifelong Learning project, argue that the term ‘school readiness’ is too limiting and underestimates the holistic development of the child. In their definition of school readiness, they therefore do not emphasise academic skills such as literacy and numeracy as being the pivotal issues. Rather, they view social and emotional skills as being more critical to a child becoming school ready.

According to a meta-analysis carried out in the United Kingdom by the Professional Association for Childcare and Early Years (PACEY, 2013), ranging from childminders and nursery workers to parents and primary school teachers, there are many variations to the definition of school-readiness. Some offer a narrow interpretation and focus on the cognitive and educational development of the child (PACEY, 2013). Others subscribe to pedagogical definitions which focus on “children’s social and emotional development as being more important than their cognitive, educational development at this early stage” (PACEY, 2013, p. 3; See also Brown, 2018). Heartland Head Start (2011) define ‘school-readiness’ as: “children possessing the skills, knowledge, and attitudes necessary for success in school and for later learning and life.” (n.p.). According to Whitebread and Bingham (2011), there is no definite agreement as to what school-readiness means, because: “there is no agreement [between professionals and policy makers] upon what young children should be prepared for” (p. 1). Moss (2016) on the other hand defines school-readiness as:

...simple and linear, assuming the child and her [his] learning follows predetermined sequential and predicate stages. It is monologic, with one-way communication from higher to lower. (p. 356)

During the focus groups with parents, the concept of school-readiness was discussed and explained to parents as defined by Bertram and Pascal (2002). It was thus offered to the parents to mean both the academic and social skills of the child. The rationale behind this question was to explore if parents thought of school-readiness as being important so that their children will be ready for formal schooling or else to give their children a set of social skills that could be used in compulsory schooling. Their expectations and perspectives could influence and put pressure on pedagogies and practices in early childhood settings. Findings from the four parents' focus groups conducted in Malta and Grenada suggest that, for 20 out of 24 parents, school-readiness meant that the children had a basic understanding of reading, writing and mathematics when they left the pre-school/kindergarten setting and that they are ready for the next school grade in a largely academic sense. Here is a sample of the responses of parents who elaborated on this issue:

Yes, school readiness is important to me because you have expectations, right? When they leave here they are supposed to be able to do certain things. So, did they fulfil those expectations? They should be able to write and to read and that is the input of the school (Aaliyah, G).

Yes, school readiness was an important factor in me choosing this preschool. I want my child to be able to read and write when she goes to kindergarten (Zuri, G).

Yes, school readiness is always at the back of your head when you are choosing a school. How important was it? Yes, important. What was more of a concern was how it was actually taught at this level. So, is there a way of getting them ready for math, English, getting them ready for those basic things? Yes, that was a serious consideration (Neriah, G).

Yes, I think it is important and that the child needs to be prepared for the upper grades. For example, in KG2 [kindergarten 2] they should start having less time for play and more time for structured learning. I used to send him to a childcare centre and even there in his second year, just before transitioning to KG, they were preparing them for this transition (Iris, M).

Yes, it is an important factor. It's the least I expect from this setting to teach my daughter the basics of reading, writing and mathematics. My daughter didn't even converse when she started at two years three months. Her

vocabulary was very limited, and they've helped her go a long way (Frida, M).

Yes. It's like school-readiness is the basis for the start of school. At this setting, they are touching on certain things that are necessary for the children's growth and when it is time for them to actually start working on things academic they are going to do it and I do feel that here (Carmen, M).

The above comments relate well to what Meisels (1999) referred to as the empiricist view to school-readiness. This view offers children the necessary knowledge, skills and experiences needed for compulsory schooling.

However, the analysis of the focus groups also shows that the four parents who did not feel that school-readiness in a largely academic sense was important at this young age were from Malta. It was more important to them that their children were happy, learning through play and feeling loved:

I don't think I had any particular expectations. I sent her here so that she would learn through play and I am not expecting her to come back home and read a book to me or write her name. I don't want to put that pressure on her, she is still so young. For me even seeing her painting is enough. She is enjoying her childhood. She is still learning, but through play (Maria, M).

No, I was more interested in him being happy to go to school and to feel loved and make new friends (Pawla, M).

No not really. I'm trusting these educators to give the best to him, but I believe that readiness is something that every child will develop in a different way and at different times. All depends on their state of development (Stella, M).

No not really. I don't have any expectation for my son when he leaves the setting. We didn't set any limits. He's attending this setting because I know that he will get that something extra which he won't be getting at home with regards to education (Tereza, M).

The study reports that the above parents' perspectives about school-readiness also effected their choice of the setting or school. Parents' comments reported in this study suggest that the choice of the setting for their children was paramount to them, be it for cognitive or social skills development. The question

about why they chose a particular setting actually opened up the focus group discussions. The study suggests that parents felt that the pedagogy of the school or private childcare that they chose for their child was one that they valued highly. Some opted for discipline and structured activities while others viewed play-based learning as an important factor. The following comments are indicative of the parents' views from Malta and Grenada:

I choose this school because a relative of mine ran the school, so I was sure that our daughter would be taken care of. My focus was a lot about play. However, because of the nature of the system, there was rigidity, and a lot of quick disciplinary techniques that were not necessarily the best. I think that the role of play was lacking in that school. However, I could not blame the school for that as that's what the system is built on (Neriah, G).

Before sending my child to this particular pre-school, I had no previous knowledge of its curriculum, activities etc. But one day I decided to visit the school and I was immediately impressed by the way the teacher was conducting her class; the tone of her voice and the overall way she was operating in the class room. I also liked that, although ABCs and 123s were being taught, religious activities such as praying, and singing were also encouraged. (Zuri, G).

When I came here, I felt that my child would be more welcome. I also looked at the grades that the children get as they grow older. In my opinion, they had very good results here. The impression I got was that this is going to be like a second home to him (Louisa, M).

This school believed in play-based activities. I have also lived in the United States for a while where they enjoy free play, and I want the free play for my son till the age of five - six. I want children to enjoy their childhood. I think we feed them with too much information. I think they need to express themselves in their first formative years (Carmen, M).

It is important to note here that in Malta there is a ballot system for admission into church schools. It determines the admission of children at kindergarten 1 and 2, at Year 1 Primary and at Form 1 Secondary levels (Secretariat for Catholic Education, 2017). This system was first established in 1995 and then revised in 2010 (Secretariat for Catholic Education, 2017). It was interesting to hear the views of three participants from a Maltese state school when they were asked

about the school of their choice for their child. They all agreed that it was not their first preference to send their children to a state school. If they had a choice, they would have opted for a church school. As *Maria* states:

I wanted my child in a church school as they are stricter and as a school they have more attention and even as far as education the church school doesn't have the pressure from the Government not to teach certain things at younger ages. The church schools keep on teaching if the child shows that she can handle it (Maria, M).

In my opinion, the fact that these parents think more highly of church schools is based on the common knowledge that the children in church schools do better in exams as they are driven harder, in spite of the fact that they have less qualified teachers and that research shows that children need and ought to learn at their own pace of development (Sultana, 2001; 2006; Wien, 2014; Wood, 2009). On the other hand, another parent was adamant that her son would not go to a church school because of her experience being brought up in one:

More than anything I did not want my son to go to a church school, because I went to a church school myself, and I have friends who have children in church schools and they are too academic oriented (Carmen, M).

This section has discussed the views of parents about school-readiness and the importance this had in them choosing a particular setting for their young children. The quality of early childhood education will be discussed in the following theme.

Theme 7: Good Quality Early Childhood Education

There are various definitions of what good/high quality early childhood education means. Payler and Davis (2017) argue that “the term quality is itself contested by policy makers and those in practice” (p. 12) According to the OECD

(2017), the main elements of a good quality early childhood education are based on similar structural aspects of quality including: staff-child ratios, physical environment, and trained staff.

The publication of the Education for All Global Monitoring Report 2005 (EFA-GMR 2005), drew attention to high quality education. The executive summary of this report notes that:

Although there is no single definition of quality, two principles characterise most attempts to define quality in education: the first identifies learners' cognitive development as the major explicit objective of all educational systems. Accordingly, the success with which systems achieve this is one indicator of their quality. The second emphasizes education's role in promoting values and attitudes of responsible citizenship and in nurturing creative and emotional development. The achievement of these objectives is more difficult to assess and compare across countries (EFA-GMR 2005, p.17).

Payler and Davis (2017) carried out a research review which considered the findings from a previous UK research study in 2003, to offer policy advice to stakeholders in regard to professionalising the early years workforce. The authors feel that qualifications play an important part in early childhood settings to ensure a high-quality service:

Findings emerged from the largest UK evaluation of the effect of early years education on children's learning and achievements, indicating an association between the quality of the workforce and the children's achievements (Payler, & Davis, 2017, p. 9).

A longitudinal study carried out in England in 2003, followed 3000 children from age 3 into primary and secondary school (Siraj Blatchford, Traggart, Sylva, Sammons and Melhuish, 2008). The findings of this study showed a significant relationship between good-quality early childhood provision and a positive effect on children's achievements and development throughout primary school. Another significant effect of good-quality early childhood provision on children as they grow

older was reported in a study by Sylva, Melhuish, Sammons, Siraj-Blatchford and Traggart, (2011). Dalli, et al. (2011) contend that young children benefit from being in a good quality early childhood education setting and argue that: “evidence demonstrates that quality early childhood education at this very early age has lasting benefits for infants and their families” (p. 1. See also Shonkoff, 2010).

Analysis of all data sets show that there was agreement about what quality childcare meant, and in the case of parents’ focus groups, if it was an important factor for them when they were choosing their children’s setting. Various elements were put forward to describe good quality education, including: highly skilled staff, enriching environments, stimulating and age appropriate resources, and satisfying relationships between educator and child. These coincide well with the above quote from EFA-GMR (2005) and the main elements for quality childcare as presented by OECD (2017).

Online questionnaire respondents were given a set of statements from which they were asked to choose those that they deemed relevant to quality early childhood education. The six statements were the following:

1. Providing worksheets to children
2. Creating opportunities for free play
3. Assuring school preparedness among children
4. Developing a stimulating environment
5. Teaching children the numbers and the alphabet
6. Committing time and resources to water and sand play

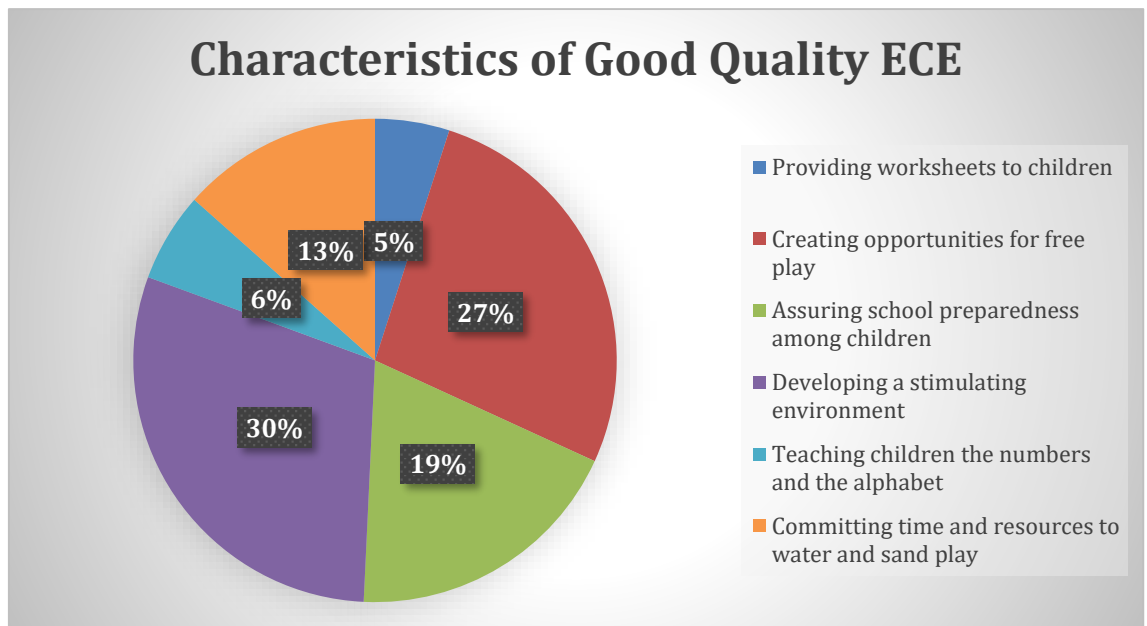


Figure 4.5 - Characteristics of good quality early childhood education. N = 64 participants

The findings presented in Figure 4.5 show clearly that the respondents valued most: developing a stimulating environment (30%) and creating opportunities for free play (27%) much more than the other four statements. The least favourable were the statements about providing worksheets to children (5%) and teaching the children the numbers and the alphabet (6%).

A possible interpretation of the findings presented in Figure 4.5 could be that the opinions of respondents from these participating countries are in line with current research that suggests that the children benefit from having a stimulating environment and having more opportunities for free play (Wien, 2014; Wood, 2009). As Fjørtoft (2004) states: “Play activities have proved to increase with the complexity of the environment and the opportunities for play” (p. 22). The importance of good quality education and the benefits and impact that it has on children’s achievement in later life is confirmed by the literature as explained above (EFA-GMR 2015; OECD, 2012; Payler & Davis, 2017; Siraj Blatchford et al., 2008; Sloane & Swift, 2000; Sylva et al. 2011).

However, as I analysed responses of one of the open-ended questions in the questionnaire, I realised that Figure 4.5 might depict the respondents' ideal view of a good quality education and not necessarily what is being implemented in the settings of the respective countries. I came to this conclusion as some of the issues mentioned by respondents in the open-ended question about challenges of being a small island state might hinder this type of pedagogy from unfolding in early childhood settings, in part due to lack of human resources, inadequate funding and inadequate training.

A similar question was asked to the 10 interviewees of this study (educators, principals and directors) to see if their perspectives agreed and coalesced around what constitutes a high-quality education were in line with the current, mainstream literature: this would affect the pedagogy and practice that they implement in their respective ECE settings. A study by Anning, Chesworth and Spurling (2005) conducted in 15 Sure Start Learning Programmes in England investigated the “way good quality early learning, play and childcare services” (p. 2) were being delivered in these programmes. One of the findings was that perspectives about play differed among practitioners depending on how they were trained to work with young children. This in turn affected their pedagogy (Anning, Chesworth, & Spurling, 2005).

This study reports that the main concerns of the educators, principals and directors taking part in my study were mainly about the need for trained staff; and the need for a suitable environment and adequate resources to work with. For example:

The environment too is very important. Sometimes, in our culture, we don't have as much to create the right environment that encourages what you want

to develop. For example, if your topic is about number 2, then the children should be able to find the number 2 in their playing areas. But we do not have the resources to do that. There needs to be that kind of reinforcement in the environment about what you are teaching (Shaniyah, G).

Small class which is easy to manage, a language-rich environment both between teacher and children, age appropriate curriculum, something that they can relate to and stimulating materials in a safe physical setting and good relationship with the teacher and the children. I would like to have a shopping corner, a building and blocks corner but I cannot because of the lack of space (Tonya, G).

First, I believe that for a good ECE to take place the teachers have to be properly trained. They must understand ECE, they must have that training, that background that will lend itself to good EC facilitators. I think too, you have to place more emphasis on training (Shaniyah, G).

Teachers should be FULLY qualified. When I say fully qualified, at least have a degree in [early childhood] EC, in pedagogy and not only that but they should be monitored on a regular basis and they should also be up to date with the new trends and research. I think that they should have a degree for teaching all ages starting with the very young (Nadisha, G).

Definitely the environment. Look at this classroom and all the work of the children. If there were no crafts and the classroom is dull, it is not good quality. The size of the room and the resources are important too. They should be available and within reach of the children (Dolor, M).

The area needs to be child friendly and age appropriate, and children should have easy access to resources. The outdoor space should be a big area for them to have space to move and run around (Antida, M).

Human Resources! The fact that the KGAs, [Kindergarten Assistants] are professionals is important. I know that the ethos of the school is important, the environment is important, the Senior Management Team (SMT) is important, but the most important impact is that of the KGA. By professionalism I don't only mean certificates. Yes, they are important because without the knowledge and theory we cannot structure our pedagogy. But then the character of the individual, the attitude of the KGA is what really matters (Vitorin, M).

The training of the KGAs is the most important. If you do not have well-trained KGAs, we can end up that, in the years when the basic learning needs to happen, this same learning will suffer the most (Xandru, M).

When it comes to the training of early childhood educators, education systems need to invest in high-quality, appropriate staff training in order to deliver good-quality programmes (OECD, 2006). Research shows that well-educated and fully qualified early childhood educators are not only the key factor to providing

good-quality ECE but also contribute to well-developed social and cognitive outcomes for children (OECD, 2006; Payler & Davis, 2017; Siraj Blatchford et al., 2008; Sylva et al., 2011). According to OECD (2012), adequate training and proper qualifications of early childhood educators will result in the professionalisation of this sector: “Research shows that the behaviour of those who work in ECEC matters, and that this is related to their education and training” (p. 14). Payler and Davis (2017) however, argue that:

Clear acknowledgement of the value of a well-qualified workforce in making a difference to outcomes for children is not supported by a consistent or systematic framework for qualifications. The nature of the qualifications has changed frequently, and at no time has equivalence across phases with the associated career progression routes and conditions of service been agreed. (p. 14).

The authors maintain that although continual professional development is important in maintaining this high-quality provision, it is not always supported by in-service training (Payler & Davis, 2017). Historically, in many countries, including England, Malta and Grenada, persons working in early childhood education have been: “primarily educators who were vocationally qualified, as well as unqualified educators.” (Waters & Payler, 2015, p. 161). However, OECD (2006) contends that: “the evidence is strong that improved training and qualification levels raise the quality of interaction and pedagogy” (p. 14).

Nevertheless, findings from my fieldnotes suggest that some of the educators I was observing lacked training and therefore the pedagogy that they were implementing was not necessarily always age-appropriate, for example:

The educator said to the children [two to three years old]: “If your name starts with the letter A, stand up.” From the chart on the wall with the children’s names it was clear that only one of the children’s names started with the letter A. However, most of the children got up anyway. The educator

then tried another letter. She asked the children whose name starts with the letter M to clap their hands. Of course, most of the children started clapping their hands. (Fieldnotes: February 2, 2017).

There was another time when an educator wanted the children to practise writing their names. Amongst these children were two-year olds who had not yet developed their pincer grip, let alone the ability to write their names. This was not an age-appropriate activity:

The educator took out some work books, wrote the children's name and they had to write their name four times. Most of the children had a hard time copying the letters, but they were made to sit down and continue their work (Observation notes: February 3, 2017).

Despite the agreement about the importance of well-trained and qualified staff, governments “often fear the funding consequences of raising staff qualifications” (OECD, 2012, p. 14). Employing better qualified staff can incur increased wage demands, which would in turn lead to significant increases to the costs of services provided, with serious consequences on the state's finances. In spite of comparable evidence in favour of staff qualifications, “governments often choose not to invest in raising qualifications or funding staff training” in this sector (OECD, 2006, p. 14). This might have serious implications on ECE quality and child development outcomes, since the staff are not being properly educated or trained to offer age-appropriate learning activities and suitably stimulating environments. This seems to be a global issue and not just on SIS as a special issue of the journal *Professional Development in Education* edited by Waters and Payler (2015) shows. Articles in this edition coming from England, USA, Australia and Cyprus show that the issue of having adequately trained staff and maintaining continuous professional development in ECE is a challenge that still persists.

Coming from a small island state myself, I would say that this challenge can be felt even more in such states as human resources are scarce.

As the literature above shows, improved levels of ECEs' qualifications do influence, and are likely to raise, the level of pedagogy which would greatly benefit the child. The study reported in this thesis indicates that, educators who are not properly informed and trained about early childhood development, might interpret terms like 'age appropriate activities', 'play-based' or 'child-centred' approaches wrongly, as resulted from my fieldnotes and observations. These will be discussed further in Category 3 which deals with the disconnect between the rhetoric and practice of pedagogy observed.

Parents participating in the study were asked what good quality early childhood education meant for them. This was asked to see if parents had a similar or different view than that of the educators on this issue. This too might influence the pedagogy and practice of early childhood settings, especially in the private sector when settings depend heavily on fees being paid by parents (Hedges & Cullen, 2005). In fact, Cherrington (2001), contends that families shape their children's learning through the social and cultural interactions they are involved in during normal life routine. Liz Chesworth (2016) agrees that children learn "from everyday engagement in family, classroom and community activities (p. 297). Parents' own experiences of education are moulded from a combination of personal and cultural experiences (McLeod, 2002).

This study suggests that, for the 18 parents out of 24 who chose to elaborate on the meaning of good quality early childhood education, their understanding was different but complimentary to that expressed by the educators. Twelve out of the 18

parents commented that a holistic approach to learning was an important element of good quality education. Holistic learning means that, apart from taking care of the children's health and survival skills, the settings' programme should include socio-emotional and cognitive stimulation (Britto, Yoshikawa, & Boller, 2011). There is in fact, increasing evidence that a holistic approach to education has better effects on the health and learning of the child (Engle et al., 2007; Wien, 2014). Another important factor for these same 12 parents was that the development of good relationships between child and educator are what constitute good quality in ECE in their opinion. Here is a sample of some of the parents' comments:

For me, quality education is a way where the individual will be well rounded in terms of not just the academics but learn a skill or learn through play. I have observed that in this school they do a lot of activities besides just academics, I noticed that at the back they also have a garden which the children tend to. I believe that this will help to develop the child in the proper way (Zillaine, G).

It is not only for their academics but for their overall development. So, it is not only the spelling, or the alphabet or the numbers, but also learning things like manners, forming friendships, learning to share, learning how to resolve conflict, things they will take into adulthood. So, it is about mixing academics with skills and play-based learning (Zuri, G).

Good quality requires helpful teachers, kind teachers, who nurture and nourish our young adults. Because you know if they don't take the time and do their jobs properly, our children will not grow up into good citizens (Jaleel, G).

For me, quality education is not just the infrastructure but all about the feeling, the quality that they're getting at school. Academically, I feel that the learning should be age related. I think my son needs to remain a child as much as possible. And when it is books, books, books, and already writing number one at the age of three and four, it is too much (Carmen, M).

By good quality I understand that it is not just teaching my child the letters, colours and numbers but manners need to come into it too. Good quality to my knowledge refers to children learning how to share, how to wait their turn, how to wash their hands and how to play together (Frida, M).

Good quality means that the teacher needs to be able to know how to deal with the children, be patient – she needs to have lots of patience, and she need to attend to them. My son tells me that he loves his teacher as much as he loves me and that is very important for me (Iris, M).

Four other parents commented that education and adequate resources are factors that determine good quality in a setting while the remaining two parents of the 18, thought that a clean environment is the most important. The following examples are indicative of parents' perspectives:

To me, good quality education in early childhood education means offering excellent educational resources that provide children with what they need to excel in their future academics, and having a stimulating environment (Zuri, G).

To me, it means a clean environment where a child is given the attention needed and teachers are consistent with their methods (Cikka, M).

Quality for me is to have a good education. I can see a big difference from when I was in school and now and not necessarily for the better. I want my son to follow the same kind of schooling that I had because it was good education. I find a big difference between church schools and state schools. I would say that church schools have better quality education (Ganni, M).

This theme presented and discussed the findings of three data sets (online questionnaire, interviews and focus groups) about participants' perspectives with regards to what constitutes good quality education. Analysis suggests that parents and educators had different views of what good quality education meant. For educators, the most important factors were trained staff, the physical environment and adequate resources. For the parents, the most important factors were the holistic development of their child, building of good relationships between educator and child, and good education for their children. Moreover, for the respondents to the online questionnaire having a stimulating environment and opportunities for free play was vital.

Theme 8 will discuss participants' opinions about the qualities of good-practising educators.

Theme 8: Qualities of Good-Practising Early Childhood Educators

Various studies review good qualities of an educator (Adams & Pierce 2004; Ebro 1977; Glenn 2001; Smith 1980; Usher 2003). These often include characteristics such as enthusiasm and a positive attitude to life. A study in the US (Johnson, 1982) surveyed 227 Indiana state school educators and 14 school principals to determine the characteristics associated with good-practicing educators. According to these participants, good-practising educators should be: qualified and trained in ECE; have a personal interest in each child; are able to establish a warm and caring environment; and show enthusiasm with children.

Taylor and Wash (2003) conducted a survey in seven school districts in the US. Three thousand K–12 educators and administrators participated in this survey. The results show that participants identified 10 characteristics of an effective educator: being passionate, flexible, an effective communicator, a lifelong learner, and being knowledgeable, accepting of others, patient, organised, hardworking and caring (Taylor & Wash, 2003).

A survey conducted by Colker (2008) with 43 kindergarten teachers, reported similar characteristics, including: passion; perseverance, pragmatism, patience, flexibility, lifelong learning, a sense of humour and care and respect for children.

A more recent study by Bean-Mellinger (2017) lists five similar characteristics of an effective early childhood educator: enthusiasm and passion for children; patience and humour; communication skills; respect for differences; creativity and flexibility. Sands and Weston (2011) go on to describe an early childhood educator as having:

...a finely balanced role, an intuitive role that sees each teacher making decisions 'in the moment' poised as provocateur, as listener, as learner, as teacher, ever vigilant for opportunities to widen and deepen knowledge ... It is a highly skilled position and one that can enhance and constrain learning in the blink of an eye (p. 15).

Before discussing this theme further, it would be best to give a very brief overview of what certification is needed to become an early childhood educator and a kindergarten assistant, both in Malta and in Grenada.

In Malta, to become an ECE in a private childcare centre, there are no qualification requirements by law. It is however, recommended that applicants have at least a National Qualifications Framework (NQF) Level 4 (diploma), or equivalent, in Early Childhood Education and Care. To be able to apply for a kindergarten assistant position currently within a state school, one is required to have a certification at NQF Level 4 or higher (MEDE, 2013).

In Grenada, to become an ECE in a private childcare centre, a kindergarten assistant in a state school and to teach in all elementary grades for that matter, only a four-week induction course in early childhood education is required. This is offered by the national vocational college. The applicant also needs to possess four passes in GCEs (General Certificate of Education) or CXCs (Caribbean Examination Council) exams (Ministry for Education, 2014). Two educators from Grenada made the following comments about this level of certification:

There's a short induction course in the community college, the teachers' section, for about four weeks. That's the basic along with four GCEs or CXCs. Individuals can come just out of secondary school and teach here. For the entire elementary school, you can teach with just the induction course. I agree that if the certification is very low, the quality of the education suffers. But, it seems to be something that they [the policy makers] do not seem to understand. It definitely needs to be changed (Nadisha, G).

There is an early childhood programme at the college and they encourage people to do it. But, sometimes in the private sector they might not have a

high level of education, but they could learn as they work. I try to look for people who have some level of education in the early years (Deja, G).

Respondents to the online questionnaire were asked to choose what minimum qualifications were required for an individual to work as an early childhood educator dealing with children in the 0-3 years and 3-5 years' age bracket in their respective country. They were given seven statements from which to choose one answer.

The figure below depicts a graphical view of the respondents' answers in percentages:

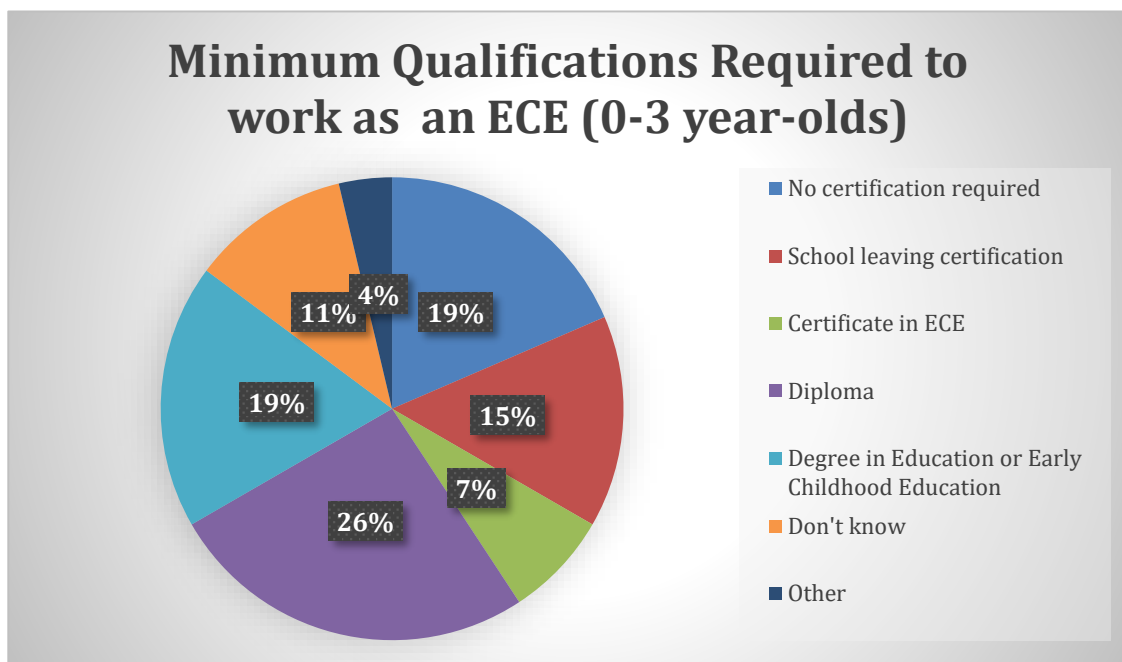


Figure 4.6 - Minimum qualifications required to work as an ECE (0-3-year-olds). N = 27 SIS

It is clear from the above figure that the answers ranged from no certification at all (five countries – 19%) to a degree in education or early childhood education (five countries – 19%). The most common answer was that the minimum qualification required is a diploma (seven countries – 26%). It was no surprise to see that nine countries reported either no certification or just a school leaving certificate as a requirement. In some countries, individuals who work with very young children

are often looked upon as babysitters and not educators who need to be knowledgeable about the development of the children in their care. According to Moss (2007) the global general public's perception of early childhood practitioners is that of a substitute mother and not an educator. Payler and Georgeson (2013b) agree that historically in England: "early years staff [were seen] as poorly qualified 'mum's army', in filling where national policy had failed to meet a need" (p. 382). A more recent study by Moss (2014) concludes that the workforce largely remains 'poorly educated' and 'poorly paid' (p. 254). A lack of standardisation and regulations about the early childhood practitioners' title of their role leads to uneven professionalism in this sector (Payler & Davis, 2017).

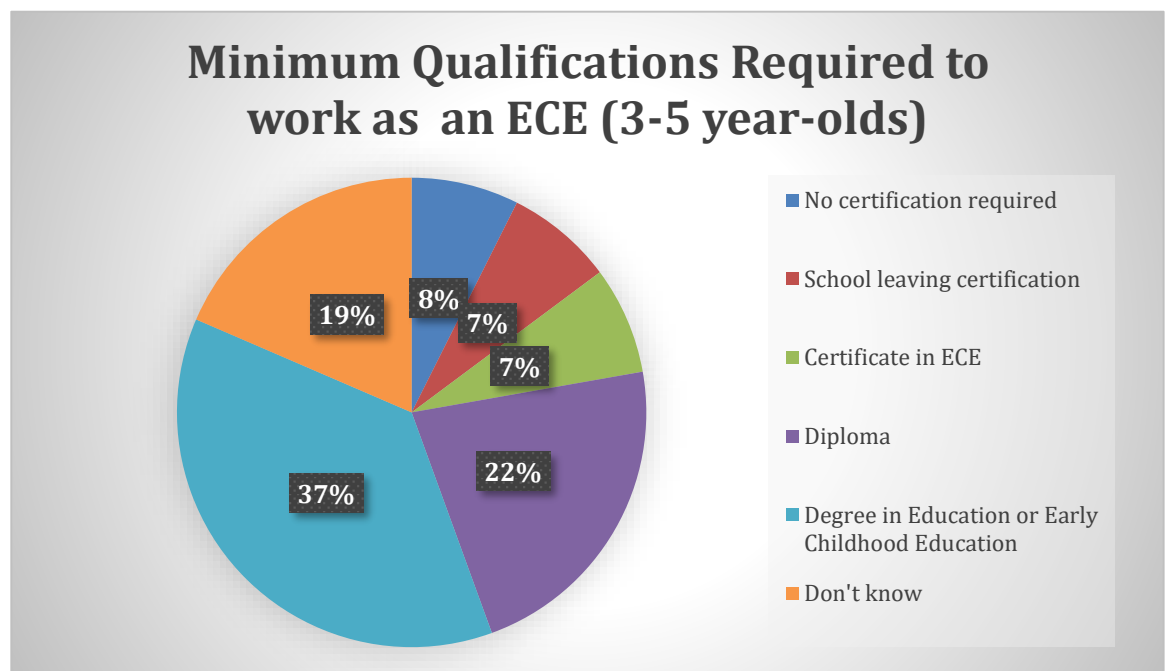


Figure 4.7 - Minimum qualifications required to work as an ECE (3-5-year-olds). N = 27 SIS

Figure 4.7 shows that the number of countries whose minimum qualification is a degree in education or early childhood education has now increased from four countries to nine (37%). This might be due to the fact that children will now be enrolled in kindergartens that might form part of the school system, so a higher

qualification level may be required. For six countries (22%), a diploma remains the minimum qualification required.

As discussed above, research shows that, the more qualified and well trained early childhood educators are, the more favourable the outcomes will be in early childhood settings (OECD, 2006; Payler & Davis, 2017). A report brief written by Taguma, Litjens, and Makowiecki (2012), about the importance of qualified ECE staff states that: “There is a general consensus, supported by research, that well educated, well-trained professionals are the key factor in providing high-quality ECEC with the most favourable cognitive and social outcomes for children” (p. 1). This is a global issue happening not just in small island states but also in larger countries where the availability of funding and resources for education and training might be just as compromised and challenging as that in SIS.

The above figures show that more educators need to be offered and exposed to more training in most of the world’s smallest island states so that they might provide high quality early childhood education. This concurs with the interviewees’ and parent focus group responses about what constitutes a good quality early childhood educator.

Analyses of the findings from the interviews and focus groups suggest that six out of 10 educators and seven out of 12 parents who opted to join the focus group discussion agreed that a very important quality that an early educator should have is that of being certified. Here are some of their comments:

If you don't have an early childhood background, what are you going to teach? How can you transfer your knowledge about early childhood when you have no early childhood education background? (Shaniyah, G).

Teachers need to be qualified from the bottom level. Everything should start from the lower levels. With a top down system of teaching, you are all the

time having pressure from upper grades and children suffer as they are not ready developmentally (Nadisha, G).

I think that the educators should also have a certain level of qualification, even more now as it is a requirement. I think experience is good as well. You need to know about the development of the child to be able to plan age-appropriate activities and not expect too much of them (Lora, M).

A sample of parents' comments show some of the frustration of both educators and parents about the lack of unqualified staff that they are encountering on their small island state. This is in agreement with research that argues that many small states suffer from a limited number of 'highly trained personnel' or 'specialists' (Bacchus, 1993; Sultana, 2006;). Farrugia (1991) also argues that the lack of human resources is a 'constant source of frustration in small countries' (p. 585). Here is what parents of this study reported:

Teachers need to be qualified, even in ECE. Within the education system, we have people who are not trained. Those are the people who end up in preschool. And that's not right (Neriah, G).

We don't even have the educational background to help children with special needs because educators are not trained for it. Nor are we really trained in ECE (Aaliyah, G).

[This parent is also an educator] We need to be trained more as educators. Even the policy makers - they have a lot of say as to what happens in EC. I don't think that some of them really understand what EC is about. They need training themselves. (Yolande, G).

However, two Maltese parents did not agree that having certified staff was an important quality of an early childhood education system:

I do not believe that theory is everything. In Malta, we tend to hold certificates in high esteem. But, some of these people then do not know how to put the theory into practice, they do not know how to go down to the children's level (Doris, M).

I believe that KGAs with experience, and not necessarily certification, are also important. I learn every day from such KGAs who have been here for twenty or more years and I respect them for that. On the other hand, when you have new blood coming in, it is also good as they come in with new ways

of teaching, new theories, new ideas and this usually has a ripple effect on the other KGAs which is really good (Vitorin, M).

All 10 educators that were interviewed went on to mention that an early childhood educator should have a positive disposition which includes factors such as caring, patience, sense of humour, respect for children as individuals and being creative and building a good relationship with the children. These responses align well with the literature discussed above. For example:

You must have a passion for the children, you cannot just jump into this job and teach. You MUST deal with each child individually. You must have patience, you must have good communication skills, treat each child as an individual, you have to respect the child. And also, you must be creative. It's not about the theory, teaching, teaching, you have to be creative as well and you have to be resourceful (Tonya, G).

You have to have a passion for children, and patience. You MUST have patience and a good sense of humour too because sometimes a good laugh will transform the classroom, because at times you are so focused on fulfilling the curriculum that you forget that the children should be having fun (Shaniyah, G).

The ECE has to be patient and love the children. I believe that the educator needs to love children as if they are their own. They do not know right from wrong, they don't know that they are hurting you and sometimes we can feel annoyed with their behaviour (Doris, M).

Care is so important my goodness! You have to care for the children. You might get an educator who is not really passionate about children. We need ECEs who understand children and care for them (Lora, M).

The above comments from educators concur with the analyses of my observations in the settings participating in this study. This suggests that, in most cases, while I was there, the relationship between the children and the educator was a positive one that showed care and nurturing on the part of the educator and a sense of belonging on the part of the children. For example:

The educator has a very good relationship with the children. They like her and respect her. She keeps eye contact when addressing them and goes down to their level to talk to them. She speaks to them in a calm voice and

whenever she wants to get their attention she starts singing a song and the children will join in. This calms them down and brings them back to focus (Observation notes: January 17, 2017).

The three educators responsible for this group all demonstrate a caring and loving disposition towards the children. They interact with the children during activities and outdoor play (Observation notes: April 4, 2017).

Educator had a good relationship with the children. She is very loving and attentive to the individual needs of the child and listens to what they have to say. She is very patient with the them. She also has a very good sense of humour which the children seemed to appreciate (Observation notes: March 29, 2017).

However, in one setting, I witnessed the following:

The teacher sat behind her desk for most of the four hours I was there. The class assistant was there to keep order. "Don't cry. I don't like cry-babies", she told the children. They both used a harsh voice with children when they were upset with their behaviour. Children came up to the educator for praise, but the educator did not react and ignored the children. Instead she took up her mobile phone and called somebody. Children kept coming up to the educator to show that they had finished their snack, but they continued to be ignored by the educator and sent back to sit down at the table. (Observation notes: February 3, 2017).

Respondents to the online questionnaire were presented with the following three statements to choose from with regards to what, in their opinion, would constitute a good-practising early childhood educator:

1. An educator who plans activities for children in advance
2. An educator who involves children in the planning of activities
3. An educator who allows children complete freedom to do as they please.

Figure 4.8 below offers a graphic view of the online questionnaire responses to this question:

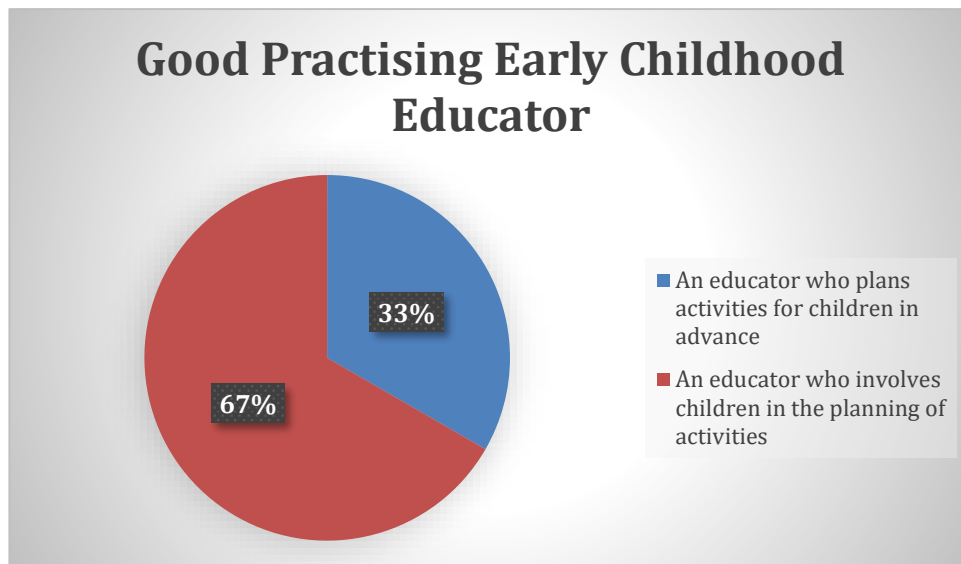


Figure 4.8 - Good practising early childhood educator. N = 64

As can be seen in the above figure, two-thirds of the respondents (67%) chose statement number two: an educator who involves children in the planning of activities. There has been a recent surge in encouraging the implementation of a child-centred approach where the focus is transferred from the educator to the child (Chesworth, 2016; O'Neill & McMahon, 2005). The educators see the child as a competent and capable human being (Fraser & Gestwicki, 2002; Gandini, 1993). The planning of activities revolves around the interests of the child and therefore involves their own participation in the planning through mind-maps and other relevant methods. Having said this, quite a substantial number of respondents (33%) said that a good-practising educator is one who plans activities for children in advance. This could mean two things in my opinion: (1) that educators prefer to come prepared with activities to the setting, rather than let children run around as they please all day, or (2) that the respondents tend to value the child-centred approach but look at it in a way that the educator does the planning in advance just the same. None of the 64 respondents opted for statement three which stated that: 'an educator who allows children complete freedom to do as they please'.

This section presented, analysed and discussed the participants' views as to the important characteristics of an early childhood educator. These included trained staff, positive disposition and including children in planning and planning activities in advance for children. The existence of ECE policies, curricula or frameworks will be discussed in the following theme.

Theme 9: ECE Policies, Curricula and/or Frameworks

Policies, curricula and/or frameworks help in the advancement of early childhood development, reduces social inequality, and “provide[s] a social protection floor below which no human being can fall into extreme poverty and deprivation” (Bachelet, 2012, p.2). The author continues to argue that ECE policies are an important investment for any country, as these young children will be the future citizens of that country, and that policies for children should be efficient, effective and well implemented.

Willoughby (2010) contends that if policies are well planned and well implemented, they can provide consensus and benchmarks for educators on how things are to be done in a particular service. According to Felfe and Lalive (2018) “the regulation and quality standardisation [through policies] means that the quality of care provided is less likely to account for variations in child development performance” (para. 7). EYFS (2017), in their statutory framework for the early years foundation stage, state that the purpose of their framework is to provide:

Quality and consistency in all early years settings, so that every child makes good progress and no child gets left behind; a secure foundation through learning and development opportunities which are planned around the needs and interests of each individual child and are assessed and reviewed regularly; partnership working between practitioners and with parents and/or carers; equality of opportunity and anti-discriminatory practice, [and] ensuring that every child is included and supported (p. 4).

In the case of Malta, there is one universal National Curriculum Framework (2012) issued by the Ministry for Education and Employment (MEDE, 2012). This framework is implemented in state and church schools but is not compulsory in private and independent schools or in private childcare centres: these formulate their own policies, mostly based on their beliefs and values.

In Malta, the Learning Outcomes Framework (2015) has been constructed and is meant to cover the whole cycle of early years (0-7 years) across all childcare centres, be they private, independent or state owned. This would standardise the pedagogy that is to take place in such settings, which will in turn be monitored by one entity – the Quality Assurance Department. Both the National Curriculum Framework and the Learning Outcomes Framework provide:

Parents, teachers and other stakeholders with an understanding of what children and young people should know and should be able to do during each of the three cycles – the early, primary and secondary years - and at the end of compulsory education (p.1).

In Grenada, state schools must adhere to a standard education policy issued by the Ministry for Education (2014). There is a no set policy for the early years issued by the Ministry for Social Services. However, there is a document (UNICEF, 2015) which lists the standards and safety practices for childcare centres and the curriculum that they can choose to follow. Educators also follow the guidelines and early childhood development standards issued by CARICOM Secretariat (2012). These guidelines help educators to work with a standardised framework that seeks to:

Reach consensus on the articulation of what practical action needs to be taken at the policy and regulatory levels to ensure that children are cared for and educated effectively in their formative years (p. v).

For the purpose of this study, online questionnaire respondents were asked if there was an official early years policy, curriculum and/or framework in their country. There was at least one respondent from each of the 27 small island states selected for this study that responded to this question. Twenty-six countries said that they do have an official policy for the early years and only respondents from the Comoros said that they do not have one. For example:

In the Comoros children start going to the Koranic school from the same age as kids in the West that is to say 5 years. There is no national policy for this sector (Comoros, 42).

Here, ECE from 0-3 is the responsibility of the Ministry for Health and Early Childhood and from 3-5 it falls within the remit of the Ministry for Education. There is a programme, but it is not standardised. No national policy (Comoros, 44).

Most parents cannot afford to pay for their children's education in the Comoros, so they send them to the Koranic schools, a well-established faith-based organisation present throughout the country, which are free but do not follow a national curriculum (UNICEF, 2016). However, in 2016, with the support of UNICEF, Comoros designed a parental education programme for children in the 0–3 age bracket. The purpose of such a programme was threefold:

Parents would be better prepared to cater to the needs of their children (health, cognitive, social and psycho-emotional); children would be better equipped to learn effectively and enjoy their right to education once they reach school age; and the offer provided by the system would be tailored to the needs of preschool-age children and their different abilities (UNICEF, 2016, p. 3).

At the end of the online questionnaire, respondents were asked to share any concerns they might have about ECE that the questionnaire did not cover. Thirty-four out of the 64 respondents chose to answer the question, with ten of these

respondents commenting on their concern about the need for a standardised policy for ECE in their country. Comments included:

ECE in Antigua is privately driven as mandatory education starts from age five. While there is concern about the quality of services being offered, there are no legally established standards to guide the sector. Efforts are currently being made to have a legal framework established (Antigua and Barbuda, 20).

In the Maldives, ECE is not included in the formal curriculum developed by the Ministry for Education. The policy is being changed and the ministry is trying to formalise ECE to make it part of the national curriculum (Maldives, 8).

There is inadequate monitoring and supervision of the sector. The centres operate within certain established policies and regulations but there is much evidence to show that the centres do not operate the official standards. Most need support to move to acceptable standards; the “good” ones are accessed by parents who are able to pay the high fees which in turn excludes children from poor families (Tonga, 22).

A similar question as to whether or not a set policy was in place, was asked to the 10 interviewees in both Malta and Grenada. Analysis of the findings show that all four settings taking part in this study have a policy or framework that they adhere to and which forms the backbone of their pedagogy. Here is a statement from each of the four settings:

[Callaloo] What we use here is the government curriculum, also a little of our values and beliefs and we also incorporate the school policy. It’s a mixture of these (Tonya, G).

[Sapodilla] I think it is mostly run on a specific policy that we have to follow and some of the things, I guess are some of our values, I hope not too much is based on one’s values. You want to teach values, but you don’t want it to be about your personal values, so I think basically most of it is based on the policy that the ministry would have laid down and have to follow (Shaniyah, G.)

[Perlina] The school policy is a consequence of what I believe in. The teaching policy was drafted on the Montessori method and I believe in it. We also have the eating and safety policy (Lora, M).

[Ġellewża] Yes, we do have a policy laid out by the Ministry for Education. The policy I like, but again there might be things that I do not agree with. But, first of all I believe in myself and when things go wrong I admit it and

try to arrange it. I think that if a person works according to their beliefs then they will do a good job (Doris, M).

The above statements show that although there is a set policy in both Malta and Grenada (MEDE, 2015; CARICOM, 2012), the values and beliefs of the educator still appear to play an important part in how they teach.

The following section will review the issue of the gap between the pedagogy claimed to be practised by the educators in the four settings and the actual practices that I observed during the data collection phase.

3. A Disconnect Between Rhetoric and Practice of Pedagogy

Theme 10: Child-Centred, Teacher-Directed Pedagogy and a Balance of Both

During the first few days of my observations at a childcare or kindergarten setting, I watched how the educator interacted with the children, how the children interacted with their peers, what pedagogic approach or approaches were being used in the setting, and what resources were made available to the children. This formed part of the framework I used to guide my fieldnotes and observations, (Appendix 11). As I started to conduct interviews with the principals/directors and educators at the setting, the conversation took us to a discussion about what pedagogy they practised in class, asking them if they thought/believed it was a child-centred or a teacher-directed pedagogy (Appendix 12). From the very first interview, I started realising that what I was seeing in the setting did not necessarily correspond with what was being said during the interviews with regards to pedagogy. This might have meant that: (1) the terms ‘child-centred’ and ‘teacher-directed’ were not properly understood by the educators or were being misinterpreted; or that (2) the educators were giving me the answer that they thought is right or expected in light of the latest research about ECE, namely that child-centred and play-based learning

were the most beneficial way of teaching (Chesworth, 2016; Rogers, 2011) in the early years - even though they knew that it was not the case in their settings. More than one fourth of the online questionnaire respondents and more than half of the participants from the parents' focus group also agreed that they wanted their children to be in a play-based setting. Some of the discourse during the interviews showed that the participants did not have a clear definition of what child-centred learning is. Phrases like "I think it is like the child-centred learning, play based activities that we do here" (*Tonya, G*), and "we try to do it [the learning] through play but this is not it" (*Ġuża, M*) reveal some of the educators' uncertainty about which pedagogy is actually influencing their practice. This question was asked to identify whether or not the policy in place was affecting the pedagogy being practised in the setting and to elicit different perspectives about which pedagogical approach or approaches were preferred and being implemented. This was then 'double-checked' through my fieldnotes and observations, as will be discussed in this section.

The term 'child-centred learning' dates back at least to 1956 and John Dewey's work (O'Sullivan, 2004). The concept of a child-centred approach has also been derived from the teachings of Frederick Froebel who believed that children should have an active part in their learning and that teachers should act as guides (facilitators) (Froebel, 1826) and not to "interfere with the process of maturation" (Simon, 1999, p. 17). This kind of learning is also associated with Jean Piaget's work and more recently with the work of Malcolm Knowles (Burnard, 1999). From my own personal experience as an early childhood educator and as a teacher educator, I have researched and experienced child-centred learning in various ECE settings in Malta and abroad. This usually entails that the planning of learning

opportunities for the children is constructed around the interests and needs of the children themselves (Chesworth, 2016; Gandini, 2011). Chesworth (2016) believes that:

The availability of flexible, un-prescribed classroom materials, such as blocks, fabric and play-dough, offered multiple affordances for children to draw upon their interests and construct meaning in their play (p. 303).

The educator in this case, will then act as a facilitator who guides, supports and supplies further material to deepen the children's learning (Baldacchino et al., 2015; Tzuo, Yang, & Wright, 2011). Ryan (2005) offers this formal definition of the child-centred approach:

In a child-centred education, the curriculum begins with the needs and interests of the child and responds to the unique characteristics of childhood. Teachers use their knowledge of how children develop to structure learning experiences that facilitate children's learning through play and discovery. Children, therefore, are viewed as active learners who require freedom from adult authority to explore ideas independently and make sense of their world (p. 99).

During the interviews conducted with the principals, their first response was that their staff practised a child-centred approach. This is in line with Grieshaber and McArdle's (2010) study in which they suggest that early childhood educators may speak about a rhetoric of child-centred practice in their settings. However, they concurrently adopt positions of power to inhibit children in choosing their play interests. As this issue was discussed with the interviewees, most of them ended up saying that what they and their staff might actually be practising is a balance of both child and teacher directed activities, but that it leaned more towards teacher directed learning:

I think it is like the child-centred learning, play based activities that we do here. You didn't see most of it, but I think that is what we do here (Tonya, G).

Basically, I think it is a little bit child-centred and a lot teacher-centred, so a little bit of both. But it is mostly teacher directed. We want to make it more child-centred. We have the environment with child friendly materials and so on, but in the learning, we try to make it more teacher based (Shaniyah, G).

I know that they want to move towards a child-centred pedagogy but right now they lean more toward teacher-directed. They usually end up at the edge of teacher-directed activities. You see that happen here, they try to do it through play, but this is not it. They are always running after time and telling children to colour within the lines (Guža, M).

To be honest, I believe that the child-centred approach works well in an early childcare setting and in KG because of the fact that you can take what they already know and build on it. You can scaffold their learning but then, when it comes to primary school, the educators feel that they need to transmit their knowledge to the children. I wish that we would have more child-centred learning (Xandru, M).

There are some invisible pedagogies in the early years in which the seemingly free choice for children to explore their interests through playful activities is in reality controlled by restriction imposed by the adult on how, when and where this play can take place (Lambirth & Goouch, 2006; see also Chesworth, 2016). Rogers and Evans (2007) agree that “adults relinquish some of their power and control of the play environment” (p. 165) and let children investigate and explore their interests. Only one director was adamant in insisting that her pedagogy was that of teacher-directed learning and structured play. Nevertheless, she did say that she agreed with play-based learning and that she was trying to get the educators to that level:

You need to have structured planning and learning. You cannot come in without planning and let the children play. If the children are playing, it must be structured play. It has to have discipline, it has to have structure and it must be playing to learn, you don't just play, wild play. They have to do their daily work. They have their snack time to play, and lunch break where they play and make noise but, there should be a play time without noise where you are learning something (Deja, G).

The five educators interviewed, on the other hand, all believed that they were teaching mostly through play and that it was a child-centred approach and based on the interest of the child. However, they also admitted that it was more a mixture of both child and teacher-directedness at times:

We do have teacher-directed learning here, but we also have child-directed learning. Yes, it is a bit of both especially the 3 and 4-year-olds. In Kindergarten, they will be teacher-directed (Nadisha, G).

I think it's a mix of both. A little more teacher-directed than we would like. You try to create an environment that is child friendly and so you try to observe the child and see what their interest is. Some things we do are based on their interest, what we see happening. But some of it is from what you think that they should learn at that age and so I think it is a little bit child-centred and a lot teacher-directed (Shaniyah, G).

My class is based on 'child-centred approach' activities. But, we also do a bit of the structured learning – for example during circle time or when we are focusing on a topic. The activity is structured in a sense that it has instructions and certain limitations. Sometimes even outdoor play is structured, depending on the activity. It is a bit of both but in a nice way (Lora, M).

We focus on child-centred learning and play based activities, but not just that. We use the child-centred learning most, but we do have teacher-directed learning, structured activities and learning through instruction in Kindergarten, but not all the time (Vitorin, M).

The analysis of my fieldnotes/observations, which I acknowledge as representing my own perspective and interpretation of child-centred learning, showed a rather different picture. The scenario below shows that the educator had good intentions, had planned and had obtained adequate resources; but the activity lacked children's participation and did not build on their interests, which could have improved their learning. This particular activity was taking place in a two to three-year-old setting during the week preceding Independence Day, February 7, in Grenada, which as I witnessed from my observations and stay in Grenada, was a very important day for Grenadians:

The educator showed the children some yellow coloured rice. She prompted them by asking pertinent questions which led the children to the conclusion that it was rice and coloured yellow. Children were then asked to find yellow items in class without leaving their place at the tables. The educator then showed them red coloured macaroni and asked what items they could find that were red. She also got them green coloured cheese and asked them to find green items in the classroom. She used these colours as they represented the national colours on their flag. She went on to explain to the children what each colour stood for. By that time, the children appeared to have lost interest. She then put the three items away on a high shelf (Observation note: February 2, 2017).

I suggest that this could have been a more meaningful learning opportunity for the children if the educator had given the children the opportunity to explore, touch and taste the items that she had shown them. But, I felt this activity stopped short and the educator did not use these items again during the time of my observation in the setting. Children achieve most of their learning through sensory play and real-life experiences (Stacey, 2009; Wien, 2014) which seemed to be largely missing in this observation.

The next observation shows that the educator had a planned activity that she intended to complete, irrespective of whether the children were interested in it, or whether they were actually grasping the concept of the activity:

The educator started to call children over to a table to paint inside a pre-printed letter R. She had different coloured paint in containers, with a paintbrush in each one, placed in a small bin. The children chose which colour they wanted. The educator took out the paintbrush of the chosen colour, gave it to the children to paint inside the letter R. The children were then asked to place it on the carpet to dry (Observation notes: March 16, 2017).

This activity took only a minute for the children to finish and I am not sure if they actually understood the concept of the letter 'R'. Honig (2015) suggests that, in such instances, the educator could have acted as their guide and let the children be more creative in order to expand their sense of pleasure while providing vocabulary

to describe what the children were experiencing. Jacobs (2001) argues that contextualising learning, in this case the letter 'R', and hands-on experiences help children to purposefully engage with their environment while their brains are continuously making connections.

Another observation of teacher-directed practice involved two educators who were working together in class. They were practising shapes with the two to three-year-old children. However, possibly also due to their limited understanding of child development, which influenced their pedagogy, the children started to become frustrated and did not seem to have an understanding of the concept of shapes being taught:

Children were handed out a pre-printed paper with the image of a house made out of shapes. They were given a red crayon each and told to colour the triangle [the roof of the house] red. Some of the children did not know which the triangle was so they coloured in other shapes. They were reprimanded and given a new sheet of paper to colour in the triangle. One child kept colouring the whole page in red. The educators were not happy with him. One of them just took his hand and coloured it with him. Another child told the educators that he did not want to colour as he does not like to. However, the educators made him colour in just the same (Observation notes: March 15, 2017).

The above observation suggests that lack of training may well influence the way the educators seek to teach new concepts to the children. This can, at times, result in children losing their attention span and not fully understanding the concept because of the stage of development they are in. Such a lack of comprehension by children can fuel frustration amongst the educators, leading to a vicious cycle.

The scenarios listed above are a sample of the practice that I observed and was reported in my fieldnotes in Grenada and Malta. During the interviews and in my daily conversations with the educators in the four settings, it was reported that

they believed in play-based learning and a child-centred approach. However, they also agreed that sometimes practice was also teacher-directed with sporadic instances of child-centred opportunities. Zachopoulou, Luikkonen, Pickun & Tsangaridou, (2010) suggest that the best practice is to have a balance between the two. Similarly, Beardsley and Harnett (2012) contend that a balance should be implemented, where both the adult and child are partners in play. In this way of teaching, it is essential for educators to see themselves as partners in the co-construction of knowledge with the children (Baldacchino, 2011; Rinaldi, 2006) and not as superior beings pouring their knowledge into the children's 'empty' brains (Dahlberg, Moss & Pence, 2007).

The following scenario is an example of how I observed an educator trying to include playful learning of the number two, using what I identified as predetermined, teacher-directed pedagogical approach:

The educator and the children were working in groups of four. The remainder of the class were given playdough to play with on another table while they waited their turn. She asked the children at her table to get any two objects from around the classroom and count them to see that they only had two. She then took out printed sheets with the number two on them that the children had worked on the previous week and provided the children with foam animals and stickers. They were asked to only take two and stick them on the sheet of paper. When this was finished, the educator gave each of them a sheet of paper with the large number two printed on it. Various numbers were printed inside this large number two. The children were to circle all the number twos they could find (Observation note: January 18, 2017).

Analysis of the interviews suggest that the educators agreed that the pedagogy being practised in their setting leans more towards the teacher-directed activities, with a few instances of child-centred learning. This was endorsed through my observations and fieldnotes in these settings. This could be due to lack of proper training about what a child-centred pedagogy entails or a commitment to teacher-

directed learning. Lea, Stevenson and Troy (2010) maintain that one of the issues with a child-centred approach is that “many institutions or educators claim to be putting student-centred learning into practice, but in reality, they are not” (p. 322). As discussed above, this is perceived as a consequence of a lack of training and proving to be of great concern to all the participants of three data sets relevant to this theme. For example, in Grenada, the High Scope approach is being implemented; but the educators did not appear to be well-trained in this approach. As one Grenadian educator said during her interview:

They told us certain things about High Scope – workshops and stuff like that but we have not had proper training about High Scope. They have taken one or two teachers, to pilot it, sent them overseas to see what High Scope is but they have not given the rest of the teachers the full training. We don't have the materials but, they expect us to follow High Scope. We cannot say we are doing High Scope because if you see a High Scope class it has nothing to do with what we do in our class (Shaniyah, G).

This seems to be the case in Malta as well. Currently, the Ministry for Education and Employment has been trying to implement the Learning Outcomes Framework (LOF) which was devised in 2015. This is based on the pedagogy of learning through play and a child-centred approach. A few individuals were sent to Ireland to experience first-hand how it works in that country. However, when they came back to Malta, there seems to have been a lack of dissemination of knowledge gained and/or it was decided that what they saw in practice was not relevant to the Maltese context, and so the status quo has been maintained. Educators have been complaining that they need proper training about the LOFs before they can be in a position to implement them in class, and their complaints are supported by their trade union (MUT, 2016). As one Maltese interviewee stated:

I agree with the new Learning Outcomes Framework. However, how are we to implement it without any training? We only get a two-hour PD

(Professional Development) session by the Education Officers and we are expected to know how to implement this new policy. It should not be done this way (Doris, M).

Shannon, Snyder and McLaughlin (2015) speak about the importance of “on-site coaching” together with adequate training before a new practice or policy is to be embedded. However, in Malta only a two day ‘professional learning course’ was offered by the Institute for Education within the Ministry for Education to educators concerned (MEDE, 2018c, para. 1). Professional development should focus more attention on the need of mentorship and support in the workplace (Waters & Payler, 2018).

This section looked at the analyses of four data sets used for this study (interviews, parents’ focus groups, fieldnotes and online questionnaire) about the issue of the pedagogy observed being implemented in the four settings in both Malta and Grenada as opposed to the pedagogy claimed to be practised by the educators, principals and directors of the settings. Analyses of participants’ comments and my fieldnotes suggest that educators would benefit from having more training about the pedagogy specified in their national early childhood education policy.

I now turn to the issue of rituals in the ECE setting and how these influence the pedagogy of early childhood educators.

4. Rituals in the Settings

Literature reviewed in Chapter Two of this study suggests that British missionaries who usually followed British colonisers left a deep impact on the Caribbean inhabitants, not only in their daily life but also in their educational system (MacKenzie, 1993). Kamerman (2006) contends that the very first kindergartens were based on “the activities of missionaries” (p. 3) together with philosophies and

educational models such as those of: Froebel, Pestalozzi and Montessori. In the case of Malta, the Maltese were already practising Catholics when the Island became a British colony.

Theme 11: Importance of Religion in ECE settings

While conducting observations and keeping fieldnotes in the Grenadian and Maltese settings, it was evident that religion and ritual played an important part in the settings' daily routine. This was more significant in Grenada, as the fieldnotes analyses that follow will show:

One of the settings in Grenada started off the day with an assembly outdoors. Children would then go to their respective classrooms where they would have a 'circle time' with their educators. They start off this circle time by reciting a long prayer with their eyes closed and hands together for praying. On a Monday, the children were asked if they went to church on the previous Sunday by a show of hands. Three or four religious songs were sung every day during circle time. On alternate days, the educator would read a story from the Bible to the children, including the stories about how David slew the giant Goliath and how Adam and Eve were driven out of the Garden of Eden by God for having disobeyed his command not to eat the forbidden fruit. The educator asked a lot of questions about these stories and I was impressed that most of the children knew the stories quite well. At the end of the story, she explained to them that the moral of the story about Adam and Eve was obedience, while reminding them that they were the children of God and they too had to obey their teacher and their parents (Fieldnote: January 2017).

This daily ritual was usually followed by the routine of reciting the month and days of the week, the colours, the weather and also the class rules.

The other childcare setting in Grenada also started the day with various religious songs. These were followed by the singing of the National Anthem and "then with their [the children and educator's] hands on their heart, they pledged their allegiance to their country" (Fieldnote: February 2017). The following scenario will

demonstrate the rote learning of such rituals and how automatic the children's responses can be:

The educator was teaching the children (aged two to three years) a verse from the Bible (Line 1, Chapter 6) of the letter of St Paul to the Ephesians which states: "Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right". The children had to repeat this verse after the teacher for three or four times. At the end she told them that they should also obey their teachers and anyone who is older than them. She told them that, if they did not obey, God will be sad. She then asked the children: "Do you want God to be sad?" "Yes," replied all the children! (Fieldnote: January 27, 2017).

This situation shows that, although the educator was trying to get the message across to these young children that they were supposed to obey because that is what St Paul recommended and that it would otherwise make God sad, the children did not understand what she was asking them. Perhaps, as Piaget (1971) suggested in his cognitive developmental stages, these children were too young to grasp such an abstract concept. This was one instance when the importance of religion was being demonstrated, irrespective of whether the children were understanding the concept or not.

One of the interviewees told me that the name of the 'infant school' she works in had recently been changed to a saint's name and a church was erected on the premises. This was done because the Catholic Church in Grenada was noticing a decline in doctrinal studies in the school and so thought that, if the Church had a stronger presence there, then it would be in a better position to influence the doctrine taught to the children. However, in this particular infant school, over 60% of the students and nearly all teachers are non-Catholic. So, every Friday, children of the Catholic faith leave their regular classes to attend church and be taught religious studies. Neither this, nor the private childcare setting in Grenada were run by the church.

In the case of Malta, each day began with a prayer in the two settings that I was observing. This was irrespective of whether or not all the children (and educators in one case) were Christians. It is important to note here that none of these settings in Malta were church schools either: one was a state kindergarten and one was a private childcare setting; and so, there was no strong moral obligation, or requirement of policy, for religious teaching or practice. An educator that I interviewed in Malta was of a different religious denomination and she had this to say about the prayers being said in the setting:

Even if I have a different (religious) belief I cannot practise it here [the setting]. For example, the prayers. The other educator is an Atheist and I'm a Protestant and so we don't participate in the prayer. We also have a Russian child, who is non-Catholic. I don't think the parents are asked if they want their children to say the prayer or not. It's the same with my own children who are in kindergarten. They must say the prayer. I cannot complain as I'm in Malta now and I'm a minority (Guza, M).

In another instance in Malta, I noted that the educator was pointing to the wooden cross that was hung up on the wall above the children's eye level and telling them that soon we would be celebrating Easter and how the Lord has died and then rose from the dead. Fieldnotes on the last day of my observations, report that she was preparing an activity for the feast of our Lady of Sorrows, (the Friday before Good Friday), where each child had to bring in a holy picture of the Virgin Mary and they were going to stick it to some craft board, decorate it, and take it home. There were children from other countries in this classroom who were not necessarily Catholic, but they were still expected to participate in this activity. Prayers were also said whenever the children had a snack, and at the end of the day.

Since Malta joined the European Union in 2004, its classrooms have seen a surge in international students who might not be of the same religious denomination

as the Maltese majority, who are baptised Roman Catholics. A recommendation was made by the European Commission that a new subject entitled Religious and Ethics Education be devised, so that children who had a different religion than that which was practised by the majority of citizens in the country they were living in could participate in this subject while the others held their regular religion lesson (Ganado 2016; Willaime, 2007). However, this was only implemented from the primary level to the upper grades. So, in kindergarten and childcare centres, it was up to the educator to decide whether or not to teach the Catholic religion and its precepts in the settings.

My data suggests that religion plays an important part in the daily routines of the settings that participated in my study in both countries. Although this was not a question asked to participants of the other three data sets, it was very pronounced in the fieldnotes kept during the observations and this led me to include it in this analysis and discussion. Religious beliefs seem to influence the pedagogy and practice of the settings in question: for example, prayers and Bible stories were seen as an important part of the teachings in such settings. I suggest that, in the case of Grenada, this policy is a lingering consequence of its former incorporation in the British Empire, where missionaries were sent to convert the slaves and natives. Adherence to this faith has since been handed down through generations (Scott, 1996). It was interesting to note that, both in Malta and Grenada, children recite the same prayer before lunch: *Bless us O Lord and these thy gifts which we are going to receive from thy bounty through Christ our Lord, Amen*. In some cases, in Malta, this has been translated into Maltese. This is a traditional English Christian mealtime blessing that probably dates back to the fifth century AD (Kasten, 2015). It is quite

likely that this prayer was brought over to Grenada by the British missionaries and to Malta during British rule.

Conclusion of Findings Related to Research Question One

This section has presented, analysed and discussed four categories and eleven themes that have emerged from five data sets used for this study in response to the first research question:

What elements influence the pedagogy and practice of early childhood education (2 to 5-year-olds) in small island states?

Online questionnaire respondents, interviews with educators and parents' focus groups all concurred that the challenges of early childhood education in small island states deal mainly with a lack of financial, human and material resources. The lack in funding and investment in ECE was also discussed and how this eventually leads to inadequately trained staff to fill the posts of early childhood educators, as well as to an obligation to multi-task rather than specialise. The discussion also showed the gap between the pedagogies that educators claimed they were practising in Grenadian and Maltese settings and what was actually observed 'in the field' during my visits. This related back to the lack of trained personnel in this sector and how this affected their pedagogy and practice.

The above elements influence the pedagogy and practice of early childhood education in small island states as reported in this study, which also reports that, in a setting where corporal punishment was lawfully practised, there was more discipline and rigidity during learning opportunities and children's ideas and interests most often went unheeded or even punished if expressed. This will be discussed in more detail further on in the next chapter. Nearly all respondents of the online

questionnaire, the interviews and the focus groups agreed that a play-based approach is the most beneficial for children, and educators also concurred that they are aiming for a child-centred pedagogy. However, as this analysis and discussion show, what is being claimed as ideal by participants is not necessarily what is being practised on the ground. On one hand, in Grenada, corporal punishment is still practised in some form in homes, childcare settings and schools, religion is very prominent in the teaching, and there is still a fundamentally traditional British school system in place. On the other hand, in Malta, corporal punishment in homes and education and care settings was abolished four years ago, religion is still present but is not as dominant as it was even two decades ago, and there is still a school system that is mostly influenced by the traditional British model that was transferred from the British to the Maltese, with very little thought to the consequences it would have on the local education system. Spiteri (2016) contends that: “Throughout its 164-year colonial history as part of the British Empire...Malta was subject to a more or less uncritical process of educational policy transfer” (p. 299). Sultana (2006) and Cutajar (2008) also argue that the Maltese educational model was handed down by the British during colonial rule and, although some superficial changes have taken place over time, it continues to be mostly guided by different British education models (Borg & Mayo, 2015).

In the case of Grenada and the Caribbean in general, Jules (2010) suggests that education in the Caribbean over the past 25 years has passed through change and restructuring. Unfortunately, he continues, there were only a few instances when these pursued reforms led to a deep rethink of the meaning of education in a way that reflected the re-shaping of the post-independence Caribbean. The analysis of this study resonates with what Prochner (2009) and May et al. (2016) state that

colonialism did leave an impact on early childhood education on children from as young as two years of age.

The next chapter will discuss in more detail the impact of colonialism on ECE in SIS and how this may still be manifested in the current postcolonial era.

Chapter 5 - The Impact of Colonialism on Early Childhood Education in Small Island States: Analysis and Discussion of Findings

Postcolonial theory suggests that a colonial impact may linger in a country long after its official decolonisation. One cannot separate the ‘past’ so easily from the ‘present’ (Bhabha, 1994) and so the impact on cultural, economic, political and educational issues can persist (Baldacchino, 2010a; Bhabha, 1994; Zammit, 1981). According to Caldwell, Harrison and Quiggin (1980), small island states are: “products of a European maritime culture of the last five centuries” (p. 954). Caldwell et al. (1980) also argue that small island states are more Westernised than any other larger developing states because they formed part of the European maritime system. The authors claim that, on the whole, “they [SIS] retained colonial links longer” (p. 960), even after gaining independence. My study has sought to examine if this colonial impact has left its mark on early childhood education.

The literature review in Chapter Two suggested that a postcolonial impact has already been detected in education, ranging from the primary up to tertiary levels, in many small island states (Farrugia, 1991; Hickling-Hudson, 2006; Jules, 2010; Sultana 2006). Colonial education systems have been effective in dispensing a particular form of education, along with its accompanying disciplinary framework (Burton, 2012; Crossley & Tikly, 2004). Baldacchino and Baldacchino (2017) argue that: “it is the formal, post-16 educational sector in small island states that continues to steal the research limelight” (p. 3), even though current research emphasises the importance of the early years as being instrumental in the formation and development of later learning (Mustard, 2010).

This study has assumed that postcolonialism has also impacted early childhood education in small island states, perhaps in ways that still need to be

identified and researched. I have argued in previous chapters that, since the models of education in both Grenada and Malta are ‘top-down’ approaches, the requirements and standards of the upper grades lead to pressure on lower grades for children to be better prepared and be ‘school ready’ (Jules, 2010; Woodhead & Moss, 2007). This sometimes neglects the fact that young children are still developing, and so the colonial impact is sometimes unconsciously handed down, even to the lower grades (Nieuwenhuys, 2013; Viruru, 2005a).

Data from four data sets – an online questionnaire with 64 respondents from 27 countries; interviews with 10 educators; four focus groups with 24 participating parents as well as personal observations and fieldnotes – will be presented, analysed and discussed in this chapter in response to the second research question of this study:

What impact, if any, has colonialism had on early childhood education in small island states, and how is that impact manifested in the current postcolonial epoch?

The methods of analysing this data and how this will be presented have been discussed in detail in Chapter 4.

Participants of this research, including educators, principals and directors taking part in my interviews, and the parents’ focus groups, agreed that there was an impact on education in general and which was then being reflected on early childhood education settings. They stated that the impact could be felt more strongly and keenly in the upper grades, but that some aspects of colonialism were still traceable at the early childhood education level. This was also evidenced through the fieldnotes and observed data I collected in both countries.

Chapter 5 will be divided in three sections, based on such and interlocking categories and ‘expressions’ of colonialism which became manifest as a result of this study:

1. Colonial Language Legacy
2. Colonial Impact on Pedagogy and Physical Environment of ECE Settings
3. Colonial Legacy: Discipline and Corporal Punishment

Five themes emerged from these three categories and each of these will be discussed separately in this section, with reference to relevant literature being made throughout the analysis and discussion as appropriate.

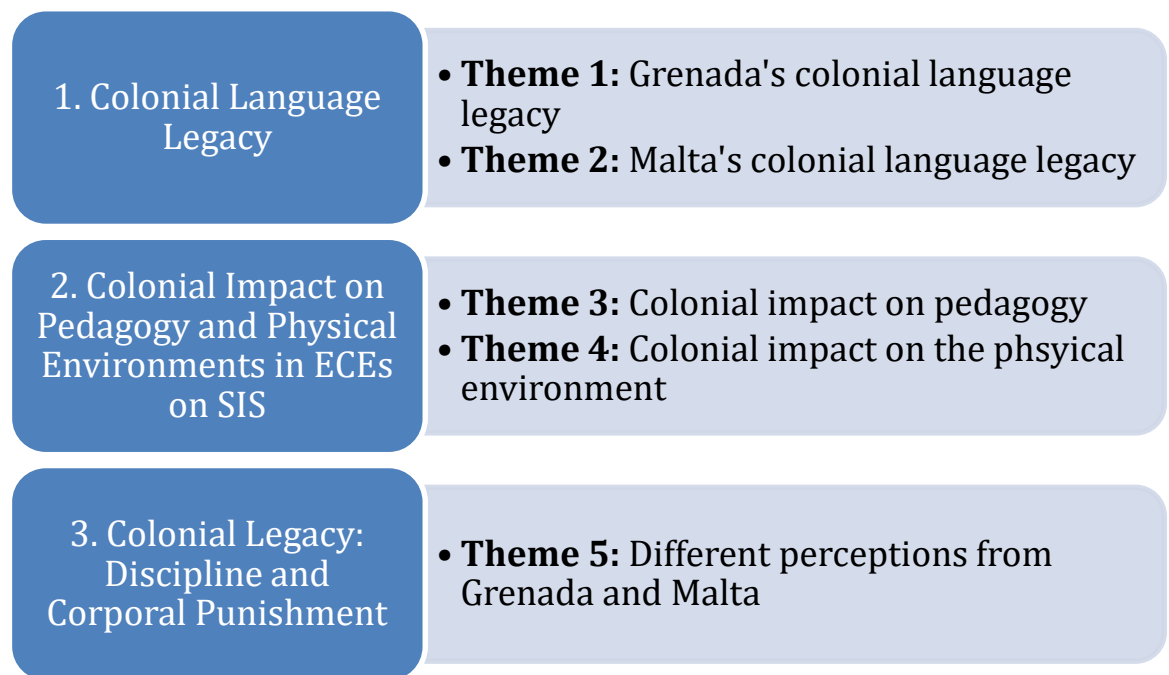


Figure 5.1: Categories and themes emerging in response to research question two

1. Colonial Language Legacy

Respondents to the online questionnaire were asked to indicate the language of instruction used in ECE and the language of instruction practised and/or encouraged at home in their own country. Respondents from all 27 small island

states responded to these two questions. The language of instruction as indicated by respondents is reported in Figure 5.2 below. This indicates that respondents from 10 countries reported that their colonial language only is the language of teaching and learning in their country (37%). Nauru claimed that both English and the local language are used for teaching purposes. Respondents from 11 countries, including those that were colonised by France and Portugal, use a mix of both colonial languages (English, French or Portuguese) together with the local language for teaching and learning in the early years (41%). In the six other SIS (22%), the language of instruction is uniquely local. In Samoa, Solomon Islands, Kiribati and Tuvalu, Melanesian and Polynesian languages are the media of instruction. These are Pacific island states where the duration of the colonial experience has not been as lengthy as in the Caribbean. Colonial infiltration in Iceland, colonised by Denmark, has not been so thorough: Icelandic, a local language, is used throughout. In the case of Cyprus, although it was under British rule, it managed to keep its local languages alive: Greek, serving as a national focal point for nationalism and resistance; and Turkish, the language of the minority community in Cyprus. In fact, these two European small island states are the world's only SIS where the language of instruction *and* communication is not a colonial language. This observation confirms the depth of the colonial experience in SIS.

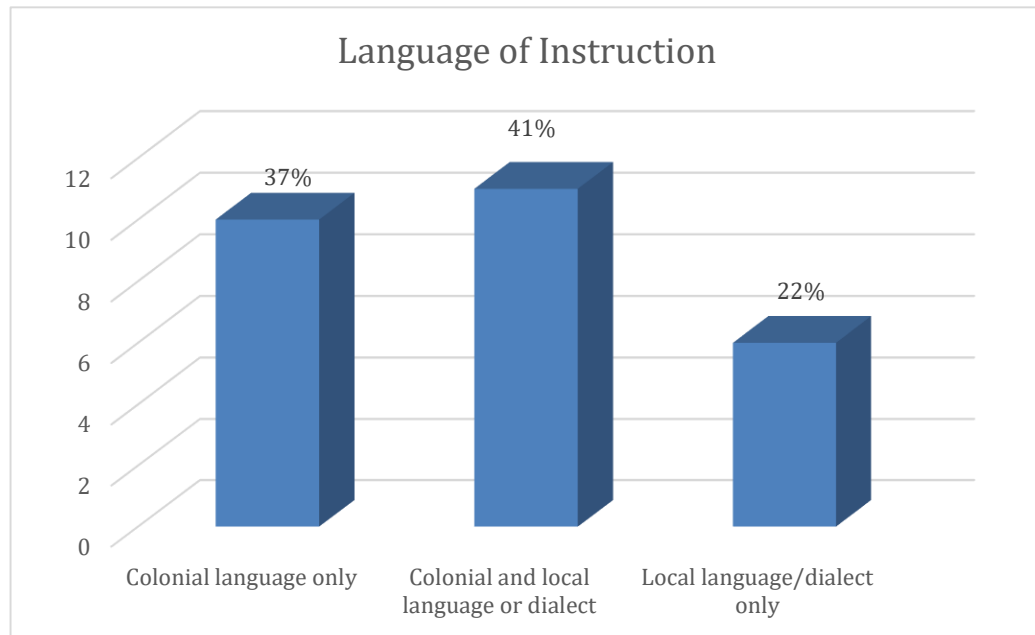


Figure 5.2 – Language of Instruction. N = 27 SIS

For this study, it is good to note that Maltese online questionnaire respondents reported that English is predominantly used for instruction. However, a mix of both Maltese and English is also used at times, to simplify explanation to students. This was also recommended by the Ministry for Education and Employment in the Language Policy for the Early Years in Malta and Gozo (MEDE, 2016): educators could use “language mediation”, in that they could switch languages in order to facilitate communication and comprehension of certain concepts (p. 11). All respondents from Grenada affirmed that English is the language of instruction in their country. Postcolonial research shows that one of the impacts of colonialism is the language that the rulers bring with them, and how this is slowly but steadily mainstreamed among the local population, particularly those interested in social and occupational mobility and in finding work with the colonial administration. This mainstreaming is more thorough if colonial rule lasts for centuries, as in the case of Malta and Grenada (Talib, 2002).

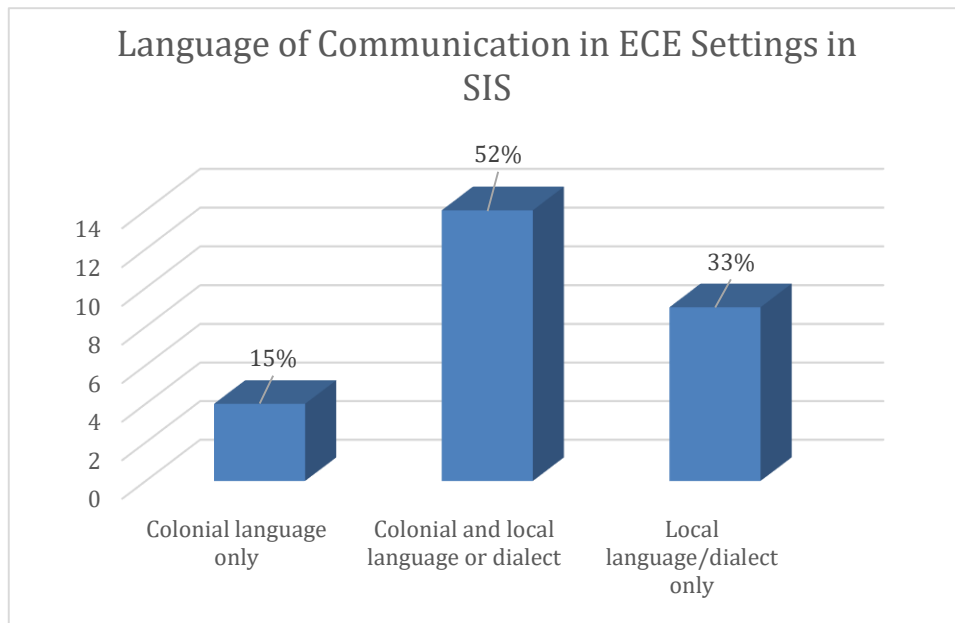


Figure 5.3 - Language of Communication. N = 27 SIS

Figure 5.3 above refers to the language of communication in ECE settings on SIS. It shows that the resort to a mix of colonial and local languages or dialects (52%) is somewhat more predominant than that in Figure 5.2 (41%). Concurrently, the percentage of SIS using the colonial language only, as a means of communication is now much less (15%) than the percentage of those using the colonial language only for instruction (37%). Meanwhile, the local language/dialect is a more preferred choice for communication now (33%), as opposed to 22% in Figure 5.2. Most probably, this would be because young children would bring to school the local language or dialect that they converse and hear in the home environment. This suggests that educational institutions in SIS are likely to promote colonial languages, even when the preferred language of communication is a different one.

Analyses from interviews and focus groups are in line with the above findings. Due to the nature of this category, data about Malta and Grenada has been analysed and will be presented separately in the next two sections.

Interviewees in both countries were asked what language should be used in an early childhood programme (inclusive of both kindergarten and childcare centres). For Grenada, it was a definite answer: English. It is their official language and they want their children to have a solid knowledge of and competence in the English language as they proceed through the school system. It is important to note that out of the 10 countries in the online questionnaire who responded that the language of instruction was English in their ECE settings, eight were from island states in the Caribbean, including Grenada. This condition illustrates how deep the colonial experience in these small island states in this region was.

Theme 1 – Grenada’s Colonial Language Legacy

At least 70 languages that survived colonialism and are still being used in various degrees in 29 states and territories of the Caribbean, including continental rim mainlands and archipelagos (Reid, 2012). Six out of these 70 languages are used in an official capacity. English is spoken in 20 of these 29 states and territories including Grenada. The situation of the ‘living language’ in the Caribbean is quite complex and at times proves to be problematic in formal education (Ferreira, 2012). The author adds that, besides this problem, there is the issue of the ‘heritage languages’ some of “which are in various stages of obsolescence” (p.130).

The official language in Grenada is English, with some local ‘*patois*’ (Grenadian Creole) derived from French and African languages. The language of Grenada evolved from its historical heritage of English, French and African lineage.

Grenadian English is based upon a tradition of British education and this is what is spoken on the island by more than 80% of the population (Wilder, 2017). It is also the single language of instruction in all schools.

Ferreira and Holbrook (2014) interviewed eight Grenadian French Creole '*patois*' speakers, aged 67-77 years on the use of Grenadian French Creole by people living in Grenada. The participants reportedly did not know of any children on Grenada and Carriacou (one of the islands in the Grenadian archipelago) who were learning or speaking '*patois*'. They reported that: "in fact, they [the speakers] did not know of any person under the age of 60 who still spoke the language." (Ferreira & Holbrook, 2014, p. 9). This was also the case in my study from the interviews with Grenadian educators and parents: they all confirmed that they do not speak French Creole to the children in school or at home; nor did they know of anyone who did speak it regularly. Only the English language is encouraged. The Ferreira and Holbrook study and the study reported in this thesis can both be considered indicative. Nevertheless, they do provide some sense of the depth of the colonial impact on language use in Grenada. The apparent demise of Grenadian French Creole will be complete when the "last of the oldest generation of Grenadians and Carriacouans die" (Ferreira & Holbrook, 2014, p. 15). Talib (2002) also argues that, if a native language does not have a "written script and a literary tradition to back it up" (p. 45), it will have fewer speakers and it may eventually die out. Nutbrown in: *The lore and language of early education* (1998) looks at the Cornish language that had died out in daily life and states that:

One way to destroy a culture is to attack its language. The destruction of a culture of *Early Education* - intentional or accidental - has been taking place, with fundamental elements of its language being redefined and other elements decried and placed in the same 'wastebasket' category of words and

phrases from different cultures and dialects which suggest something less than 'proper' (Nutbrown, 1998, p. 16).

According to five of my Grenadian interviewees, French creole 'patois' is a dying language:

I think what basically happened to our ancestors, is that Creole language was used when you wanted to communicate something that you did not want everybody to know. So, when you are talking, and the children are around they speak Creole English so that they won't understand you. Instead of transferring the knowledge (of the language,) our ancestors kept it and died with it (Shaniyah, G).

English! Because, I believe the children need to start to speak properly. They hear Creole at home at times but then, at school they need to start speaking proper English. Creole is only a broken English language, so in the classroom we try to speak British English (Deja, G).

Of course, I would say English! I am 39 and I'm not sure I know what Creole is. Creole is something that has been dying out slowly and most of the older folks have died and it has gone with them. We teach in English here. It is important to know a little bit of Creole as it is in our culture, but right now I would say English should be the language of teaching in ECE. I don't know if the children know what Creole is, maybe their grandparents did but not anymore (Tonya, G).

English. However, at the lower levels, sometimes we have to break it down a bit, but the majority of children understand English. Sometimes, we only need to change two or three words in the sentence (Nadisha, G).

Only one Grenadian respondent showed her concern and discomfort about having to use the English language instead of French Creole:

Personally... our culture, Africa, we are descendent from the African tribe. One of the things that we have is the language, Creole. We still use Creole in our culture, so some children still hear Creole, even at school, at times we hear it and sometimes as adults we do use some Creole words. But, in my opinion, it is our culture, it's our heritage, you don't kill it for standard English. Standard English is what is accepted universally. You teach that because that is what is acceptable, but you don't kill your own so that you can have somebody else's. I think it should be used interchangeably. Because on other [Caribbean] islands they do use it, actually they do teach it and they do use it as part of their teaching. I don't think we should have killed it, but that is what we did in exchange for standard English (Shaniyah, G).

Educators in Grenada who participated in my research also confirmed that there is no written French Creole in schools in any form, be it textbooks, reading books or otherwise. With the dying of the language, there is also the obliteration of the culture that came with it (Talib, 2002). Nevertheless, as one interviewee (*Shaniyah, G*) told me: “*In Grenada, there is a small group of people who are trying to revive this culture (not the language)*”. However, even this drive has had little effect because of a lack of interest, especially among the younger generation, most of whom have not experienced any French Creole in their home environment (Ferreira & Holbrook, 2014).

English is thus the undisputed official/and unofficial language in Grenada, Carriacou and Petite Martinique which together form the Grenadian archipelago. Grenadian French Creole is not taught in schools and English is spoken amongst adults and students in all school environments. It is the same scene at home, as the findings of parents’ focus groups suggest. Creole is not encouraged neither at home nor at school. All the interviewees of both focus groups in Grenada stressed that English was their preferred language. The following parents’ statements show that English is their preferred language even at home:

English! Because it is the only language and writing that I learnt when I was growing up. We used to speak Creole at home, but I don’t speak it anymore now. I would encourage my child to speak Creole maybe later on in her life but, not right now because it is not a part of our culture in our home (Neriah, G).

We speak English at home because we were taught that our language was bad, and it is not good. So, we teach our children standard English (Aaliyah, G).

English mainly. We do try and speak Creole to an extent. Like when we don’t want the children to understand what we are saying (Doel, G).

English is still preferred as language of instruction than Grenadian Creole; our everyday language of communication has been belittled by a very colonial approach to education (Nasisha, G).

Nine of the 12 respondents in the focus groups which were conducted in Grenada did not speak Creole at home and did not encourage it either. As can be noted from the comment presented below, Creole is perceived as a dying language in Grenada (Ferreira & Holbrook, 2014).

The history of Creole is that the slaves would speak it amongst themselves so that the plantation owners would not understand them. It was there prior to independence. My grandmother, my great grandmother, everyone would have been speaking Patois as we refer to it. What the historians are saying is that our ancestors did not want to pass it down to the other generations because the idea was that it is was only for them. So, it died with them. Maybe, they did not see the importance of it as a language and it being unique to the Caribbean (Neriah, G).

Analysis of my fieldnotes and observations in the Grenadian settings, suggest that both the language of instruction and communication was consistently English in the Grenadian settings participating in my study. However, I also noticed that educators code-switched between English and Grenadian Creole, especially when they were with the children. There were also very few instances when I witnessed ‘patois’ being spoken by adults without code-switching and these individuals would be in their 50s or older (*Fieldnotes: January 26, 2017*).

During one particular instance, two children were heard speaking a couple of words in Creole to each other while role-playing. The educator corrected them by repeating what they were saying in standard English (*Fieldnotes: January 18, 2017*). Paugh (2005) confirms that young children in Dominica still use ‘patois’ (a French lexicon creole) “to enact particular adult roles during peer play” (p. 63). This happens in spite of the fact that children are forbidden to speak ‘patois’ at home or at school (Paugh, 2005). Role-play shows how children’s interests “can be theorised as a desire to connect with and reconstruct meaning from the sociocultural activities, values and practices of the communities to which they belong” (Chesworth, 2016, p.

295). Analysis of my fieldnotes suggest that this behaviour is quite reasonable since, during role play, children model and experiment with events experienced at home, in which they would be imitating their parents, siblings, relatives and friends. So, they are associating the language with the individual whose part they are role-playing. Perhaps, this is the only time they can practise ‘*patois*’.

The following section will continue to discuss colonial language legacy, but this time with respect to Malta.

Theme 2 – Malta’s Colonial Language Legacy

Malta has two official languages: Maltese, also acknowledged as the single national language, and English. Centuries of different colonial rule has resulted in the hybrid language that is contemporary Maltese: the world’s only Semitic language written with a Latin alphabet. As early as the 9th century and until 1964, when Malta gained independence, “a series of conquerors left their mark on all aspects of Maltese life,” including their language (Camilleri Grima, 2018; The Economist, 2015). The article in The Economist goes on to state that:

The main linguistic transformation came in around 1050, when the ruling Arabs absorbed the existing community and, through force of numbers, replaced the local tongue with their own. The Sicilians and the Knights of Malta followed. Sicilian, Latin and Italian, which was later declared the country’s official language, enjoyed a high status for centuries – but Arabic persisted (para. 2).

When the British took over Malta in 1800, Italian was the language used in courts, for educational instruction, and by members of the upper to middle classes who wanted to distinguish themselves from the rest of the ‘common’ population who spoke Maltese (Brincat, 2001). As may be expected, the British started promoting English as the official language and made this language compulsory for

any Maltese aspiring to work in the Malta public service (Zammit, 1981). In fact, in 1813 Sir Thomas Maitland, the then newly-appointed governor of Malta, imposed English as the sole official language. He was given strict orders by Lord Bathurst:

I commend to your constant attention the diffusion of the English language among the inhabitants and the adoption of every means of substituting English for the Italian language [which was then the official language] (Hull, 1993, p. 5).

So, in 1829 Maitland declared English as the sole language of the Courts in Malta. It was only in 1921, that Maltese was allowed in parliamentary debates for the first time (Camilleri Grima, 2018). Local resistance prevented a complete take-over by English, to the detriment of both Italian and Maltese (Brincat 2001; Frendo, 1975; Mifsud, 1993). There appears to have been no similar opposition in Grenada where English dominated and eventually led to the demise of any other native language.

English was first introduced into the school system in Malta in 1833, yet, Italian maintained priority as language of instruction, while a still largely oral but unwritten Maltese “was officially recognised as the first language of the pupils” (Camilleri Grima, 2012). Both Maltese and English became official languages of Malta in 1934. The British desire to eradicate the Italian language “with the real dangers of fascism’s expansionistic and aggressive policies” (Brincat, 2001, p. 137) and their concern with the rise of Mussolini in neighbouring Italy led to the encouragement of the teaching of Maltese in schools (Brincat, 2001). Although Maltese was then declared an official language, the principals and school administrators of primary schools in Malta were offered training in the United Kingdom: they were required to undergo training in the United Kingdom from 1881

until the 1960s. The teachers' training colleges in Malta were also run by British nuns (for women) and British clerics (for men) (Camilleri Grima, 2012).

The resulting multilingual culture is at the basis of Malta's modern society (Camilleri Grima, 2018; *The Economist*, 2015). Today, English is the language of instruction in private and independent schools, except for the teaching in and about the Maltese language and literature. In state and church schools, Maltese is considered the language of instruction: however, church schools tend to favour English in most cases. English is also seen largely as the written language, since most of the textbooks and printed material are in English, while Maltese is the main vehicle for oral communication and interaction (Vella, 2013). English is the official language of instruction for almost all courses taught at the University of Malta (Camilleri Grima, 2018). However, one of the pre-requisites to enter the University of Malta for Maltese citizens is certification in the Maltese language.

Nowadays, most of the Maltese population are bilingual and both languages are spoken fluently by most citizens. Maltese is also one of the official languages of the European Union. Code switching between English and Maltese in conversation is widespread and hard to avoid:

The use of English is increasingly present in informal speech – some words are even adopted and given a new life in Italian forms. Some fear this intrusion could cause the language to be abandoned. Others dismiss such concerns as irrelevant. But whereas Malta's tongue emerged through inescapable blending, it is no longer vulnerable to the whims of foreign rulers. The evolution of the island's language depends on those who speak it (*The Economist*, para. 4).

Analysis of the interviews conducted with educators about which language of instruction they think should be used in ECE settings reports that most of the respondents agreed that there should be a balance since both Maltese and English

are the official languages of the country. The National Literacy Strategy for All (MEDE, 2017) stresses the fact that both languages are important and argues that students should have: “access to learning materials in both languages to engage in meaningful tasks” (p. 29) and have a solid knowledge of both languages. However, this was not the case in *Perlina* childcare centre. Although this centre was run by Maltese individuals, the *Perlina* childcare setting was an English speaking one. Interviewees from this centre acknowledge that the complete exclusion of Maltese does not amount to good practice:

I believe that there needs to be a bit of both languages, especially because of the aspect of inclusivity. In this school especially, we have a reality that may be different than what other schools might have and so we need to use both languages. We have quite a number of international students. We need to be inclusive. However, it is not right to shift to English because of people coming from other countries all the time as we also have Maltese students in our school (Xandru, M).

No, we cannot have one single language, as this would be a disservice to our students. We are a bilingual country, so we cannot do everything in Maltese or everything in English. We try to give instructions and have flash cards in the classroom in both languages (Vitorin, M).

I think we should say some words in both languages, just words at least, even though we are an English-speaking school. Maybe not the whole day but at least some words that they use every day, like ‘xemx’ in Maltese and ‘sun’ in English. When they go to KG they will find it difficult to learn Maltese if they were only exposed to the English language. They will have exams in Maltese as well later on in life (Ġuża, M).

Two educators-respondents in Malta held quite different views about what language should be used for instruction:

I totally believe that English should be used. I agree that Maltese has to be learned from a young age, but the English language for me is more important. It seems to be the universal language. We would be really foolish to believe that we can use the Maltese language to dominate everything else...our resources are mostly in English. We do not have any local material in this setting (Lora, M).

I believe that it depends on where you live. Why? Because the language that you will hear the most is the local one. Here, we have instances where we

have international children with multicultural parents. So, this child, at home, will hear his native language. Then he comes to school and finds me here. I believe that since we are in Malta and we have our own language, I should speak to him in Maltese. Why shouldn't we speak our language? If he does not understand, I will try and explain differently, or in English (Doris, M).

Participants in the parents' focus groups were asked what language of communication they use or encourage at home with their children. The findings from the focus groups in Malta offered a mixed view about this practice, indicative of regional differences on the small island state. When asked what language they use at home for communication with their children, those interviewed in the south of Malta were more inclined to say Maltese and that they did however, try to teach their children some English words, especially through such media as television and video clips from the internet on laptops and tablets.

I think that it depends from where the children come from. Which part of Malta they come from. For example, if you are from the south you speak mostly Maltese but if you are from the north or centre of Malta you tend to speak in English (Maria, M).

Yes, I agree. I work in Sliema [central Malta] and the majority of the people I meet there speak English even though they are Maltese. But when I worked in the south of Malta I could feel the difference as everyone spoke in Maltese (Ġanni, M).

These two parents seem to hold the view that English spoken in Maltese households is related to social class and is seen as a status marker. Bugeja (2011) agrees that there is a “fake status symbol embedded in the psyche of some English-Maltese language speakers and it is an evident fact, which is dangerously damaging our lingual heritage” (para. 3). Bugeja adds that this was not always the case and that the practice has accelerated over the last half century or so. He argues that this status symbol attached to the English language “was originally attributed to a strong British colonial influence” (Bugeja 2011, para. 3).

On the other hand, the response from the focus group participants coming from central Malta was a definite ‘yes’ to using the English language both to communicate with their children and also amongst the adults in the home. They reported that they use Maltese only when they did not want their children to understand what they were saying and that they found it difficult to teach Maltese to their children. One wonders: why this divide between the south and the central part of Malta? The Maltese have the tendency of labelling English-speaking Maltese coming from the central and more affluent part of Malta as ‘snobbish’. Case studies conducted in Malta by Camilleri (1995), Caruana (2007) and Vella (2013) suggest that “regular use of English in Malta by Maltese nationals, especially as a spoken medium, is sometimes associated with families pertaining to a higher socioeconomic class” (Vella 2014, p. 13).

Three respondents participating in the focus group conducted in the south of Malta agreed that Maltese people spoke English more in the central part of Malta than in the South. One of the respondents (*Maria*) shared her work experience: when she was working in the south of Malta she spoke only Maltese to her clients, and then when she shifted to a job in Sliema (which lies in central Malta), she had to shift to the English language because of the different clientele.

Maltese used to be the preferred language of communication in Maltese homes, but this has changed rapidly over recent decades. As *Malta Uncovered* (2017) argues: “Today, a considerable portion of the population prefer to speak English or were raised as English-speaking primarily” (para. 3). The parents’ comments below, show that this practice is very much still the case. Suffice to say that the focus group conducted with parents of *Perlina* childcare centre – an English-speaking setting – preferred that we conduct our focus group session in

English, even though we were all Maltese born and raised. These parents all agreed that English was the language that they used to speak with their children at home. Some said that they found it difficult to encourage their children to speak Maltese while other parents in the focus group showed an interest in trying to teach/speak Maltese to their children at home:

At home, we speak English, but sometimes we speak Maltese when we do not want her [the daughter] to understand what we are saying. My daughter does not speak Maltese, but I want to teach her. I think nowadays it's harder to pick up Maltese. Now we have more individuals coming from other countries and the internet, so we hear English more often. It's going to be a challenge for me to teach my daughter Maltese (Antida, M).

Me too. I realise how important it is to speak Maltese, but I don't speak to her in Maltese. We do sometimes try to say Maltese words and then tell her what they mean in English, but we are not consistent, and I worry she will struggle with the Maltese language later in school. I want to encourage her to speak in Maltese. (Ines, M).

We always spoke Maltese at home when I was young. Both sides of the family, and I speak to my husband in Maltese also, but for some unexplainable reason I speak to my son in English. I'm caught in a bit of a trap as it's easier for him to communicate and understand this language. I'm trying to instil the Maltese language in him, but I automatically fall back to English since he's more comfortable with it. But, I have to keep trying and correcting myself as I believe otherwise he's going to have trouble learning it at school later on (Stella, M).

In contrast, while conducting the focus group with parents whose children were attending *Ġellewża* state school in the south of Malta, the conversation was mostly in Maltese with some code switching at times – which is quite common amongst Maltese speakers (Camilleri Grima, 2018). All parents in the *Ġellewża* group admitted that they spoke to their children in Maltese. They also agreed that it is important for their children to learn English and that they encouraged them to learn/speak English in one way or another at home. Here are some of their comments:

I do agree that we need English. Interacting abroad we need it, but it is very, very important that my son knows Maltese. I feel that our son needs to know good Maltese especially since my parents are Maltese speaking and I don't want him to not be able to interact with them because of his language (Louisa, M).

We speak Maltese at home. I sometimes speak in English so that my son won't know what we are saying. However, he can now pick up some words too. My son watches a lot of cartoons in English and is picking up a lot of words. And now, even the fact that there are so many foreigners in the school, they have to learn English. It has become an important language for communication (Ġanni, M).

Maltese only. Sometimes he says some words in English like 'yes' and 'no'. Sometimes, when I tell him tuffieħa [apple in Maltese] he says le [no in Maltese] 'apple'. I tell him that they are the same, but he says: le dik 'apple' u t-teacher hekk tgħidilha [no, that's an 'apple' and that is what the teacher calls it]. (Iris, M).

Only one parent from this *Ġellewża* focus group said that she spoke to her children in both English and Maltese at home:

I use both languages as my elder child has learnt a lot of English, so when she is in the mood to speak in English we answer her back in English. But otherwise, we speak to our children and amongst ourselves in Maltese. I do not agree with schools that are only English speaking as the children will forget the Maltese language and when it comes to sitting for Maltese exams they will not do well (Tereža, M).

It is quite clear from the above theme that there are both Maltese and English-speaking families who value one language over the other. An interesting finding is that the Maltese-speaking parents are more acceptable and ready to teach their children the English language whereas, the English-speaking parents tend to move more reluctantly in teaching their children to speak Maltese as they do not really see its value except for school and exams later on in life. They also thought that Maltese was a hard language to learn.

Findings from my observational fieldnotes also show that, in the case of *Perlina* childcare centre, which is located in the central part of Malta, the language

of instruction and communication was English at all times. The children had a good command of the English language from as young an age as two or three. There was no instance during my observations where these children resorted to the use of the Maltese language or code-switched (*Fieldnotes: March 13, 2017*). The books offered to children in this setting were all in English, even though Maltese children's books are readily available in bookstores all over Malta.

In contrast, observational fieldnotes in the setting situated in the south of Malta - *Ġellewża* - report that the educator spoke Maltese, English and even Italian in her classroom, depending on the nationality of the child she was speaking to. The Maltese children communicated with each other mostly in Maltese, even to the international students. An English boy spoke English to everyone and a pair of Italian twins communicated in Italian amongst themselves and also with the educator (*Fieldnotes: March 3, 2017*). Moreover, I could also observe that the kindergarten educators communicated amongst themselves mainly in Maltese, with some code-switching at times. This resonates with what Camilleri Grima (2018) states:

Throughout the system, spontaneous and intentional use of Maltese and English is frequent among teachers and learners and school administrators. As a system, this evolved naturally as a result of interaction between bilingual teachers and bilingual learners who mostly speak in Maltese but read and write in English. (p. 35)

The books offered in the *Ġellewża* setting were in both the English and Maltese languages. However, most of the books in Maltese were either a translation of an English story or had content that Maltese children might not relate to so easily. Needless to say, the arrival of a considerable number of immigrants and international workers to Malta in recent years, has introduced a number of other

languages (including Arabic, Bulgarian, Filipino, Serb, Italian, to name a few) which must be taken into account once the children of these migrants join the educational system. As Camilleri Grima (2018) contends:

...as a consequence of the presence of an increasing number of newly arriving non-Maltese children in schools, we are experiencing a switch to an English-only medium of instruction. (p. 38)

The main difference that I noticed in these two settings was that the setting in the central part of Malta used English only, while in the other setting there was a considerable amount of code-switching. This was not done only to accommodate the foreign students, but it was being done unconsciously, based on the ability of the educator who could fluently speak three languages. Arguably, Vella (2014) states that, “even those who claim to use exclusively Maltese or English at all times are likely to use forms of code-switching” (p. 14). This has not been my experience at the setting in central Malta, where I did not hear the educators code-switching, but rather, they spoke in the English language only. Code-switching helps individuals to better explain themselves or to better transfer concepts of learning from the written text (which is usually in English) to the oral discussion and problem-solving that goes on in the classroom (Camilleri Grima, 2012). The following are examples of code-switching by the educator in the south of Malta that I noted during my classroom observations:

Number one x'inhu? Big or small? (What is number one? Big or small?). The educator was explaining the difference between the values of smaller or larger numbers (Fieldnotes: March 8, 2017).

Rasu Circle, two saqajn u two idejn (His head is a circle, two feet and two hands). The educator was trying to show the children how to draw a person (Fieldnotes: March 6, 2017).

This is a common occurrence in Maltese classrooms (Camilleri Grima, 2018; Camilleri, 1995) and in society at large, and is usually related to subject-specific issues or to the educator's own experience in the language. Baker (2000) contends that this takes place so that there is a deeper understanding of the concept being taught. Camilleri Grima (2012) shows that, in the case of the more scientific subjects such as numeracy, in the early years these are taught in English, and this was quite evident in the setting I observed where code-switching was a regular and unconscious routine. It is important to acknowledge that English is an integral and important language in Malta "not only because of its international currency and profusion in education worldwide, but also due to its relevance to the tourist industry in Malta" (Camilleri, 2012, p. 13). Due to our colonial heritage, I would argue that, it is difficult, and not recommended for Malta to switch to a monolingual method of instruction, not only because most of our educational printed material is in English but also because of social media and because English is a global language that unites Maltese people with the rest of the world. As Farrugia (2009) argues, educators have formulated their own tactics on code-switching and therefore, 'rather than trying to eliminate this situation', one should 'look for ways to maximise the effectiveness of linking strategies' (p. 111). In fact, a recent document issued by the Ministry responsible for Education about language policy for education states that code-switching is now encouraged and should be part of the normal every day routine for instruction in all schools (MEDE, 2017).

Summary: Findings Related to Colonial Language Legacy

The above themes emerging from the first category have discussed findings from this study relating to the colonial language legacy in both Grenada and Malta. Grenada uses the English language only for both instruction and communication, at

school and at home. Parents reported that they actively discourage their children from using the French Creole even though some parents might use a word or two of this language between them at home, such that their children would not understand what they are saying. All the books in the Grenada settings, both in childcare settings and in kindergarten were in English, including those written by Grenadian authors.

The findings here indicate that, in the case of Grenada, English is the predominant language of instruction: Creole lacks respectability and social standing amongst the participants of this study and is slowly dying out. Whereas, since Malta has two official languages, Maltese people in the study reported that they usually use English as the language of instruction but are more prone to use Maltese or code-switch between languages to communicate. It is also clear that the Maltese language remains a vibrant medium in that small European island state. This could be because when Malta was officially ceded to Britain in 1814, the local people already had a strong hold of their language and kept it in spite of the long British rule; or because of it, since it provided a local medium of communication which the British could not understand (Hull, 1993).

In the case of Grenada, the French landed there and started a settlement in 1650. The majority of the population in Grenada at the time consisted of African slaves who were imported by the French to work in their plantations. These slaves were introduced to the Christian faith and the French language was imposed on them (Steele, 1974). When the British invaded and conquered Grenada in 1763, they too imposed their own language and religion on the natives. The British colonised Grenada for nearly two centuries and, by the end of the colonial rule, English was the official language in Grenada and was spoken by all, with the consequence that

the French and English lexifier Creole was slowly dying (Ferreira, 2012; Steele, 1974).

One similarity that came out of the two themes in this category is that some of the participants used the native language not as a means of communication in the house amongst all the dwellers. Rather, it was used selectively among adults when they did not want the children to understand what they were saying.

The following section will now discuss how colonial influence impacts the pedagogy practised in the early childhood education settings, participating in my study and how this influence was also reflected in the physical environment of the observed settings.

2. Colonial Impact on Pedagogy and Physical Environments in ECE on SIS

Early childhood education all over the world has been strongly influenced by discourses about young children emerging from the dominant West – England and North America (Cannella & Viruru, 2004; Viruru, 2005a). Viruru (2005a) argues that these “discourses draw heavily from the work and theorists such as Piaget and Vygotsky, [and other] Western discourses” (p. 14), and that in present-day contexts these are subtly embodied in documents which discuss the concept of “developmentally appropriate practice” (p. 14). Such ideas have, argue Dahlberg, Moss and Pence (1999), provided the foundation of hegemony, colonisation and a ‘one-size-fits-all’ mentality in early childhood education.

The findings from interviews and focus groups conducted as part of this study, also suggest that both the environment and the pedagogy in the early years settings studied, have been influenced in some way or another by Western/colonial curricula. Vygotsky (1978) and Lave (1991) have each made a strong case for the

significance of cultural context in learning and have suggested that it should be the fundamental theme in educational reform. However, in the case of small island states (SIS), colonisers brought with them their own curricula and imposed these on their subjects irrespective of whether they related to local cultures and traditions. Penn (1997) carried out studies in early childhood settings in South Africa and observed:

The written curriculum and pedagogy for the black nurseries were mainly provided by NGO's, almost all of it in English, whatever the first language of the recipients. Despite the discrepancies in catchment, funding and organisation of the black and white centres, the curriculum, literature and training materials were all derived from western sources, mainly adaptations of Montessori and High Scope methods (Penn, 1997, p. 107).

This was also evident from the data acquired through my fieldnotes in Grenada, where educators had recently been introduced to the High Scope method of teaching with only a one-day training programme for one kindergarten educator in the school that participated in my study (*Research Journal: January 2017*).

Theme 3: Colonial Impact on Pedagogy

The colonial impact on the physical environment, as will be discussed in this section, appears to have influenced and/or is a reflection of the pedagogy of early childhood educators involved in this study. Since the resources that they are equipped with are coming from other countries, then the teaching and learning that takes place in ECEs in SIS can also be driven by these resources which do not always relate to the culture and traditions of the country (Coard, 1985; Hickling-Hudson, 2006). Viruru (2005b) argues that: “when some educators try to engage children in their learning and ‘meet the needs of children within that culture’ (p. 15), they are told by their superiors that the work they are doing does not conform to

“Western methods” (p. 15). The rigid methods of teaching in the settings observed also showed a colonial lingering of methods that had originally been implemented by colonisers. Although most of the educators in the study reported here voiced their concern about this and showed a willingness to change their way of thinking, they said that they were still hesitant to change their pedagogy. As some participants insisted, this was something that they had been “doing for many years and it seems to be working” (*Lora, M and Nadisha, G*).

Colonial education has been effective in disseminating a particular form of education along with its accompanying disciplinary framework (Burton, 2012; Crossley & Tikly, 2004). Viruru (2005a) contends that “Western” curricula are being imposed universally and that this is a new form of colonisation where children are seen as developing in a “linear sequence that all children must undergo to achieve maturity” (p. 14; See also Moss, 2012).

This colonial mentality, and the fact that there is pressure from upper grades for children at a very young age to be prepared for the primary level of schooling (another colonial legacy), (Newcombe, 2012; Nieuwenhuys, 2013; Jules 2010; Mazrui, 1995; Woodhead & Moss, 2007), can have a deleterious effect with such methods becoming entrenched rather than educators moving on to incorporate more current, research-based pedagogy in the early years. Change takes a long time and follows a certain process (Chapman, 2012; Wien, 2008). To change the mentality of a whole nation is difficult and will take an even longer time. It is a whole process that has to start from the policy makers and include parents and educators. As Moss (2012) however rightly states that one should not despair when change needs to take place. Rather it is:

A reason to renew contestation and reconceptualisation, to insist there are alternatives, and drawing on existing cases develop strategies for transformative change working at all levels from national through local to the individual preschool and school. (Moss, 2012, p. 367)

Mazrui (1995) talks about a history of dependency because of colonialism and how this is also tied in to the colonial system of education. Mazrui studied colonial education in Africa and concluded that there were a number of factors that had brought about this dependency. These include: the language of instruction used; the cultural background of the instructors; the curricular structure; what books could be found in the library and the pedagogic requirements (Mazrui, 1995). Findings from the data for the study reported here suggest that both Grenada and Malta showcase similar factors of dependency. Moreover, the University of Malta is similar to what Mazrui's study found in Africa in that it "perceives itself as an extension of major European universities" (Cutajar, 2008, p. 32), hence the dependence on and pervasiveness of colonial legacy throughout the local educational system.

The issue of whether there is a colonial impact on early childhood education proved to be a hot topic with all participants, both during the interviews and during the parents' focus groups. The reaction of all 10 interviewees was that colonialism did have an impact – be it negative or positive – on the school system in general and that in some way or another it was handed down to kindergarten and private day-care settings. Literature already suggests that there was a postcolonial impact on education, starting as early as at the primary level at the very least (Farrugia, 1991; Hickling-Hudson, 2006). However, there is no literature to show if this has also impacted kindergarten as well as childcare settings. The data shows that, in a top-down education model, forms of which both Grenada and Malta have adopted,

where the upper grades put pressure on lower grades, this colonial impact is practically unavoidably handed down, even to the lower grades (Jules, 2010; Prochner, 2009; Woodhead & Moss, 2007). After reflecting on the question, interview participants came up with the following elements that for them seemed to represent such colonial lingering:

- a) The use of uniforms in all primary and secondary schools, sometimes even in kindergartens. In Grenada, even the 2-year-old children in private childcare settings wore uniforms;
- b) The dress code of educators and workers in general. This was more pronounced in Grenada where the attire was very smart and maybe sometimes not too comfortable for the role of an early childhood educator (e.g. high heels). In Malta, the dress code for kindergarten educators and in childcare settings seemed to be more casual and comfortable but not so in the upper grades, where it tended to be more formal;
- c) The use of corporal punishment. This is legal in Grenada in schools according to the Education Act (Government of Grenada, 2002). Corporal punishment is also legal in the home environment as per Article 54 of the Criminal Code of 1958 (Global Initiative 2016a). Corporal punishment has been officially abolished in Malta since 2014;
- d) The class environment, resources and books available in the early childhood settings all resonate with different cultural models and materials. The charts displayed on the walls mostly depict American

and British related materials. The books and worksheets used do not relate to the country's context and so this is not something that children can always relate to;

- e) The colonial mentality that seems to still linger especially among people who are 50 years of age or older. Findings from the research show that, when I talked to parents in the focus groups who were younger than fifty, they had a different perspective about colonialism and how that might have impacted on their country's educational system. This might be due to the fact that the older participants would have directly experienced British rule, and at the same time have also been through independence and postcolonialism and so comparisons 'before and after' are possible.

However, even though parents in the focus groups were asked exactly the same question, the three elements that they reported as a colonial impact on ECE included: The British education system in general which they felt is still being practised in their country; the use of the English language; and the use of books in English in the ECE settings. It was interesting to note that the only similarity I could find between educators' and parents' responses was the last: English books made available to the children.

The findings from this study suggest that the colonial impact on Grenada is more dominant and pronounced than on Malta and that perspectives of participants from the respective countries may vary. Grenadian respondents all acknowledged that there is a colonial impact on early childhood education and the education system as a whole. Some of them think that nothing can be done about this as it is

ingrained in their system, and it has been like this for generations, even though they think that it should not necessarily be that way:

Yes, I think we have an English mentality which keeps us from changing. We still use corporal punishment with the children. That is what they know at home. The way people dress for work is definitely handed down from the British era as are the children's uniforms. Not that it's a bad thing mind you, but it is definitely a British influence (Tonya, G).

Sometimes it is ingrained in us so much that we cannot see any further. I think that school is very rigid and not play based as research shows because of the colonial influence still lingering in our system. But, if you look at Britain now, they do have play-based learning. Then there is corporal punishment. That was brought here by the British when they were the landlords to punish slaves. We are trying to get away from it now, but it is a hard and a slow process after all these years (Nadisha, G).

I strongly believe that we have a colonial impact in the early years. Some of our books are about the British culture, but we don't have anything from home. They all come from another country, another culture. Children cannot relate to the stories. They could have books about children picking mangoes or picking nutmeg or playing hop scotch that they can relate to instead. But, what is happening here is that we are so enculturated by the other nation and it is so ingrained in us, you become more of another person than who you really are, who you were born as. Even the TV [television] – we have one or two local programmes [for children] but, anything else is Western and foreign to us and they want us to conform to it and it shouldn't be like that (Shaniyah, G).

For instance, the Caribbean curriculum from which the students are taught is similar to that of our British rulers. We have come to embrace everything foreign and have forgotten about our own culture and heritage. It is not to say that it is not taught at our schools, but it has come in second to what we have to follow (Zuri, G).

Yes, I don't think we have ever changed our education system really from the colonial. We still have the rigid disciplinary approaches; we still use corporal punishment to some extent which I think was handed down by our colonisers. (Neriah, G).

It is worth noting the comment below by *Deja, G* about how the dolls in their setting were all white. In fact, my fieldnotes report both settings in Grenada had only white dolls (*Fieldnotes: February 3, 2017*):

A lot of it is handed down from the British. The uniforms, books, corporal punishment. And somehow it just won't go away. Just because of how we are

it just won't go away, some of it will remain as a relic of the British influence. Even though we are independent we are not in that position where we can do it on our own. Even our dolls are white! Most of our things are not produced here, everything comes from Canada or America. This is what happens because we are a small island. We don't produce our own things, everything is imported. The workbooks also come from the West, even the alphabet chart! (Deja, G).

Smith and Lewis-Todd (2017) contended that the absence of coloured dolls in the UK may well be due to a low demand for this kind of doll, even from non-white background individuals who in the 2011 census totalled eight million people. Gopaul-McNicol (1995) conducted a cross-cultural examination of racial preference of dolls in preschool children in the West Indies where the majority of the population is black. Results of this study indicate that most children still preferred white dolls to coloured ones, even though both were available on the market:

It was found that the majority (71.9%) of West Indian children when presented with Black dolls and White dolls chose to play with the White doll. The implication is that, in spite of the fact that the West Indies is composed of a majority Black population, the impact of colonialism has left a debilitating effect on West Indians. (Gopaul-McNicol, 1995, p. 141)

This might be one reason why my fieldnotes reported that there were no coloured dolls in the Grenadian settings that participated in the study.

In the case of Maltese participants, their views were focused around the lingering impact of colonialism that is seen in the classrooms and the colonial mentality of individuals who have lived and experienced being citizens of a British colony. For example:

Yes, it did impact us as educators. Sometimes we are not aware of how great the impact of colonialism is before time passes, then we look back and say to ourselves: "I'm still under that mentality." The environment of the classroom is still heavily influenced by colonialism. It is there, and we are not even aware of it sometimes. Even the children as young as three years – when you ask them to draw a house – they always draw it with a slanting roof, which we do not have here! (Vitorin, M).

I believe that it [the school system] is still the same. So, there is still an impact from the British. Even the fact that we speak in English at school and as an educator there, we are told to teach and speak only in English and we only do the Maltese lesson in Maltese. They tell us not to speak to students in Maltese at any time, only in English – educate them in English. I think they want to keep the same model handed down from the British. (Ines, M).

Parents of a certain age have grown up with that mentality – under the British rule, certain rules and rigidity. I'm one of them and I have been handed that down by my parents. We find it difficult to think independently, it seems. Speaking from my own experience, when I was growing up my parents handed down these influences on me and I did hand some of them down to my own children. (Doris, M).

The method of teaching as I grew up was totally British, our way of thinking, so it was passed on from generation to generation, even just looking around us, like the dress codes and uniforms. Our textbooks are still influenced by the British legacy. Yes, colonialism has had its impact on education. It's not bad as long as we know how to move away and as long as we realise that certain things need to be changed (Lora, M).

When we were young we attended a school run by British nuns. We had a uniform and a hat, and they were very strict. But now England has moved on and changed. Have we changed from that mentality? I find that here in Malta it is still the same where it [education] is very strict and academic oriented (Dolor, M).

I feel that the British influence that was here long ago was carried through the generations of our grandparents. The fact that their systems and methods were passed on, yes, I feel that they have had an impact. I'm not saying that the British education is the best or anything of the sort but then I feel that we have tried to go overboard with it instead of continuing with their system of education because they have changed, and they do have the free play system till the age of six. Here, we still don't (Carmen, M).

From the perspective of participants – as these comments show - textbooks, uniforms and resources can be considered to be examples of colonial impact that Maltese and Grenadian participants have in common. Both Maltese and Grenadian participants stressed that some individuals still have a colonial mentality, and this has been passed on from generation to generation (Bray et al., 1991; Prochner, 2009). One significant detail that Maltese participants mentioned that was not mentioned by those in Grenada is that they feel that things are changing and that we are slowly moving away from this rigid, colonial thinking:

This is slowly changing in schools I find, due to the fact of us having international students coming in from different countries, different cultures. Even we as adults, feel that we are learning from these students because when we were their age we were not aware of such cultures (Vitorin, M).

Nowadays, because of the immigrants that we have I feel that new traditions are being introduced into the country. So hopefully, we are moving away from this impact finally. It could also be that nowadays people have spread their wings: Internet and travelling, especially since we joined the EU [European Union]. This has helped us move forward, not like when I was young. We only had books and television to inform us (Doris, M).

Malta joined the European Union (EU) in May 2004. A discussion paper by Patrick Tabone (2014) talks about the changes in Malta that came about as a result of joining the EU, including the change in mentality and how Malta as a country became more confident in its abilities. Tabone (2014) also mentions the advantages that EU accession has given students and youths who can now travel to other European countries to continue their studies as well as to search for work or advance their future careers (Tabone, 2014). I would continue to point out, that being part of the European Union has helped Maltese people discover alternative points of reference and inspiration, and to start looking towards other models of education besides the British one.

However, four Maltese parents from the two focus groups conducted in Malta reported that they did not feel there was any lingering impact on education by colonialism on education:

No, I don't think so as everyone has their own ways of teaching (Marija, M).

I don't think that the language of teaching was impacted by the British as I attended a church school and it was supposed to be English speaking but, we all spoke Maltese, even the teachers (Frida, M).

I don't think so. I'm very happy with the system in this school. I think it is different than when we were children (Tereza).

It did in the past, but not anymore now (Pawla, M).

As previously discussed in this chapter, the above comments from Maltese parents might reflect the fact that they were in the age bracket of 26 to 34 years of age. They would not have experienced or remember colonialism directly. So, when they compared what they experienced at a young age to what their children are experiencing now, they might see no colonial impact on the education system.

An analysis of findings indicates that, when it came to the question of whether or not colonialism had an impact on education, all 10 educators interviewed, and 22 out of 24 participating parents in focussed discussions were in agreement that colonialism had an impact on education in Malta in one form or another and that, once they started reflecting on it, they realised that it was all pervasive. As Mills (1959) commented, it was a matter of ‘making the strange familiar’; they all acknowledged its existence but were not really aware of it. The participants’ comments reported in this study are also in agreement with what May, Kaur, and Prochner (2016) state, that a colonial impact from British infant schools was part of the colonial endeavour to educate children from a young age according to the British education model. This might still linger in ex-British colonies.

The next theme will discuss findings about the colonial impact on the physical environment of the ECE settings that participated in this study.

Theme 4: Colonial Impact on the Physical Environment

When educators and parents taking part in the study were discussing the issue of the colonial impact on the physical environment of their setting, in Grenada, all four interviewees and all 12 parents agreed that the books in their setting reflected this impact. Grenadian participants were in agreement that they did not have any books in Creole for the children and that the content of the books available

in the classrooms was not always relevant to the children and as Hickling-Hudson (2006) contends, did not relate to their culture or traditions. In Malta, books for children are made available by the government in both languages in state schools. But, such resources are not always found in private childcare settings as they might be expensive for the private owners to buy. Since the demand for Maltese language books is limited to Malta, the costs of printing and publishing can be expensive on a small island state because there are no economies of scale (Sultana, 2006). In private childcare settings, it is up to the director of the centre to decide whether to invest in Maltese children's books. It was unfortunate to note that the director, and later on the parents during the focus group pertaining to *Perlina* childcare centre, did not know that books in Maltese were available in local bookstores for young children. Once I discussed this with them, they all showed an interest to seek out these books.

Here are some of the views of Grenadian and Maltese participants about the books available for children and their suitability:

We do not have any books written in Creole. We do have some written by Grenadian authors, but these are in English. Most of our books produce western stories, white people. The books are imported, and children cannot relate to them. It is very rare to see black children in them (Deja, G).

Nothing in Creole for children's books. Very little that children can relate to in the contents of the books. Even the charts for the months in the classroom come from America so the children cannot relate to the corresponding pictures. For example, January has mittens, snowflakes, and a snowman while October has a pumpkin for Halloween. We don't celebrate Halloween and we have never had snow here. It seems we cannot shape our own. We want to gravitate to the white man's world, to America. It's hard. The workbooks I use are American as well, with no relevant content (Tonya, G).

Worksheets all come from Western books. The books we have here are not local books. I don't think we have any. We have local writers, but they focus mostly on language and we still don't have it in the school system as part of the reading text. Everything is imported (Shaniyah, G).

Only recently we have started changing the school textbooks that we use in the system since we are under the Caribbean Examinations Council (CXC), so we have some Caribbean authors writing relevant text but still in English.

But, prior to independence, you would not have seen something written about a banana tree or all the birds that we have here. These did not exist in the textbooks. We still have English in our literature and I think that's good too. So yes, I think the colonial lingering is still there (Neriah, G).

The books our children have in this setting are all in English and with white people in them for the most part. This is all due to the colonial impact and I think that our children find it hard to relate to some of the material in the books (Aaliyah, G).

There is an element of Maltese, but I feel that there is a lack of such books for this young age. We have a lot of English books, including the alphabet chart, but we need Maltese ones much more (Xandru, M)

The books are slowly changing. The change has not been taking place during the last 10 years or so but, much closer to our time, even though we have been independent since 1964 (Vitorin, M).

We do have books in both languages in my classroom and I do storytelling in both languages too (Doris, M).

When we use matching sheets, for example, they are British, and they do not have a Maltese content unfortunately. Certain resources for this age I cannot find in Maltese. Our books are also all in English. But, now that I am aware of Maltese books for young children, I will try and get some for the children (Lora, M).

We do not have any books in Maltese, but we do try a few words in Maltese. We would like to introduce some basic words here. Our worksheets are all taken from British books (Dolor, M).

During the interview with educator *Nadisha* from Grenada, an interesting discussion arose about the alphabet chart in all the classes. Why did it have to be made up of British or American pictures, some of which the children cannot recognise or relate to? Why not use local content?

Yes, I agree. One can use Iguana for the letter 'I' instead of Igloo [something that the Inuit do not use anymore], and ants for 'A' instead of alligator. We have lots of ants here. Some teachers are starting to do their own alphabet charts. But it's very slow in coming. If it was something local, the children could relate to it more quickly and learn faster. It would instil pride in the children and their culture (Nadisah, G).

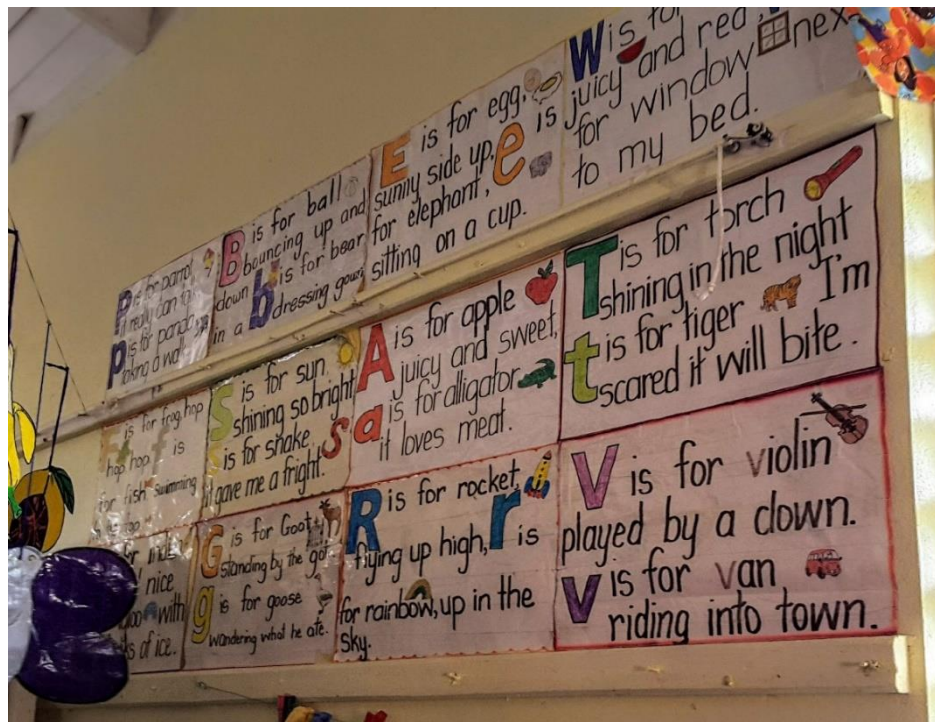


Figure 5.4 – Alphabet chart in one of the Grenadian settings. Photo: Anna Baldacchino (2017)

The discussion about the alphabet chart was also brought up during the interviews with the Maltese participants. Educators all agreed that it is necessary for children to learn about animals, weather, food or other objects that are not found in their country, but they should not be depicted on an alphabet chart where children are still learning to recognise and sound their letters, and where children are in their early stages of reading. Here, participants all agreed that, if the children could relate and recognise the alphabet pictures, then it would be easier for them to learn the letter and its sound, and thus motivate their drive for literacy more strongly. There is now a Maltese alphabet chart issued by the National Literacy Agency with Maltese letters (the Maltese alphabet is made up of 30 letters as opposed to the 26 letters in the English alphabet). This is made available to all state schools. Although it is certainly a step in the right direction, some of the pictures depicted in the chart are ones that are not easily recognisable by the children and, at times, are simply too abstract for them to relate to.

Just to give one example, the photo below for the letters ‘Ie’ in the Maltese alphabet is depicting two hands holding (or pressing, touching) a yellow object. The word accompanying this letter is ‘iebes’ which in English would mean ‘hard’. In this instance it is difficult for the children to realise what the hands are doing in the picture – pressing the yellow playdough to indicate that it is hard. This makes it harder still for children to sound the word as they would not necessarily be recognising the picture. Another example is for the silent letter in the Maltese alphabet ‘H’. The picture shows a hand pointing to a piece of red playdough. The word accompanying this picture is ‘hemm’ meaning ‘there’ in English. I have to argue here that when children who are not yet literate look at this picture it is hard for them to actually articulate what it means.



Figure 5.5 – Maltese alphabet chart in one of the Maltese settings. Photo: Anna Baldacchino (2017)

Moreover, other charts displayed on the walls of the settings which I visited, mostly featured concepts and cultures in learning materials that were not so culturally relevant or meaningful to the children including for example:

In most settings, both in Malta and Grenada, I could observe charts depicting the months of the year having snowflakes, and sledges for the month of January, or leprechauns and clover leaves for the month of March. There is no snow in Malta or Grenada and no sledges are used. St Patrick's Day (March 17th) is not celebrated in schools, in both countries. Another popular visual aid is the weather chart which is usually depicted by four individual photos of spring, summer, autumn and winter. This can very easily be constructed by using local photos. But what I found in the settings and also, throughout my personal professional career is that the photos are taken from other countries, with photos for autumn showing trees with changing and falling leaves, and snow for the winter picture: something that does not happen in either Malta or Grenada (Fieldnotes: January – April 2017).

Work books and worksheets are also imported from Western countries such as the United Kingdom, the United States and Canada. During one of my observations in a childcare setting in Grenada, I noticed that the children were being given the task of colouring in a deer, something that the children could not relate to. I do acknowledge the fact that it is good practice to learn about animals in other countries; but, I do not think it is the best time to be doing this with children as young as two since, as Piaget points out in his stages of development, children at this age are still in their concrete stage and cannot understand abstract issues (Piaget, 1971) (*Fieldnotes: February 2, 2017*).

Another example involved giving children a template of a house depicted with a slanting roof to colour. This task was proposed in a Maltese context where we do not have any buildings with such roofs in our architecture (*Fieldnotes: March 8, 2017*). This seems to be a universal imagery according to Gašić-Pavišić, and Lazarević (2002) and has been so ingrained in our culture for decades, that it comes next to natural for our children to draw this kind of house when asked to draw one.

Gašić-Pavišić, and Lazarević (2002) conducted a study of 60 children (39 boys and 21 girls) who lived in New Belgrade. All these 6-year-old children lived in multi-story buildings with flat roofs. When they were asked to draw a house, they drew it with a slanting roof.

In their analysis, the authors agreed that this depiction of slanting roofs happened because in Serbia there are houses with slanting roofs in the countryside and so the children must have seen them at one point or another and they reproduced what they saw. However, I question this, as in the case of Grenada and Malta, we do not have any houses with slanting roofs and our children still draw a house in that shape. My thinking is that the answer lies in Piaget's (1971) stages of development and schemas where children draw according to their mental image of a certain object. In fact, Piaget (1971) suggested that, up till the age of seven or eight, children's drawings represent what they know about the object, in this case a house (intellectual realism), and not necessarily what they actually see. In my opinion, young children's drawings of a house relate to the image of a house depicted in books, television programmes, and toys pertaining to countries like the United Kingdom, the United States or Canada that children are exposed to these from a very young age. Established literature about children's drawings also contends that there is a strong impact by television and other media images on children's drawings (Bailey, 1993; Skelton & Hall, 2001, Ring, 2006). This kind of imagery can also be found in government policies in Malta, such as the National Standards for Child Day Care Facilities, where children's drawings were used (MFSS, 2006, p. 20) (Figure 5.6). I have looked at such images for many years, never realising that they are so disconnected and alien from the vernacular Maltese architectural landscape.

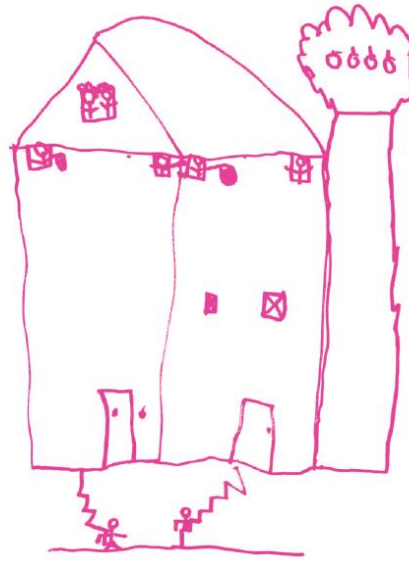


Figure 5.6 - House with slanting roof. Source (MFSS, 2006, p. 20)

As most of the participants in this study stated, such representations become a state of mind, that sometimes we are not aware of, but becomes part of who we are (Bray et al., 1991). Matthews and Travers (2012) state that “Britishness” is dynamic and can easily be “transplanted or absorbed” (p. 4) into the daily routine of a different country’s way of life. Analyses suggests that this was also the perception of participants interviewed for this study, by online questionnaire respondents, and witnessed through my observations and personal experience as a Maltese citizen and resident for almost five decades.

The analysis of the findings presented in this theme shows that most of the participants in both countries hold the view that a colonial impact persists on education in general including at the early childhood level. In spite of over five decades of political independence, school systems are still based on the British model and subjects are all taught in English in Grenada, while there are a few exceptions to this practice in Malta. As discussed above, English is the language of instruction in all schools in Grenada while it is used in most private and church schools in Malta as well as at the University of Malta. All 12 Grenadian parents in

the study agreed about the colonial impact on education; whereas analyses of focus groups report a sense of doubt amongst some of the younger Maltese parents as to whether this impact still exists. In the case of Malta, five of the respondents disagreed with the seven other parents and did not see any kind of impact nowadays. They suggested that things have changed for the better since they were younger, and that Malta has moved on. These parents can look at Malta in a different light: Malta, as being an integral part of the European Union now and a Malta that has multicultural classrooms because of the heavy, recent influx of immigrants from different parts of the world who bring their cultures and traditions. In comparison, Grenadian participants all thought that there still was a stubborn colonial lingering in their school system.

The next section will discuss and analyse the third and final category which relates to the second research question: the colonial legacy of discipline and corporal punishment.

3. Colonial Legacy: Discipline and Corporal Punishment

Theme 5: Different Perceptions from Malta and Grenada

From the interviews with educators in Malta, it was evident that the word ‘discipline’ meant that the children learn what is (and is not) acceptable in the classroom setting. It was interpreted as socialisation, learning how to get along with others in society. In sharp contrast, it struck me from the very first observation in *Callaloo*, a Grenadian state school, how disciplined the children were, in a physical and regimented sense. For example:

When the first bell sounds in the morning, the children get ready for assembly which takes place outdoors, if it is not raining. The second bell goes off five minutes later and all the children, including the three-year olds, line up according to their classroom and wait patiently for the principal to

come out and address them. Just as the bell rings, an educator comes out and tells the children to put their index finger on their lips and reminds them that they come to school to: "Listen, look and learn" and that they were at school to: "Work hard and play hard" (Fieldnotes: January 16, 2017).

This was quite different to what I would later witness in Malta during my observations in *G'elwża* school, a state kindergarten. Discipline in Grenadian settings was very important, and it was emphasised daily through the songs they sang and the Bible stories they read.

Seven out of ten interviewees in this study voiced their opinion about discipline and order in kindergarten and childcare centres. For these individuals, this issue was as paramount as the acquisition of social skills. Here is a sample of these different perceptions:

I think that discipline should begin at home. Yes, we do help them here, but it should begin at home and yes, we do promote discipline in the school as well, even if it needs to include some lashings (Tonya, G).

With socialising comes discipline too and they learn to work with one another. Socialisation leads to discipline and as they grow up they will be able to cope. You have to learn discipline because when you grow older you have to go to the bank; you have to go to church...in our culture, order and discipline are very important (Shaniyah, G).

Promoting order and discipline from a very young age is very important. It usually starts at home. Yes, children are disciplined, even by means of corporal punishment at home. Discipline and socialising helps them do well in future academic studies. It also helps them to communicate with others and helps them to fit in better in society and prepares them for lifelong learning (Nadisha, G).

Yes, I don't think we have ever changed our education system really from the colonial. We still have the rigid disciplinary approaches, lashings, we still use corporal punishment to some extent which I think was handed down by our colonisers. (Neriah, G).

When children come into your class they are a bit older [three-to-four-years-old] and they can learn a bit of order, even when they are playing they have a certain order in their playing. However, I would not call it discipline, it's more the order of things and knowing what's right and what's not acceptable when you are with others. Freedom within limits, they can do this, but not that (Lora, M).

Promoting order and discipline from a young age is very important – obviously, you have to be disciplined to be able to work with people, to show respect to others and to authority (Vitorin, M).

Out of the seven interviewees who responded that order and discipline were important skills to learn, five of them were from Grenada. As *Tonya* and *Shaniyah*, both from Grenada clearly point out “order and discipline are important in our culture” and “we do promote them in the school”. The comment from *Neriah* resonates well with the word “lashings” that one of the educators mentioned during the interview.

As my fieldnotes report, during my observations in a Grenadian classroom the educator used that word with the children when she was reprimanding them:

Children were sent to stand on the stairs just outside the classroom for the assistant and the educator to be able to sweep the classroom after snack time. Some of the children started going up and down the stairs. At one point, the educator came out and said to the children: ‘You’d better have a seat if you don’t want a good lashing’ (Fieldnotes: February 7, 2018).

Grenadians do not refer to corporal punishment as smacking but rather they use the word ‘lashing’ which dates back to the time when slaves under the French and British rule would be lashed by their landlords (Steele, 1974). In Grenada, order and discipline are seen as a means of correcting children when they do not do as they are told or misbehave, even if this means implementing some form of corporal punishment, as *Tonya* and *Nadisha* (Grenada) claim. It is also seen as respect to authority figures and for the strict observation of rules.

Interviews with the four educators in Grenada, participating in this study showed that, for them, order and discipline included corporal punishment when needed. Discipline could also be witnessed in the Grenadian ECE settings during

their children's activities. The following scenario in a class of two to three-year olds illustrates this:

The educator handed out copybooks for the children to practise writing their names. One child, who did not have good language command and had not yet developed her pincer grip, kept doing circles for her name. The educator reprimanded her and sent her back to her seat to try again. The child went back and drew some more circles. Children who had managed to write their name were allowed to play with the playdough. This child kept going back to show the educator what she had done, but the educator kept sending her back to write her name and would not let her play with the playdough. The child, obediently went back to her place and did some more circles (Fieldnotes: February 2017).

There were other times when the children were noisy, and the educator banged her ruler on the table and spoke in a stern voice to them and said: "This is not a fish market. This is a learning centre. Be quiet." (*Fieldnotes: February 2017*). In other instances, similar words were used, and corporal punishment hinted: "Go and sit down or you will get some lashes" as the educator banged the ruler on the table (*Fieldnotes: January/February 2017*). I felt that the educators in this setting may have been very careful not to use corporal punishment in my presence; but this seems to be so much part of their culture that they, perhaps unavoidably, referred to – or threatened physical punishment at times. I witnessed first-hand what could be described as 'mild' forms of corporal punishment on a few occasions. I do respect and acknowledge that in Grenada it is lawful for parents and teachers to use this kind of punishment with the children in their care (Barrow & Ince, 2008; Global Initiative, 2016b), this does not necessarily mean that all Grenadians agree with such a practice. In one of the focus groups I conducted, there was a gentleman who was a bit older than the rest of the group and he shared with us that he grew up in a corporal punishment environment and that sadly this was still being practised in childcare settings and higher school levels in Grenada. He said that he believed that

this is something that was learned and adopted from the British colonisers long before, when their ancestors were slaves - whipped by the land owners to make sure that they did what they were supposed to do and to learn to be submissive to authority (*Fieldnotes: January 27, 2017*).

Attempts to address this practice have been made: in 2010, recommendations were made to the Grenadian government to abolish all forms of corporal punishment by the Human Rights Council, but these were rejected. During a second review in 2015, the Grenadian government stated:

Grenada is cognisant of the call for the total abolition of corporal punishment. Currently there exists a pilot project in several schools called the 'Child Friendly Schools Programme' which facilitates the use of positive behaviour management strategies, thereby removing the need for the use of corporal punishment. The feedback from this project has been positive and it is the intention of the Ministry for Education to extend the programme to all of the schools in Grenada (Human Rights Council, 2015, p. 5).

The Child Friendly Schools Programme was mentioned to me by the principal of the school in one of the settings where I conducted my observations, but it was not yet being implemented to date (2018). Corporal punishment is still evident to this day in the Caribbean despite attempts to reduce or abolish it (Boduszek, Debowska, Jemmott, DaBreo, Willmott, Sherretts, & Jones, 2017). Barrows and Ince (2008) also contend that: "Corporal punishment is common [in the Caribbean] and children are often ignored, shouted at or belittled" (p. vii). This goes against the UN Declaration of Human Rights (1948) and seems to be so ingrained in Caribbean culture that it is proving hard to abolish (Barrows & Ince, 2008).

Corporal punishment was something that I had experienced during my own childhood, both at home and at school. That was about 40 years ago, and I had hoped that this was not currently the case anywhere else in the world. However,

Freeman and Saunders (2014) contend that, corporal punishment in English-speaking countries has continued for many decades, and there are a number of countries that have still not abolished corporal punishment entirely. One such country is, perhaps surprisingly, the United Kingdom where, although the law prohibits corporal punishment in schools, parents still have the right to smack their children in their homes (Freeman & Saunders, 2014). Malta changed its criminal law about corporal punishment in 2014 (Freeman & Saunders, 2014) and it is now against the law to use any form of corporal punishment at home, in childcare settings or in schools.

Conclusion

In an oft-cited quote from Marx, we are reminded that, while people make their own history, the shadow of the past weighs heavily on the present:

Men [sic] make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past. The tradition of all dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brains of the living. And just as they seem to be occupied with revolutionizing themselves and things, creating something that did not exist before, precisely in such epochs of revolutionary crisis they anxiously conjure up the spirits of the past to their service, borrowing from them names, battle slogans, and costumes in order to present this new scene in world history in time-honoured disguise and borrowed language. (Marx, 1852, p. 5)

This thesis has highlighted that such a situation may prevail in the child care centres and kindergartens of small island states, and as demonstrated from the participants in the settings in Grenada and Malta. Instead of borrowing “names, battle slogans, and costumes,” our protagonists are reproducing images, practices and languages that are not necessarily their own.

Chapters 4 and 5 have discussed and analysed the key findings of this study in light of the two main research questions:

1. *What elements influence the pedagogy and practice of early childhood education (2 to 5-year-olds) in small island states?*
2. *What impact, if any, has colonialism had on early childhood education in small island states, and how is that impact manifested in the current postcolonial epoch?*

Analysis of the five different data sets, taken together, suggests a composite picture that has some resonance with existing literature on the pedagogy and practice of ECE in SIS in primary, secondary and tertiary education. During my doctoral research, I have come across Grenadian educators who were participants in this study, that want to develop their professional credentials but, because of lack of funding and a dearth of human resources, find themselves obliged to spread (rather than deepen) their skill repertoire. I have observed rituals, routines, disciplinary regimes and a resort to corporal punishment and rigid discipline that is strongly laced (and legitimised) by reference to the Christian religion. I have witnessed a clear disparity between the alleged child-friendly and child-centred pedagogy claimed to be practised in the educational setting by the educators, and the more top-down and teacher-driven form that actually unfolds, with students learning by rote, colouring in within the lines, being exposed to learning how to read and write from a very early age, and producing identical looking crafts that are then hung in the classroom, for all (including parents) to see and admire: not so much for their creativity but for their sameness. Research shows consistently that the child-centred approach is the way forward (Pyle & Danniels, 2017; Tzuo, 2007; Van Oers & Duijkers, 2013) and that children benefit the most from this kind of learning. In this approach, learning is contextualised and evolves while playing and experiencing real life events (Wood, 2009). I have noted that the language of instruction *and*

communication in Grenada is English (as is the case with all eight, small island Caribbean states). I have acknowledged that English is the language of instruction in most cases in ECE in Malta, while the usage of this language as a medium of communication differs according to region and social class. Meanwhile, online questionnaire respondents reported that the colonial language was predominant as the language of instruction, but not as much as a language for communication. I have also seen first-hand how the physical environment of the classroom in small island states continues to witness clear traces of colonialism: the alphabet charts and books in these educational settings are definitive markers of this legacy from the past and are likely to pre-empt the future.

These two analysis chapters have presented, analysed and discussed the findings from all five sources of data collection: an online questionnaire, interviews, focus groups, fieldnotes/observations and a research journal. Responses to the online questionnaire offered a glimpse of both a quantitative and a qualitative view of the findings since they included answers to three open-ended questions and other closed ended questions. The analysis shows a broad consensus about the challenges that respondents consider are facing early childhood education in small island states worldwide. These challenges, the respondents suggest, include: a lack of funding in the ECE sector which then leads to a lack of adequate resources in the settings; and a lack of skilled human resources which often lead to under-trained and/or unqualified early childhood educators. Findings indicate that, in such small island states, a certain degree of multifunctionality in the workforce is inevitable.

The findings from the interviews and focus groups show that the participants feel that there is a lingering and persistent colonial impact and that this has influenced early childhood education both in Malta and Grenada. This was

substantiated by notes from a research journal, fieldnotes and observations of the four early years settings. This colonial lingering, participants suggest, include: the comprehensive use of the English language for books, worksheets, textbooks, the language of instruction and the preferred language spoken at home. Uniforms, dress codes and corporal punishment were also mentioned as part of the colonial impact. All this in turn can and does influence the pedagogy being implemented in both childcare centres and kindergartens in these two countries. Suggestively, the kindergarten and childcare settings of small island states are not exempt from a postcolonial lingering, just like educational settings at primary, secondary and tertiary levels in the same countries.

The next and final chapter will conclude this thesis. It will summarise its main findings and propose a set of recommendations that may guide future policy and research.

Chapter 6 – Conclusion: Future Research, Limitations and Policy Recommendations

This chapter summarises the major findings from the data collected and outlines the main limitations associated to the study. It will also propose some considerations for future research, as well as some recommendations for targeted policy initiatives.

Justification

When I set out on this research project, I had what I thought was a fairly clear idea of what I wanted to understand: the effects of a long and deep experience of colonisation in the practice of early childhood education (ECE) in small island states (SIS). This motivation may have been partly inspired by the fact that I have lived such an experience in the decolonising island state of Malta. I have also had the benefit of visiting early childhood settings in a number of countries, some of which have been of a similar size and population to Malta.

I have been both fortunate and restricted in finding myself researching a field where there is some literature – such as about language and bilingualism, children's drawings, and developmentally appropriate practice – however, such texts were often not grounded or situated in studies that concerned small island states. And, in any case, these issues emerged as significant for this study during my fieldwork and not before. This explains why my literature review began as being a largely critically descriptive endeavour. At that point, I hardly knew what I was looking for except for the challenge of bringing in early childhood education to the debate on the impact of colonialism on the educational systems and practices prevalent in small island states today. It was subsequent to the literature review that I became gradually and steadily aware of the important perspective to my research provided by postcolonial theory.

It was the process of sifting through the literature that helped me identify knowledge gaps and so refine and review my ideas, focusing on the issues that I subsequently determined as significant to my research. I am also now in a position to acknowledge and recognise some of the limitations that exist in this literature.

Revisiting the Subject Matter

After my experience of collecting data from Malta and Grenada, including nurturing the added perspective of being able to look critically at the practice of ECE in my own country, I can now revisit the subject matter from a fresh and better-informed perspective. My research, as reported in this thesis, has brought me closer to the context and experiences of ECE in two small island states, and more specifically towards a better understanding of how and why early childhood education unfolds the way it does in small island states today.

This thesis hopefully represents a contribution to knowledge in an under-researched field of ECE. Moreover, it has identified that the British colonial endeavour is only one of a series of impacts on ECE in SIS. The British "colonial endeavour" encompasses British colonialism proper; the use of the foreign territory for the privileged access and import of home-grown products and manufactures; and also the deployment of ideas, beliefs and frameworks of social, cultural and political organisation, emergent in Britain, on that same territory: including Whitehall/Westminster style politics; the civil service, Christianity, and the English language itself (Royle, 2007. See also May et al. 2016).

My study also shows that a relative lack of resources and a relative marginalisation of the ECE sector in public policy, leads in turn to a lack of training and professionalisation of the teachers and other staff who run ECE in the two SIS

that participated in this study. Other SIS may find themselves in a similar predicament, but this would need to be confirmed by subsequent research.

A case in point is a recent directive issued by the Directorate for Quality and Standards of Education in Malta. During a general meeting, childcare managers were informed that, as from January 2018, anyone 25 years and over could be employed as an ‘assistant to the child carer’ in the 0-3-year-old childcare centres, irrespective of their qualifications or experience in the early years (Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education, 2017). I feel strongly that this is a step backwards: as international literature confirms, the quality childcare that we are striving for as a country will not materialise with unqualified and untrained individuals joining the sector (Payler & Davis, 2017; Simpson, 2010, UNESCO, 2010; Water & Payler, 2015). Even if such untrained and unqualified personnel are employed, they should be encouraged or expected to seek and secure certification at the earliest opportunity (ECDAM, 2017). It is worth noting that personnel’s professional learning and development in the private childcare sector was scarce or non-existent in some settings, as this depended mainly on the director’s initiative. Waters & Payler (2015) contend that in countries such as the United Kingdom, USA and Australia: “a large proportion of provision falls within the private, voluntary and independent sector, particularly with regard to provision for babies and children younger than two or three years of age” (p. 162). In Malta, the Early Childhood Development Association of Malta (ECDAM) is trying to fill in this gap with regular sessions being offered to members and other educators working in ECE to further their professional learning and development. Since ECDAM’s membership includes various professionals such as: education officers, early years educators, individuals from senior management teams and university lecturers, this is referred

to as multi-professional learning where these individuals get together to take part in presentations/lectures and sharing of good practices (Hammick, Barr, Freeth, Koppel, &, Reeves, 2002; Payler et al., 2007).

Such a lack of professionalism in the classroom could result in educators ending up doing what they think should be done, rather than what good practice demands and expects. This attitude may be hindering the sector from moving along and keeping in step with what ongoing research about ECE is recommending (Pyle & Danniels, 2017; Tzuo, 2007; Van Oers & Duijkers, 2013). As an old Chinese proverb advises: ‘Do not confine your children to your own learning, for they were born in another time.’

Without training and professional support, these educators could easily end up reproducing and falling back on what they themselves may have experienced in school when they were growing up and what they are most comfortable with. In a study conducted when a new pedagogy was being introduced in early childhood practices in Canada, Wien (2008) noticed that educators seemed to go through four stages of change while transitioning from their current pedagogy to the new one: the challenged, the novice, the practicing and the master educator stage. The challenged educators like the idea of a new pedagogy, at the same time realising that they do not have enough knowledge or training to implement it. The novice educators realise that they are slowly changing and implementing the new pedagogy through their actions with the children, but do not necessarily fully understand why they are doing it. As educators move on to the third stage—the practising educator—they know that they are now implementing the new pedagogy in their settings. However, they might still have challenges relating to staffing, lack of resources or time, so at times they fall back to traditional ways of teaching (Wien, 2008). When teachers reach the final

stage—the master educators—they do everything that the practicing educator does but are now fully committed to the new pedagogy and manage to find ways of overcoming challenges (Baldacchino et al., 2015; Katz, 1972). Their focus now becomes to seek children's potentials and to find ways of enticing them, so they can expand children's learning (Wien, 2008).

Educators participating in my study contended that they fear change and agreed that, at times, they object to the need for reform since, to them, what they have been doing for years seems to have worked. An action research study conducted in four childcare centres on Prince Edward Island, Canada, confirms that change may take time and prove difficult to some educators. The study, involving 12 early childhood educators and the children in their care, shows that these educators reported that they: “were going through changes in their personal and professional development as early childhood educators” and that they were afraid to change current practices (Baldacchino, et al., 2015, p. 112).

Data collected from both Grenada and Malta shows that early childhood education settings are striving to reach goals with new policies and pedagogical models that they are trying to adopt. Such models are often imported from other countries, and the former colonial power is a preferred source of such material and ideas (Hickling-Hudson, 2006; Sultana & Baldacchino, 1994). My study suggests that the lack of trained staff and of sufficient support from management to implement the required changes to policies and curricula is resulting in most educators giving up and reverting to their old habits – including exam-based curricula that ‘schoolify’ ECE and push quasi-formal education too soon (House, 2013; Moss, 2012) – which are generally to the detriment of the children, especially at that young age, as was discussed in Chapter Four. This concern was also shared

by responses to the online questionnaire. In any case, and even with the best of intentions, the resort to exam-based assessment is a stubborn legacy of the educational system in various countries. This study confirms the preference for exam-based assessment in Malta and Grenada and how ECE settings can be construed to primarily better prepare children to excel academically (Moss, 2012). Unless the educational system in both these countries moves away from an exam-driven model, the pressure to excel or even achieve the academic standards expected at higher grades is bound to trickle down to kindergarten and further down the line to childcare centres (Miller & Almon, 2009; Moss 2017). As Moss (2017) states:

It is hierarchical, assuming the 'lower' educational level, ECE, must serve the needs of the 'higher', [Compulsory School Education] CSE, and in the process 'grasping' the otherness or alterity of ECE, making the Other into the Same. It is simple and linear, assuming the child and her learning follow predetermined, sequential and predictable stages. (p. 356)

Kevin Bonello, a former President of the Malta Union of Teachers (MUT), in an interview with a local Maltese newspaper, argued that exam-heavy education was failing students in Malta (Bonello, 2016):

This country's obsession with examinations and certificates has forced teachers to concentrate on oceans of content instead of skills. As a consequence, even those with qualifications are likely to lack the skills to adapt to new situations and to face tests for which they cannot do their usual rote learning. (p. 1)

At the time, Mr Bonello had confirmed that the MUT was working with the Ministry for Education to change this exam-driven system. However, he insisted that this had to be done with caution and the necessary training and preparation was required for the transition to be a success (Bonello, 2016, p. 2):

If this country goes through yet another educational reform with haste and with lack of proper preparation and training and resources, nothing will change except for the cosmetics.

Snyder, Hemmeter & Fox (2015) contend that training and ‘coaching’ need to be part of educators’ professional development in order to implement new policies. The authors stress the importance of:

supporting implementation of an explicit and coherent set of instructional practices. It [the coaching] included systematic and cyclical processes of collaborative goal setting related to practice implementation, providing repeated opportunities to practice implementation in job-embedded contexts, and engaging in guided reflection as well as giving explicit feedback about implementation. (p. 134)

In Malta, the Ministry for Education has proposed that the Learning Outcomes Framework will be implemented in Kinder 1, Year 3 and Year 7 as of October 2018 (MEDE, 2018b). Educators in Kinder 1 were requested by the Directorate for Learning & Assessment Programmes to attend a two-day ‘professional learning course’ about the implementation of the Learning Outcomes Framework (MEDE, 2018c, para. 1). Whether this is sufficient training for a new educational policy remains to be seen.

A Very British Story

Picture yourself in a village square in Malta where the church dominates the square. Just a few paces down the road, you come across a red telephone box, dating from the British era. Walk to the corner of the road and you will find the “Royal Barber” an old and small traditional barber shop sporting the Union Jack on its façade (Aldrich & Johnson, 2018, p. 171. See figure 6.1 and 6.2). Cross the road and walk down a few metres and you will come across a red British post box in pristine condition and still in use. Indeed, Malta has been described as “more British than the

British” (Brinkley, 1990; Saul, 2009). The Victoria Lines, Victoria Gate in the capital city of Valletta, and Victoria (the capital of Gozo, the smaller island in the Malta archipelago) were named after Queen Victoria and are clear indications of a lingering association with the British Empire.



Figure 6.1 – The Royal Barber shop in Malta. Photo: Anna Baldacchino (2018)



Figure 6.2 - Red telephone and pillar boxes in Malta. Photo: Anna Baldacchino (2018)

Malta was a British colony for 164 years, prior to achieving its independence in 1964. One can still find visible elements of this colonial legacy today, such as the British style red letter/pillar and phone boxes, cafés and stores with British names, British-standard plugs and sockets for electrical fittings, not to mention the driving on the left-hand side of the road. In Malta, beer is served in pints, rather than litres. English is the second official language in Malta, is the language of instruction at the tertiary level, and most of the locals are fluent English (apart from Maltese) speakers. Malta incorporated the British system of administration, education and legislation when under the British rule, and many of its essential attributes remain in place today (Goodman, 2014).

Now, picture yourself in another small island state, this time in the Caribbean. The country is Grenada. Here too, you can find red telephone boxes (See

Figure 6.3). Grenada acquired its independence from Britain in 1974, but it still has a very British feel: here again we find the occasional British style red telephone box, beer comes in pints, there are British-standard plugs and sockets for electrical fittings, and people drive on the left-hand side. The island is divided into parishes which have British names (Hannan, 2008). Its capital city is St George's, named after the patron saint of England. Its official language is English, and this is also the language of instruction throughout its education system.



Figure 6.3 – Red telephone boxes in Grenada. Photos: Anna Baldacchino (2017)

Both these countries had been under British rule for close to 200 years each, so it is understandable that one can still find tangible evidence of this (Avellino Stewart, 2012). It is hard to eradicate such items when they have been engrained into one's culture and traditions. Some of these constitute heritage and artefacts which might be considered as tourist attractions on both island states. Avellino Stewart (2012) contends that British tourists consider coming to Malta as: “an instance of finding Britain from an “other” era on an island away from the Britain of today.” (p. 53).

There may very well be additional manifestations of “colonial inheritance” (Zammit, 1984) that may be less visible than telephone and pillar boxes but are nevertheless just as influential and possibly with even more significant effects on contemporary Maltese society. Indeed, it may therefore not come as a surprise that, after so many years of being independent, the education model that was implemented by the British in these two island states is still being adhered to: both Grenada and Malta have a top-down education system which was instituted by the British (Jules, 2010; Moss, 2012; Woodhead & Moss, 2007). Pressure comes from the upper grades on to the lower grades to have high standards for students in order to be prepared for the upcoming grade. In England today, there are new initiatives to revert to some kind of assessment, even in kindergarten: there is a tense, ongoing debate about the baseline assessment that the British government wants to implement by 2020 (National Education Union, 2018). This assessment consists of a one-off test in the first few weeks of reception class to 4-year-olds to test their ability in language, numeracy and literacy. It is meant to monitor children’s progress from reception to the age of 11. Goldstein, Moss, Sammons, Sinnott, & Stobart (2018) state that tests on very young children can only be “ethically justifiable” (p. 2) when they are used by educators to support children’s learning. The authors, being an expert panel picked out by British Educational Research Association, state that:

The government’s proposals, which will cost upward of £10 million, are flawed, unjustified, and wholly unfit for purpose. They would be detrimental to children, parents, teachers, and the wider education system in England. (p. 5)

Various pieces of research suggest that primary to tertiary education on small island states has been impacted by colonialism (Borg & Mayo, 2015; Brock &

Crossley, 2013; Sultana, 2006). However, there is practically no research as to whether colonialism impacts the practice and pedagogy of pre-primary education; or what is known as early childhood education. This brought me to the following research questions which have led me through this journey of research and discovery:

3. *What elements influence the pedagogy and practice of early childhood education (2 to 5-year-olds) in small island states?*
4. *What impact, if any, has colonialism had on early childhood education in small island states, and how is that impact manifested in the current postcolonial epoch?*

Main Findings

I opted for a mixed methods approach and focused on two small island states as the research sites for my investigations: Malta and Grenada, the world's tenth and eleventh smallest countries respectively by land area (Central Intelligence Agency, 2018a; 2018b), and each with a resident population of under one million. Both countries are former British colonies, apart from other similarities already discussed.

My research design included the use of five different methods of data collection: interviews, focus groups, a research journal and observations, along with an online questionnaire which was distributed to a select number of inhabitants from each of the 27 small island states around the world with a current resident population of less than one million (See Table 1.1).

The analysis of my data – carried out using NVivo and a thematic approach – suggested that my findings could be organised under eight categories, which together elicited 16 themes. The emergent major findings were the following:

- The particular challenges of scale that influence ECE in small island states, including the lack of appropriate and sufficient material and human resources, as well as a resort by individuals to multifunctionality.
- The inadequacy of training and support for educators in the ECE sector in these countries.
- The impact of colonialism on pedagogy and practice in ECE settings, including such issues as the choice of the language of instruction and language of communication, the status of the local language or dialect, and the use of culturally inappropriate teaching material.

One unexpected finding came out whilst analysing language use. The data collected from Malta, Grenada and the online questionnaire suggested that the colonial language – which is English in 20 out of the 27 SIS – is used primarily for instruction in all but six small island states today. However, I was quite surprised to note that the native language was not always used as a means of communication at home: in some households on small island states, including Malta and Grenada, it was rather purposefully used among adults when they did not want their children to understand what was being said.

The ‘language question’ merits further commentary. Small is pluri-lingual: the citizens of most small states speak more than one language. They need to understand (rather than be understood by) foreigners, since it is these who provide the economic means of survival: whether in the form of trade, entrepreneurship or tourism. Hence, investment in one or more international languages is a natural and necessary disposition. At the same time, these small state citizens may also have their own indigenous ‘languages’ to nurture and practise. In the never-ending dance between local and global, such local languages may be themselves variants and

adaptations, creolisations and patois renditions of such global languages as English, French, Spanish and Portuguese – the national languages of the main colonisers of the past 500 years – localised enough through inter-generational use to be distinct, even becoming languages in their own right.

Yet, in this situation, not all languages are equal to others. English, in particular, reigns supreme as the language of instruction, administration and often even common parlance in most of the world's 27 small island states. So deep, thorough and lengthy was their colonial experience that, even after securing political independence, English lingers as one, or the, official language. Local languages must compete for status and prestige with English, competing for use amongst the local publics, competing for space in the printed form, on the local radio and television airways, and on internet blogs and websites. Ironically, local languages find a perverse justification in the manner in which they are used by some islanders amongst themselves as some kind of secret code, communicating together effectively while precluding foreigners – but also their own children – from understanding what they are saying.

Another unexpected finding was that Maltese interviewees younger than 50 years of age did not feel that there was any colonial impact on the educational system in Malta, while those older than 50 believed that colonialism did impact education. The former, younger participants commented that Malta had changed for the better over the years, especially in the educational sector. This could be because these younger people have not lived and experienced colonialism, and so they have a different perspective of Malta. In contrast, all Grenadian interviewees conceded that a colonial lingering was present in most aspects of their national educational system, including ECE.

Issues influencing the pedagogy and practice of ECE on SIS

The findings of this study indicate that the major issues that are influencing the pedagogy and practice of ECE in small island states include: a relative lack of human resources; lack of funding; lack of adequate training; role multiplicity; and the disconnect between the pedagogy claimed to be practised and the one observed. I would argue that the last issue can only be solved if proper and adequate training is given to all those working in early childhood education (Payler & Davis, 2017). Findings from the online questionnaire suggest that provisions for such adequate training may not be in place in Malta and Grenada and for most of the other 27 small island states in the world.

I acknowledge that some of the above-mentioned issues related to pedagogy and practice in ECE could also be found in larger countries. However, I believe that the impact of these issues is felt more strongly in small island states because of their longer, deeper and more intimate experience of colonialism (Caldwell, et al., 1980).

The Impact of Colonialism on ECE

Research findings from the analysis of the five data sets – online questionnaires, interviews, focus groups, research journal and observations/fieldnotes – suggest that there is a degree of colonial lingering that influences pedagogy and practice in ECE (May et al, 2016; Prochner, 2009). This includes: the language of instruction; work sheets and story books used; and charts and pictures depicted in the settings that do not necessarily relate to the culture and traditions of the home country. When I first voiced the issue about the impact that colonialism might have on ECE during interviews with principals, directors and educators in childcare settings, most of them said that they had not really thought about this issue before. Reflecting on the question, they all agreed that there was still

a colonial lingering, but that they had not necessarily thought about it in that way since its impact and effects, ingrained in the history and environment, have become part and parcel of the culture and traditions of the country and are so entangled in daily routines and epistemologies. This was a case where I was “making the familiar strange” to my participants (Clough, 2002; Kaomea, 2003; Mills, 1959; Shklovsky, 1965; Sikes, 2003), highlighting something that they had lived with but had not questioned critically. I too started my career as an ECE in Malta believing that an exam-driven pedagogy was the best way to teach young children. It was only through my 10 years of lived experience in Canada and by furthering my studies on the topic of early childhood education there, did I come to believe that there were other pedagogies that would benefit the child more: namely play-based learning (Chesworth, 2016; Wood, 2004b) and a child-centred approach (Wien, 2008). I hope that my research has nudged my participants to somewhat defamiliarise themselves with what they had been taking for granted, unsettling their epistemic composure. They may now be looking at postcolonialism in a different way and possibly making new efforts to introduce more local resources and embrace more fully the pedagogies that they claimed to be implementing. This cannot happen if the disposition and mind-set of educators and parents is not addressed: such citizens of small island states deserve to be made aware of such colonial residues which are still quite visible in our classrooms and childcare settings...for those who have the eyes to see them.

This study also suggests that, for the participants, the colonial impact is more noticeable in Grenada than in Malta. As detailed in Chapter Five, this could be due to the fact that Malta is a member of the European Union since 2004, unlocking the route to a new external reference point for both Maltese policy makers and the

Maltese public at large; and one that is likely to be strengthened after the UK exists the EU in 2019. EU accession has also opened the door to more immigrants, mainly EU nationals, coming to Malta and joining the labour force: their children are finding their way into the local childcare and school populations. Malta is now being more exposed to different cultures, languages and religions and is trying to find a way to assimilate these into the local community and classrooms (Camilleri Grima, 2018). This task is, in itself, creating new challenges, including the new status of Maltese as a foreign language for immigrant students in local schools (Gruppetta, 2018).

Limitations of the study

As with every research exercise, there are certain limitations that need to be taken into consideration. Subjectivity is one of the limitations to this research. My professional career has been that of an early childhood educator and instructor since 1995 and I value high quality early childhood education and a child-centred pedagogy. I have lived through part of the British colonial experience in Malta and can therefore acknowledge its impact on education more readily than some of the younger participants in this study. Bryman and Teevan (2005) contend that in qualitative research such bias is usually the case and that research questions (and their findings) would somewhat reflect what is relevant and important in the eyes of the researcher (Grieshaber & Cannella, 2001). I tried to counterbalance this by using a mixed method approach so that I could call upon, triangulate and interpret data from different sources (Creswell, 2009). This included collecting data from interviews, focus groups, a research journal, fieldnotes, observations and an online questionnaire. To strengthen the credibility and dependability of the findings, I conducted a member check with all interviewees and focus group participants who

confirmed written transcripts and validated the themes that emerged from their interviews (Sinkovics, Penz, & Ghauri, 2008). I used these different sources of data collection to further validate the research findings. However, there is an inevitable bias due to my own life experiences and I acknowledge these: not as a weakness but as an inevitable characteristic of this study.

The sample size is another limitation of this study. Due to time restraints and financial burdens, especially when conducting my research in Grenada, the sample size was limited to one private childcare setting and one state kindergarten setting per country. The choice of the settings in both Malta and Grenada was not randomly selected and the opinions of the respondents from these countries might not be typical of the general population. In the case of Grenada, the participants were chosen purposefully and conveniently by a colleague of mine – himself a professional educator – who resides there and offered to help. In Malta, I chose a setting in the south of the country, as it provided me with a diverse population including immigrants and their socio-economic backgrounds. The second setting was chosen from central Malta which is a more affluent part of the country, with the majority of participants being Maltese but speaking English. The sample was therefore constrained to what I was able to achieve with the personal resources I could commit and to the people and settings available to me for the study.

I could not reasonably expect to undertake qualitative research in all the world's 27 SIS. I restricted my on-site engagement to two countries, but still collated some data from a semi-structured questionnaire that was sent to, and completed by, at least one person from each of these 27 SIS. Nevertheless, the online questionnaire had its own limitations as well. The population was selective in that only residents or individuals currently working or residing in one of the 27

small island states could respond to the questionnaire. Findings cannot be generalised as in some cases only one respondent from a country replied to the questionnaire whereas, in other cases, there was more than one respondent from the same country (see Table 4.1). However, it is important to note that the respondents who took part in the questionnaire generally agreed in their opinion on most of the questions posed. To compensate for this issue, all responses were weighted in a way that each country carried the same significance. Another limitation concerned the questions asked as they were not exhaustive to the topic under study. I had to take into consideration a viable length of time that would boost the response rate. In acknowledging these limitations, I also want to report the achievement in obtaining at least one perspective from each of *all 27* small island states: I am not aware that this has previously been ever achieved in ECE research.

A further limitation dealt with my observation sessions which were conducted in four-hour blocks and did not consist of a whole day in the ECE settings. However, I scheduled my observations so that I could be present at different times of the day to cover the whole day at each setting. Since the purpose of the observations was largely to contextualise my work, I feel that the time of day in which I conducted my observations did not impact unduly on the type and quality of the data I collected.

My presence in the setting might also have influenced the way the educators and children acted, and therefore distorted the practices I was hoping to observe. This was more so in Grenada since I was visibly (and self-consciously felt) a Caucasian and could not keep myself as unobtrusive as when I was in the two Maltese settings where I was a 'local'. To counteract this and to exclude the possibility that I might have been perceived as a 'white British woman', I did state

from the very beginning that I too was coming from a former British colony during my explanation of why I choose Grenada to conduct my research. I needed to build bridges with my respondents, in highlighting our commonly shared colonial experience with Britain, and this is where reference to Malta and its similarities to Grenada were very useful and were much appreciated.

I am also aware that, particularly in the case of Grenada where my familiarity with the local situation is not deep and continuous as in the case of Malta, I am not well placed to suggest policy recommendations. In Grenada, I was, and remain, a partial ‘outsider’; whereas in Malta, I am largely an ‘insider’. The notion of insider/outsider positioning was discussed in more detail in Chapter One when describing my positionality in this study. I believe that I took the ‘space between’ the two perspectives of outsider and insider (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009, p. 60). As Gair (2012) contends, as a qualitative researcher, one cannot completely detach oneself from (outsider) nor enmesh oneself fully (insider) with participants. Rather, she agrees with Dwyer and Buckle (2009) that it is best when the researcher can occupy the space between the two positions.

Nevertheless, I venture some tentative policy recommendations for further thought. These include initiatives, taken on my part in Malta, which were inspired by this study. In the light of what I have learned, I also suggest some considerations for future research.

Policy Recommendations

As part of the conclusion to this thesis, I now venture some tentative policy recommendations which have arisen from my findings. These are expressed as issues for tentative consideration which could support the early childhood settings

that participated in my study specifically, but which may be useful to other settings facing similar issues.

Let me start with a general recommendation that applies to all countries, and not only to small island states:

Internationally, taking the current research in early childhood education into consideration – and recommendations from bodies such as the OECD (2017; UNESCO, 2016; Felfe & Lalive, 2018) – should be a public policy priority. Financial support, professional training and developmentally appropriate resources need to be provided with this priority in mind. The implementation of ECE policies and new pedagogical approaches should be reinforced by adequate resources and infrastructure, together with continuous support and mentoring to all educators. Adequate training should be provided for all persons employed in the early childhood education sector. If high-quality childhood education is the aim of these settings, a suitable level of certification of those employed in this sector needs to be first assured and, eventually, standardised. Knowledge of child development as informed by recent research, is a must for educators operating in this critical sector.

I also recommend that childcare and kindergarten (0-5 years) be integrated under one Ministry, preferably that for Education, to enhance regularisation of the sector and a common early years policy.

Moreover, inter-professional learning should be promoted between policy makers and stakeholders to ensure cohesion and understanding of children's needs and development.

Moving from these general exhortations aside, it becomes just as critical to address what I have referred to as “colonial lingering” and its impact on ECE. This

time, this impact is likely to prove especially significant in SIS, given their long and intimate experience of (mainly British) colonialism. The data collected from the parents and educators in my study, and its ensuing analysis, suggest that ECE settings in SIS may create more meaningful environments for young children if they are aware of this postcolonial impact and its consequences on the children in their care. Equipped with this consciousness, educators may be better positioned to reconsider the design of their settings and revise their own practice in ways that better fit the identities and developmental aspirations of their own countries.

On this note, I would also like to encourage ECE educators everywhere, but especially in SIS, to use contextualised and culturally sensitive materials in their settings and, in particular, to refrain from using abstract and culturally meaningless pictures to depict, for example, alphabet sounds and the weather.

A personal challenge to action

The need to address this condition and the obligation to create contextually and culturally meaningful environments and practices which are not inherited or glibly transposed from colonising countries, is now sharply focussed in my mind and is as an urgent personal and professional issue. I had to *do* something in my own country about this. Inspired by the experience and insights gleamed from the study and supported by like-minded friends and colleagues (including other doctoral candidates), I have co-founded and am the first president of the Early Childhood Development Association of Malta (ECDAM). ECDAM was launched in April 2016, with the aim of providing parents and educators in Malta with further knowledge about ECE (0-7 years), to create a community of good practice and, importantly, also lobby government for action to promote high quality education. The foundation of ECDAM is a direct outcome of my doctoral journey which has

given me knowledge and confidence. Our efforts have been acknowledged and members of ECDAM are now being involved by the Maltese Government, as individuals and as an organisation, in the rolling out of current ECE policy measures (Directorate for Learning and Assessment Programmes, 2018). The heightened awareness of the effects of colonisation on ECE in SIS can stimulate meaningful and positive change.

Considerations for future research

In the course of this study, I also came across a number of gaps and issues that would benefit from further research:

1. English-language literature on the impact of colonialism on the current pedagogy and practice of education in the early years is sparse. My research represents a contribution to knowledge which, in part, addresses this gap. More research needs to be done to help broaden this field of knowledge. Such research should also widen its remit to include literature in other languages, apart from English.
2. A wider, comparative study in the 27 small island states would result in a broader and more comprehensive assessment of the challenges and issues early childhood education faces and how these might be better managed or overcome.
3. A comparative study of the challenges faced by ECE providers in small island states with those in larger countries may provide additional insights. I know, for example, that in most of North and South America, local populations engage in languages of interaction and communication that have a colonial legacy (English, French, Spanish, Dutch, Portuguese). The question remains as to whether there is, nevertheless, a qualitative difference

in the colonial experience between such larger states and their small island counterparts.

A Final Comment

On Boxing Day 2017, my husband and I had lunch with a Dutch couple who were visiting Malta as tourists. During the conversation, they asked me about my doctoral studies. I explained that I had been researching the colonial impact on ECE as part of my research. While doing so, I could see looks of acknowledgement and approval from the Dutch lady sitting with us at the table. When I had finished, she told me that she could relate very easily to what I was saying. She had attended primary school in Zimbabwe, the former British colony known as then Rhodesia. She remembered the time when she was at a similar school and one of the text books in use was: *The Wind in the Willows* (Grahame, 1908/1983). She described to me how difficult it was for her to relate to the mole, water vole, toad and badger that were depicted in that book, creatures of the English forest, when none of these animals exist in her subtropical home, with its savannahs and jungles. Like the children whose settings I observed in Grenada and Malta, hers was an educational experience conditioned by the pedagogy and curriculum of a foreign and distant land, with little affinity or relevance to local reality.

The classroom is often heralded as the site where ingrained attitudes can be modified, and where a new generation equipped with a newly critical awareness can take form. Such optimism, however, needs to be tempered by the realisation that classrooms are also sites of reproduction, formally or otherwise, representing particular frameworks of power and knowledge.

The study reported in this thesis, can now contribute to that body of literature which captures some of the many ways in which colonialism, mainly British, continues to cast a long shadow over the pedagogies and practices deployed in classrooms around the world, and particularly those of small island states. Clearly, as evidenced from this study, childcare centres and kindergarten classrooms are not exempt from the effects of colonial lingering long after the colonisers have left.

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Appendices

Appendix 1

Letter of information – Kindergarten Assistant/Childcare

Date _____

Dear Educator,

My name is Anna Baldacchino. I am an Early Childhood Education instructor at MCAST and the University of Malta. I am also a PhD student at the University of Sheffield in the UK, under the supervision of Prof Cathy Nutbrown who can be reached at this email address: c.e.nutbrown@sheffield.ac.uk. My research topic deals with Early Childhood Education practices and pedagogies in small island states.

The literature about education in small states has picked up of late; however, there has so far been a systematic failure to engage with and integrate the field of early childhood education (ECE) – child care and kindergarten before the onset of formal primary school – into academic and policy debates. In my ongoing PhD research, I would like to investigate the general challenges facing Early Childhood Education in small island states, deploying perspectives gleaned largely from both postcolonial studies as well as island and small state studies. My over-arching research question is:

What elements influence Early Childhood Education practices and pedagogies in small island states?

The Head of School/Manager has given his consent for me to conduct part of my fieldwork at _____ school in your classroom. This fieldwork will take place between March and May 2017. I also plan to conduct similar fieldwork in Grenada in the Caribbean in January 2017. The research would include:

- Observations of daily routines and practices over a period of two weeks in your classroom. I will be conducting these observations in such a way that I will be able to cover the whole daily routine in the classroom. I will be placing myself in an unobtrusive area, when possible, and will not be taking

part in any of the activities going on in the classroom. I will be using the field notes from my observations as part of my data analysis for my thesis.

- A thirty-minute interview with you at your convenience. A similar interview will be conducted with the Head of School/Manager. The interview will be recorded with your permission to facilitate transcription for data analysis.
- A Focus group with parents of the children in your classroom.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may decide to stop participating at any time, without any consequences. No harm to any of the participants is envisaged by conducting this research. I will ensure that your name is in no way revealed in my report. All the data collected during this study will be available only to me and my supervisor. All the data will be destroyed 5 years after the completion of the study.

If you agree to participate I will be visiting your classroom for an orientation time prior to the observation sessions. This orientation will take place at a convenient time for you. This will ensure that children are familiar with me before I start my observations.

Your participation in this study will contribute to build a better understanding of what influences Early Childhood Education practices and pedagogies in small island states and how we can overcome challenges, if any, in the future. Once the project is completed, I would be willing to share my findings with you and the participants of this research.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions. You can also contact my supervisor if you have any issues or concerns about the study:

Name: Prof Cathy Nutbrown (Head of School of Education, University of Sheffield, UK)

Email Address: c.e.nutbrown@sheffield.ac.uk.

Thank you for your collaboration.

Anna Baldacchino

abaldacchino59@gmail.com

Tel No: 79639603

Appendix 2

Letter of Consent – Kindergarten Assistant/Childcarer

I _____, understand that the Head of School/Manger has agreed to participate in the research study being conducted by Anna Baldacchino as part of her doctorate.

I understand that the sessions will involve the researcher observing me and the children in my classroom, during our normal day's activities. I also understand that I will be interviewed by the researcher for about 30 minutes at my convenience. I understand that the interview will be audio recorded for transcription purposes. I understand that the data being collected by the researcher during the interview will be transcribed and returned to us/me for confirmation before it can be used in the researcher's report. I understand that parts of the interview may be quoted in the study.

I understand that the observation sessions will be over a period of two weeks. I understand that I will be present during these sessions. I understand that if parents/guardians do not give consent for their child to participate in the observational session, the child can still continue with his/her activity, but the researcher will not take note of any of his/her activities in her report.

I further understand that, as a participant in this study, I have several rights. I understand that my participation is strictly voluntary and that I may discontinue my participation at any time. I understand that my name will be kept completely confidential and that under no circumstances will the school's name, the children's names, or my name be included in the study's report. I understand that the data collected by the researcher will be kept in her personal locked cabinet and password protected computer. I understand that the researcher and her supervisors are the only ones who will have access to this information. I understand that I can keep a copy of the signed and dated consent form. I understand that the information will be kept confidential. Finally, I understand that the school, the parents and I will have access to a final report about the study.

I have read and understood the contents of this letter and agree to participate in the study.

Name _____ Signature _____

Researcher's signature: _____ Date: _____

Appendix 3

Letter of Information – Head of School

Head of School

Date _____

Dear,

My name is Anna Baldacchino. I am an Early Childhood Education instructor at MCAST and the University of Malta. I am also a PhD student at the University of Sheffield in the UK, under the supervision of Prof Cathy Nutbrown who can be reached at this email address: c.e.nutbrown@sheffield.ac.uk. My research topic deals with Early Childhood Education practices and pedagogies in small island states.

The literature about education in small states has picked up of late; however, there has so far been a systematic failure to engage with and integrate the field of early childhood education (ECE) – child care and kindergarten before the onset of formal primary school – into academic and policy debates. In my ongoing PhD research, I would like to investigate the general challenges facing Early Childhood Education in small island states, deploying perspectives gleaned largely from both postcolonial studies as well as island and small state studies. My over-arching research question is:

What elements influence Early Childhood Education practices and pedagogies in small island states?

I would like to conduct part of my fieldwork at _____ school. This fieldwork will take place in a Kindergarten 1 classroom between March and May 2017. I also plan to conduct similar fieldwork in Grenada in the Caribbean in January 2017. The research would include:

- Observations of daily routines and practices over a period of two weeks in the chosen KG 1.
- An Interview with the Headmaster and another with the educator/s of the classroom. The interviews will be recorded with your/and the educator's permission to facilitate transcription for data analysis.
- A Focus group with parents from the chosen KG 1 classroom.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may choose to stop participating at any time, without any consequences to anyone. No harm to any of the participants is envisaged by conducting this research. Under no circumstances will the identity and location of the school, as well as the names of the educators and the children, will be disclosed. All the data collected during this study will be available only to me and my supervisor. All the data will be destroyed 5 years after the completion of the study.

My research will contribute to build a better understanding of what influences Early Childhood Education practices and pedagogies in small island states and how we can overcome challenges, if any, in the future. Once the project is completed, I would be willing to share my findings with you and the participants of this research.

This research project has been ethically approved by the University of Sheffield School of Education's ethics procedure.

If you have any issues or further questions regarding the study, please do not hesitate to contact my supervisor:

Name: Prof Cathy Nutbrown (Head of School of Education, University of Sheffield, UK)

Email Address: c.e.nutbrown@sheffield.ac.uk.

You can also contact me on the email address below.

Thank you for your collaboration.

Anna Baldacchino BCFS (Canada), M.Ed. (Canada)

abaldacchino59@gmail.com
Contact Number: 79639603

Appendix 4

Letter of Consent – Head of School

I, _____ have read and understood the information letter regarding this study and give my consent to Anna Baldacchino to conduct her research at _____ School in a Kindergarten 1 classroom as part of her doctoral studies.

I also understand and give consent to be interviewed by the researcher at my convenience.

I understand that no harm will come to me, the educators or the children and that our participation is voluntary and we can withdraw from the study at any time without any consequences to us.

Head of School

Appendix 5

Letter of information – Childcare Centre Manager

Date _____

Dear,

My name is Anna Baldacchino. I am an Early Childhood Education instructor at MCAST and the University of Malta. I am also a PhD student at the University of Sheffield in the UK, under the supervision of Prof Cathy Nutbrown who can be reached at this email address: c.e.nutbrown@sheffield.ac.uk. My research topic deals with Early Childhood Education practices and pedagogies in small island states.

The literature about education in small states has picked up of late; however, there has so far been a systematic failure to engage with and integrate the field of early childhood education (ECE) – child care and kindergarten before the onset of formal primary school – into academic and policy debates. In my ongoing PhD research, I would like to investigate the general challenges facing Early Childhood Education in small island states, deploying perspectives gleaned largely from both postcolonial studies as well as island and small state studies. My over-arching research question is:

What elements influence Early Childhood Education practices and pedagogies in small island states?

I would like to conduct part of my fieldwork at _____. This fieldwork will take place with a group of 2-3-year-old children between March and May 2017. I also plan to conduct similar fieldwork in Grenada in the Caribbean in January 2017. The research would include:

- Observations of daily routines and practices over a period of two weeks in the chosen group.
- An interview with you as the Manager/Director of the school and another one with the educator/s of the group being observed. The interviews will be recorded with your/educator's permission to facilitate transcription for data analysis.
- A Focus group with parents of the children in the group being observed.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may choose to stop participating at any time, without any consequences to anyone. No harm to any of the participants is envisaged by conducting this research. Under no circumstances will the identity and location of the childcare setting, as well as the names of the educators and the children, will be disclosed. All the data collected during this study will be available only to me and my supervisor. The data will be destroyed 5 years after the completion of the study.

My research will contribute to build a better understanding of what influences Early Childhood Education practices and pedagogies in small island states and how we

can overcome challenges, if any, in the future. Once the project is completed, I would be willing to share my findings with you and the participants of this research.

This research project has been ethically approved by the University of Sheffield School of Education's ethics board.

If you have any issues or further questions regarding the study, please do not hesitate to contact my supervisor:

Name: Prof Cathy Nutbrown (Head of School of Education, University of Sheffield, UK)

Email Address: c.e.nutbrown@sheffield.ac.uk.

You can also contact me on the email address below.

Thank you for your collaboration.

Anna Baldacchino BCFS (Canada), M.Ed. (Canada)

abaldacchino59@gmail.com

Contact Number: 79639603

Appendix 6

Letter of Consent – Childcare Centre Manger

I, _____ have read the above information and give my consent to Anna Baldacchino to conduct her research at _____, with a group of 2 – 3-year-old children as part of her doctoral studies.

I also understand and give consent to be interviewed by the researcher at my convenience.

I understand that no harm will come to me, the educators, or the children and that our participation is voluntary, and we can withdraw from the study at any time without any consequences to us.

The Manager/Director

Appendix 7

Information Letter – Parents/Guardians – Observation Sessions and Focus Group

Date: _____

Dear Parents/Guardians,

My name is Anna Baldacchino. I am a part-time lecturer with the Faculty of Education at the University of Malta. I am also a PhD student at the University of Sheffield in the UK, under the supervision of Prof Cathy Nutbrown who can be reached at this email address: c.e.nutbrown@sheffield.ac.uk. My research topic deals with Early Childhood Education practices in small island states.

As part of my research I will be conducting observations of the children and the educator of your child's setting. The observations will be for a duration of two weeks. I will be observing the children during their routine activities. I will be taking notes while doing my observations. I will be taking photos of the classroom environment and children's work during these observations with your permission. The identity of the child will not be disclosed at any time.

I would like to ask your consent for me to observe your child in his/her classroom/childcare environment. If you do not wish to include your child in the observations/photos for this study, your child will still be able to continue with his/her regular class activities and I will not include any observations or photos that relate to his/her work in my report.

Your consent for your child to be included in my observations is voluntary. You may decide to stop your child from being involved in the study at any time, without any consequences to you or your child. At no time will your child's identity be revealed. No harm to any of the participants is envisaged by conducting this research. All the data collected during this study will be available only to me and my supervisor. All the data will be destroyed 5 years after the completion of the study.

Your child's participation in this study will contribute to build a better understanding of what influences Early Childhood Education practices and pedagogies in small island states and how we can overcome challenges, if any, in the

future. Once the project is completed, I would be willing to share my findings with you and the participants of this research.

I would also like to invite you to a parents' group discussion to hear your thoughts, ideas, and perspectives about what Early Childhood Education looks like in Grenada and what might we do differently. If you are willing to take part in this discussion I would need your email and/or phone number to get in touch with you, please. This meeting will be conducted at a convenient date for you. Your participation is greatly appreciated.

KINDLY RETURN THE SIGNED CONSENT FORM ATTACHED TO THIS INFORMATION LETTER TO YOUR CLASS TEACHER BY NOT LATER THAN *WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 11TH, 2017*.

If you have any issues or further questions regarding the study, please do not hesitate to contact my supervisor:

Name: Prof Cathy Nutbrown (Head of School of Education, University of Sheffield, UK)

Email Address: c.e.nutbrown@sheffield.ac.uk.

You can also contact me on the email address below.

Thank you for your collaboration.

Anna Baldacchino BCFS (Canada), M.Ed. (Canada)

abaldacchino59@gmail.com

Contact Number: 79639603

Appendix 8

Letter of Consent – Parents/Guardians – Observation Sessions

I, _____ give my consent to Anna Baldacchino to observe my child in his/her classroom as part of her research at the school/childcare setting for her doctoral studies.

I understand that the observations will be conducted over a period of two weeks. I understand that the researcher might take photos of the class environment and the children's work.

I understand that the identity of my child will not be revealed under any circumstances.

I understand that I may discontinue my participation at any time, without any consequences to me, or my child. I understand that my name will be kept completely confidential and that under no circumstances will my name, or my child's name, be included in the study.

I understand that the researcher and her supervisor are the only ones who can access this information, and that all the data will be destroyed 5 years after the completion of the study.

I have read and understood the contents of this letter and give my consent for my child to take part in the observation sessions.

I would like to take part in the parents' group discussion. My email address is: _____

Mobile Number: _____

I would NOT like to take part in the parents' group discussion.

Name Parent/Guardian (Print) _____

Signature _____ Date _____

Name of Child (Print) _____

Appendix 9

Ittra ta' informazzjoni lill-Ġenituri/Gwardjani – Osservazzjoni tat-Tfal u *Focus Group*

Data: _____

Gheżież Ġenituri/ Gwardjani,

Jiena Anna Baldacchino, għalliema fit-tagħlim tal-Edukazzjoni bikrija fl-MCAST u fl-Universita' ta' Malta. Jien ukoll studenta tad-dottorat fl-Universita' ta' Sheffield fir-Renju Unit, taħt id-direzzjoni ta' Prof Cathy Nutbrown li tista' tintlaħaq fuq dan l-indirizz eletroniku: c.e.nutbrown@sheffield.ac.uk għal aktar informazzjoni.

Is-sugġett tar-riċerka tiegħi jitratta dwar il-prattika u t-tagħlim tal-edukazzjoni fis-snin bikrin (Early Childhood Education), fi stati żgħar li huma gżejjer. Fir-riċerka tad-dottorat tiegħi, nixtieq ninvestiga l-isfidi ġenerali li l-edukazzjoni bikrija fi gżejjer żgħar tiffaccja billi nuża perspettivi li ġejjin minn studji post-kolonjali kif ukoll dawk mill-istudji ta' stati u gżejjer żgħar. Il-mistoqsija ewlenija tar-riċerka tiegħi hi:

X'elementi qed jeffettwaw il-prattika u t-tagħlim tal-edukazzjoni tas-snin bikrin?

Parti mir-riċerka tiegħi tinvolvi li nosserva it-tfal waqt l-attivitajiet tagħhom fil-klassi tal-*Kindergarten*. Waqt dawn l-osservazzjonijiet, jiena se nkun qiegħda nieħu biss noti tal-attivitajiet li jkunu qegħdin isehħu. Din l-informazzjoni se tintuża fl-analiżi u l-kitba ta' tezi tad-dottorat tiegħi.

Nixtieq nitlob il-permess tagħkom biex tagħtu l-kunsess sabiex it-tifel/tifla tagħkom jiġi/tiġi osservat/a waqt attivitajiet ġol-klassi. Il-partecipazzjoni hija fuq bażi volontarja. Intom tistgħu twaqqfu lit-tifel/tifla tagħkom milli jiġi osservat meta tridu, mingħajr ebda effetti negattivi. L-identita' tagħkom u tat-tifel/tifla se jibqgħu dejjem anonimi. Nixtieq ukoll nitlob il-permess tagħkom biex nieħu ftit ritratti tat-tfal waqt l-attivitajiet varji tagħhom. Nixtieq naċcertak li dawn ir-ritratti mhux ser ikunu ippublikati fuq il-medja ta' *Internet*. Dawn ser jintuzaw biss għar-riċerka tiegħi.

Parti mir-riċerka tiegħi tinvolvi wkoll *Focus Group* mal-ġenituri. Dan jikkonsisti fl-laqgħa ta' mhux iktar minn siegħa fejn jiġi diskuss is-sugġett tal-Edukazzjoni tas-snin bikrin. Id-diskussjoni ser tiġi rrekordjata biex tghinni fir-riċerka tiegħi meta niġi biex nanalizzza dak li jkun ġie diskuss. Din l-informazzjoni se tintuża fl-analiżi u l-kitba ta' tezi tad-dottorat tiegħi.

Nixtieq nitlob il-partecipazzjoni tagħkom biex tieħdu sehem f'dan il-*Focus Group*. Il-partecipazzjoni hija fuq bażi volontarja. Intom tistgħu tieqfu milli tieħdu sehem meta tridu, mingħajr ebda effetti negattivi. L-identita' tagħkom se tibqa' dejjem anonima. Jekk tixtieq li tattendi nitlob timla l-formola t'hawn taħt.

JEKK JOGĦĠBOK IRRITORNA DIN IL-FORMLA LILL-GĦALLIEMA MHUX IKTAR TARD MINN NHAR L-ERBĠĦA, 11 TA' JANNAR, 2017.

Filwaqt li niringrazzjakom tal-kollaborazzjoni tagħkom, infakkarkom li jekk għandkom bżonn aktar informazzjoni dwar dan l-istudju, inħegġigkom biex tikkuntatjawni.

Grazzi.

Anna Baldacchino BCFS (Canada), M.Ed. (Canada)

abaldacchino59@gmail.com

Numru tat-telefon: 79639603

Appendix 10

Formola ta' Kunsess Ġenituri/ Gwardjani – Osservazzjoni u *Focus Group*

Aħna/Jiena _____ nagħtu/nagħti l-kunsess lil Anna Baldacchino biex tosserva lit-tifel/tifla tagħna/tiegħi waqt attivitajiet li jseħhu fil-klassi tal-*Kindergarten*. Aħna/Jiena nagħtuha/nagħtiha ukoll kunsens biex waqt l-osservazzjonijiet tkun tista' tieħu xi ritratti tat-tfal waqt l-attivitajiet tagħhom.

Aħna/Jiena nifhmu/nifhem li l-identita' tat-tifel/tifla tagħna/tiegħi se tibqa' anonima. Aħna/Jiena nifhmu/nifhem wkoll li il-partieċipazzjoni hija fuq bażi volontarja u li nistgħu/nista' nwaqqaf lit-tifel/tifla milli jkompli/tkompli jieħu/ tieħu sehem fir-riċerka meta rridu/ rrid mingħajr ebda konsekwenzi.

Jien nixtieq nieħu sehem fil-*Focus Group*. L-indirizz tal-emajl tiegħi huwa:

Numbru tat-telefon: _____

Jien MA NIXTIEQX nieħu sehem fil-*Focus Group*.

Firma ta' ġenituri/gwardjani

Data _____

Appendix 11

Observational and Fieldnote Framework

Children with respect to practice (What are the children doing?)

Educators with respect to pedagogy (Why are they doing? what are they doing with the children?)

Targets of Inquiry: (observe interactions/relationships)

1. Children alone
2. Children with children
3. Educator alone
4. Educator with other educators or LSE in class/group
5. Educator with child
6. Educator with children as a group
7. Other

Context – Environment of the classroom/group:

1. Language
2. Toys/ resources made available to children

3. Books (language, context)
4. Dress code (uniform, casual)
5. Routine/Rituals (prayer, national anthem, bell schedule)
6. Layout of classroom
7. School environment

Appendix 12

Interview Questions for Principals and Educators

1. What is the more important reason for a society to have formal provisions for Early Childhood Education? Choose one answer below that is closer to your opinion:
 - Enabling both men and women to participate actively and more fully in the labour force.
 - Encourage children to socialise, interact and learn with, and from other children.
 - To promote order and discipline from an early age.
2. Why is it important for parents to send their children to an Early Childhood setting or Kindergarten even though it is not compulsory?
 - Should all children be given an opportunity to experience Early Childhood Education? Why? Why not?
3. How does a child benefit from an Early Childhood Education?
4. What are the key characteristics of quality Early Childhood Education?
5. Can you describe the qualities of a good-practising Early Childhood educator?
6. Which of the following would describe the pedagogy practised at your early years setting?

Child-centered learning
 Play based activities
 Learning through play

Teacher-directed learning
 Structured activities
 Learning by instruction

7. What influences the way you teach? Is there a specific school policy? Is it your values and beliefs?
8. In what language should an Early Childhood programme be carried out? Why?
9. Is adult-child ratio specified? If yes, what is it?

10. Malta spent many centuries as a colony, only becoming independent in 1964. Does Malta's colonial history and legacy impact on Early Childhood policy and practice? If yes, how?
11. (For Grenadian respondents: Grenada spent many centuries as a colony, only becoming independent in 1974. Does Malta's colonial history and legacy impact on Early Childhood policy and practice? If yes, how?
12. Do you have anything else to add?

Additional Questions for Principals/Directors:

1. What certification is needed to teach in KG/Childcare? Is it obtained locally, or do they have to go abroad?
2. In Grenada and Malta formal schooling starts at the age of 5. In most other countries it starts at 6 or even 7. What are your views about this? What do you think are the origins of this practice?

Appendix 13

Questions for Focus Groups

1. Why did you choose to send your child to this particular school/childcare setting?
2. What do you understand by good quality education?
3. Is good quality education important to you and your child? Why?
4. Are there any challenges to Early Childhood Education based on Malta being a small island state? If yes, what are these?
5. Malta spent many centuries as a colony, only becoming independent in 1964. Do you think that this long colonial experience has influenced education in Malta? If yes, how?
(For Grenadian respondents: Grenada spent many centuries as a colony, only becoming independent in 1974. Do you think that this long colonial experience has influenced education in Grenada? If yes, how?)
6. What language do you speak at home? (If answer is English – Do you encourage your children to speak Maltese?)
7. (For Grenadian respondents: What language do you speak at home? (If answer is English – Do you encourage your children to speak Creole?))
8. School readiness is a term that means: A child has a basic understanding of reading, writing and maths when he or she leaves the preschool setting to start formal schooling. Was this school readiness an important factor in your choosing of a particular school?

Appendix 14

Online Questionnaire – English Version

Early Childhood Practice in Small Island States

Thank you for showing interest in participating in this study. Please take a moment to read the following information regarding the research before answering the short (5 – 7 minute) online questionnaire which is attached to this email.

I am an Early Years lecturer from the small island state of Malta. The main purposes of this questionnaire are: (1) to gather basic information about Early Childhood Education (ECE) in the world's 27 small island states; and (2) to explore opinions about ECE practices in such small island states.

Your participation in this online questionnaire is voluntary. You may choose not to take part in the research, or to refrain from answering any question, with no negative consequences to you. All data collected from these questionnaires will remain confidential and at no point in time will your identity be disclosed.

This research has received ethical approval by the School of Education at the University of Sheffield, United Kingdom where I am registered as a PhD student. This research is part of my thesis fieldwork.

If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me and/or my supervisor below:

Researcher

Name: Anna Baldacchino

Email: abaldacchino1@sheffield.ac.uk

Supervisor

Name: Professor Cathy Nutbrown

Email: c.e.nutbrown@sheffield.ac.uk

Your participation in this study is greatly appreciated. Thank you again.

1. What is your age group?

Mark only one oval.

18 - 24

25 - 40

41 - 55

Above 55

2. Your current (or latest) Occupation

3. Your current Country of Residence

4. Which one of these three statements do you agree with most? (Please choose only one.)

- The provision of licenced early childhood education and Kindergarten enables parents of young children to participate actively and more fully in the labour force.
- Licenced early childhood education and Kindergarten encourages children to socialize, interact and learn with and from other children.
- Licenced early childhood education and Kindergarten is a waste of time and money: children of a young age should stay at home.

5. Which is the language of teaching and learning in licensed early childhood education provision (0-5-year-old) in your country? (Please choose any that apply.)

- English
- Local Language/Dialect
- Don't know
- Other:

6. Which is the language of casual conversation and communication in licensed early childhood education settings (0 - 5-year-old) in your country? (Please choose any the apply.)

- English
- Local Language/Dialect
- Don't know
- Other:

7. Which of the following do you consider to be key characteristics of good quality, licensed early childhood and kindergarten education? (Please choose as many answers as you wish.)

- Providing worksheets to children
- Creating opportunities for free play
- Assuring school preparedness among children
- Developing a stimulating environment
- Teaching children the numbers and the alphabet
- Committing time and resources to water and sand play
- Other:

8. Which of the following do you consider to be key characteristics of a good-practising Early

- Childhood Educator? (Please choose only one.)
- An educator who plans activities for children in advance
- An educator who involves children in the planning of activities
- An educator who allows children complete freedom to do as they please
- Other:

9. Would you say the challenges, if any, facing Early Childhood Education (0 - 5-year-old) in

your country are impacted by its relatively small and island geography? If yes, please elaborate.

10. The literature about small island states suggests that teachers and other service providers

in these countries may have to multi-task, performing several roles at the same time. Do YOU feel the pressure to be such a multi-functional person in your country's labour force? If yes, please elaborate.

11. Is there an official Early Years Policy, Curriculum and/or Framework in your country?

(Please choose only one.)

- Yes
- No

- Don't know
12. Which Ministry in your country is responsible for Early Childhood Education (0 - 3 year old)? (Please choose only one.)
- Ministry responsible for Education
 - Ministry responsible for Social Services
 - Don't know
 - Other:
13. Which Ministry in your country is responsible for Early Childhood Education (3 - 5 year old)? (Please choose only one.)
- Ministry responsible for Education
 - Ministry responsible for Social Services
 - Don't know
 - Other:
14. What minimum qualifications are required to work as an Early Childhood Educator (0 - 3 year old) in your country? (Please choose only one.)
- No certification required
 - School leaving certificate
 - Diploma
 - Degree in any subject
 - Degree in Education or in Early Childhood Education
 - Postgraduate Degree (Masters, Doctorate)
 - Don't know
 - Other:
15. What minimum qualifications are required to work as an Early Childhood Educator (3 - 5 year old) in your country? (Please choose only one.)
- No certification required
 - School leaving certificate
 - Diploma
 - Degree in any subject
 - Degree in Education or in Early Childhood Education
 - Postgraduate Degree (Masters, Doctorate)
 - Don't know
 - Other:
16. Are there any other insights that you may wish to share on the characteristics of Early Childhood Education in small island states?

Thank you so very much for your participation in this survey.

Appendix 15

Online Questionnaire – French Version

Pratiques pédagogiques de la petite enfance dans les petits États insulaires

1. Quel est votre âge?
 - 18 - 24
 - 25 - 40
 - 41 - 55
 - Plus de 55
2. Quel est votre emploi actuel (ou le plus récent)
3. Votre pays de résidence actuel
4. Avec laquelle de ces trois affirmations êtes-vous le plus en accord? (Veuillez choisir une seule.)
 - La possibilité d'une éducation préscolaire et maternelle permet aux parents de jeunes enfants de participer activement et plus pleinement à la vie active
 - L'éducation préscolaire et maternelle encouragent les enfants à se socialiser, à interagir et à apprendre avec d'autres enfants
 - L'éducation préscolaire et maternelle sont une perte de temps et d'argent: les jeunes enfants doivent rester à la maison.
5. Quelle est la langue d'enseignement et d'apprentissage pour l'éducation préscolaire et maternelle (0 à 5 ans)
 - Anglais
 - Langue nationale
 - Je ne sais pas
 - Autre
6. Quelle est la langue de conversations et de communication occasionnelles dans les établissements préscolaires et maternels (de 0 à 5 ans)
 - Anglais
 - Langue nationale
 - Je ne sais pas
 - Autre
7. Parmi les éléments suivants, quelles sont les caractéristiques clés de la bonne éducation préscolaire et maternelle? (Veuillez choisir autant de réponses que vous souhaitez.)
 - Fournir des cahiers aux enfants
 - Créer des occasions de jouer librement
 - Assurer la préparation scolaire des enfants
 - Développer un environnement stimulant
 - Enseigner aux enfants les chiffres et l'alphabet
 - Passer du temps et des ressources pour jouer avec l'eau et le sable

- Autre
8. Parmi les éléments suivants, quelles sont les caractéristiques clés d'un bon éducateur de la petite enfance? (Veuillez choisir un seul.)
- Un éducateur qui planifie des activités pour les enfants à l'avance
 - Un éducateur qui implique les enfants dans la planification des activités
 - Un éducateur qui permet aux enfants une liberté totale de faire ce qu'ils veulent
 - Autre
9. Pensez-vous que les défis de l'éducation de la petite enfance (0 à 5 ans) dans votre pays soient liés par la relative petite taille de l'île et sa géographie ? Si oui, veuillez préciser.
10. La littérature sur les petits États insulaires suggère que les enseignants et fonctionnaires dans ces pays exigent d'effectuer plusieurs tâches en même temps. Vous sentez-vous sous pression en raison d'un emploi multi-tâches? Si oui, veuillez préciser.
11. Existe-t-il dans votre pays une politique, un programme d'études et / ou un cadre officiel pour l'éducation préscolaire et maternelle? (Veuillez choisir un seul.)
- Oui
 - Non
 - Je ne sais pas
12. Quel ministère dans votre pays est responsable de l'éducation de la petite enfance (0-3 ans)? (Veuillez choisir un seul.)
- Ministère chargé de l'éducation
 - Ministère responsable des services sociaux
 - Je ne sais pas
 - Autre
13. Quel ministère dans votre pays est responsable de l'éducation de la petite enfance (3 à 5 ans)? (Veuillez choisir un seul.)
- Ministère chargé de l'éducation
 - Ministère responsable des services sociaux
 - Je ne sais pas
 - Autre
14. Quelles sont les qualifications minimales requises pour travailler comme éducateur de la petite enfance (de 0 à 3 ans) dans votre pays? (Veuillez choisir un seul.)
- Aucune certification requise
 - Certificat de fin d'études
 - Diplôme spécifique
 - Diplôme universitaire
 - Diplôme en éducation ou en éducation de la petite enfance
 - Diplôme d'études supérieures (maîtrise, doctorat)
 - Je ne sais pas

- Autre
15. Quelles sont les qualifications minimales requises pour travailler comme éducateur de la petite enfance (3 à 5 ans) dans votre pays? (Veuillez choisir un seul.)
- Aucune certification requise
 - Certificat de fin d'études
 - Diplôme spécifique
 - Diplôme universitaire
 - Diplôme en éducation ou en éducation de la petite enfance
 - Diplôme d'études supérieures (maîtrise, doctorat)
 - Je ne sais pas
 - Autre
16. Y a-t-il d'autres idées que vous voudrez peut-être partager sur les caractéristiques de l'éducation de la petite enfance dans les petits États insulaires?

Merci beaucoup pour votre participation à ce sondage.

Appendix 16

Ethics Approval – University of Sheffield



Downloaded: 23/08/2016

Approved: 22/08/2016

Anna Baldacchino

Registration number: 140240854

School of Education

Programme: Not applicable

Dear Anna

PROJECT TITLE: The Pedagogy of Early Childhood Education: A Small Island State Perspective

APPLICATION: Reference Number 010790

On behalf of the University ethics reviewers who reviewed your project, I am pleased to inform you that on 22/08/2016 the above-named project was approved on ethics grounds, on the basis that you will adhere to the following documentation that you submitted for ethics review:

University research ethics application form 010790 (dated 12/08/2016). Participant information sheet 1022146 version 2 (11/08/2016). Participant information sheet 1022147 version 2 (11/08/2016). Participant consent form 1022152 version 1 (16/07/2016).

Participant consent form 1022151 version 1 (16/07/2016). Participant consent form 1022150 version 2 (11/08/2016). Participant consent form 1022148 version 2 (11/08/2016). Participant consent form 1022149 version 2 (11/08/2016).

If during the course of the project you need to deviate significantly from the above-approved documentation please inform me since written approval will be required.

Yours sincerely

Professor Daniel Goodley Ethics Administrator School of Education

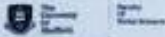
Appendix 17

Ethics Approval – Ministry of Education and Employment, Malta

B. Tutor's Approval (where applicable)

The above research work is being carried out under my supervision.


Tutor's Name: CATHY NUTEROUN Signature: _____
SCHOOL OF EDUCATION, UNIVERSITY OF SHEFFIELD

Faculty: Cathy Nuteroun Faculty Stamp: 

C. Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education - Official Approval

The above request for permission to carry out research in State Schools is hereby approved according to the official rules and regulations, subject to approval from the University of Malta Ethics Committee.

Raymond Camilleri
 Director
 EU Affairs, International Relations
 Research and Policy Development Directorate
 Official Stamp

 Date: 20.06.2010
 Director
 (Research and Development Department)

Conditions for the approval of a request by a student to carry out research work in State Schools

Permission for research in State Schools is subject to the following conditions:

1. The official request form is to be accompanied by a copy of the questionnaire and / or any relevant material intended for use in schools during research work.
2. The original request form, showing the relevant signatures and approval, must be presented to the Head of School.
3. All research work is carried out at the discretion of the relative Head of School and subject to their conditions.
4. Researchers are to observe strict confidentiality at all times.
5. The Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education reserves the right to withdraw permission to carry out research in State Schools at any time and without prior notice.
6. Students are expected to restrict their research to a minimum of students / teachers / administrators / schools, and to avoid any waste of time during their visits to schools.
7. As soon as the research in question is completed, the Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education assumes the right to a full copy (in print/on C.D.) of the research work carried out in State Schools. **Researchers are to forward the copies to the Assistant Director, International Research, Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education.**
8. Researchers are to hand a copy of their Research in print or on C.D. to the relative School's.
9. In the case of video recordings, researchers have to obtain prior permission from the Head of School and the teacher of the class concerned. Any adults recognisable in the video are to give their explicit consent. Parents of students recognisable in the video are also to be requested to approve that their siblings may be video-recorded. Two copies of the consent forms are necessary, one copy is to be deposited with the Head of School, and the other copy is to accompany the Request Form for Research in State Schools. Once the video recording is completed, one copy of the videotape is to be forwarded to the Head of School. The Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education reserves the right to request another copy.
10. The video recording's use is to be limited to this sole research and may not be used for other research without the full consent of interested parties including the Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education.

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