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**An exploratory study of
early childhood leadership in Singapore
from the context of policy-to-practice**

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in Education

University of Warwick
Centre of Education Studies
November 2021

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Acknowledgments

The thesis would not have been possible without the support, guidance and faith of the following people who have given me the courage to embark, and most importantly, cross the finishing point.

Professor Carol Aubrey, who has been the pillar in building the critical foundations of this study. Thank you for giving me the map to begin the exploration and the space to let me find my way. The journey would not have started without you.

Associate Professor Michael Hammond, thank you for reminding me to engage not just 'the head' but 'the heart' in the research. The call to be a 'human being' not just a 'human doing' has helped me find my voice in the research process.

My mother-in-law, Brenda Marchant, you have provided me with safe shelter, food and warmth and most importantly, a place I could call home whenever I needed it. Thank you for your generosity, kindness and care. I am blessed to have you in my life.

My first teachers, my mum Mdm Siti Hawa Janamin and my dad Mr Selamat Omar, for always knowing how to support me and whose quiet prayers have helped me in my journey. Thank you for having complete belief in me all through my life.

Most importantly, my husband and angel, Paul. Only you know the pain and joy of this epic journey. Our shared experience in this monumental adventure is truly OUR magnum opus.

Not forgetting, my team of sanity keepers, friends and family, who in your own ways, have helped maintain my spirit and well-being. You know who you are. Bless you and thank you.

Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis is entirely my own work and efforts. No material from this thesis has been used or previously published, and where I have used other sources of information, appropriate acknowledgements have been made. author. I confirm that this thesis has not been submitted for a degree at any other university.

Parts of this study have been presented in the following events.

Conferences

- Early Childhood Leadership in Singapore from a policy to Practice Context, In: *Centre of Education Studies Conference* (2015), University of Warwick, UK.
- What is early childhood leadership? Perspectives from Practitioners in Singapore, In: *Pacific Early Childhood Education Research Association Conference* (2016), Bangkok, Thailand.
- Perspectives of Leadership among Early Childhood Teachers and Leaders in Singapore, In: *International Leadership Research Forum in Early Childhood Education* (2017), Hamburg, Germany.
- Understanding early childhood leadership from the context of preschool settings in Singapore, In: *Redesigning Pedagogy International Conference* (2022), Singapore.

Publications

Fonsén, E., Varpanen, J., Modise, M., Marchant, S., Kawakita. M., Inoue, C., Szecsi, T., Halpern, C. and Strehmel, P. (2019) International review for ECE leadership research – The United States, Finland, Japan, South Africa, Singapore and Germany in *Leadership in Education in Times of Change: Research from five continents*. (Research monograph (International Leadership Research Forum Early Education); No. 3). Opladen: Verlag Barbara Budrich.

Abstract

Early childhood education in Singapore has undergone a transformation following multiple policy initiatives implemented over the last decade. Increased government engagement in the development of the sector has resulted in the establishment of two national agencies, the development of sector-specific skill frameworks, the passing of regulatory legislation and a series of programme initiatives with the aim of improving accessibility, affordability, and the quality of early childhood education.

Early childhood education centre leaders too, have played an instrumental role in translating these policy initiatives to on-the-ground practice. These changes have required leaders to continually adapt their operations to meet the demands and challenges which accompany such new initiatives. The largely marketised early childhood sector, the progressive increase in the number of early childhood centres, the competition for student enrolment and the ongoing lack of qualified staff, have compounded the challenges that centre leaders have to cope with, in addition to their daily operational work.

This study examines the perspectives of early childhood leadership during a critical period of change. It adopts a mixed-method, multiple case study site approach to provide a thick and rich description of early childhood leadership in practice. Adopting Bowe, Ball and Gold's (1992) trajectory model of policymaking as its theoretical framework, it seeks to shed light on the 'what' and 'how' of leadership as seen through the perspectives of multiple stakeholders.

The study supports the current conceptualisation of early childhood leadership as contextually defined and builds upon existing literature in a situational and socially constructed frame to understand leadership work. It also seeks to challenge Singapore policymakers to broaden their definition of leadership and adopt a relationally driven approach to build leadership capacity.

The findings define political, structural, social, and cultural factors that have contributed to the challenges of leadership enactment within Singapore's early childhood landscape. They also suggest the emergence of an early childhood leadership community, grappling with its professional identity amidst the lengthening shadow of the government's hand in the sector.

Abbreviations

ADECL	: Advanced Diploma in Early Childhood Leadership
AOP	: Anchor Operator
CL	: Centre Leader
CPD	: Continuing Professional Development
CPDFw	: Continuing Professional Development Framework
DPL	: Diploma in Early Childhood Leadership
EC	: Early Childhood
ECCE	: Early Childhood Care and Education
ECE	: Early Childhood Education
ECD	: Early Childhood Development
ECDA	: Early Childhood Development Agency
ECDC	: Early Childhood Development Centre
LT	: Lead Teacher
MCYS	: Ministry of Community, Youth and Sports
MOE	: Ministry of Education
MOM	: Ministry of Manpower
MK	: MOE Kindergarten
MSF	: Ministry of Social and Family Development
MTI	: Ministry of Trade and Information
NIE	: National Institute of Education
NIEC	: National Institute of Early Childhood Development
OECD	: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
POP	: Partner Operator
SFw	: Skills Framework for Early Childhood
SFw-SSL	: Skills Framework for Early Childhood- Skills Standards for Leaders
SDEL	: Specialist Diploma in Early Childhood Leadership
SPARK	: Singapore Preschool Accreditation Framework
SSG	: SkillsFuture Singapore
SSO	: Social Service Organisation
ST	: Senior Teacher
SUSS	: Singapore University of Social Sciences
VWO	: Voluntary Welfare Organization
WOG	: Whole-of-government
WSG	: Workforce Singapore
WSQ	: Singapore Workforce Skills Qualifications
QRS	: Quality Rating Scale

Chapter 1 – Introduction

1.1 Introduction

This study explores early childhood (EC) leadership in Singapore within the context of policy-to-practice. Using a mixed-method, multiple site case study approach, it examines leadership from the perspective of teachers, principals, and policy elites, to comprehend the roles, perceptions and challenges of early childhood leadership across a range of centre settings.

1.2 Significance of policy and early childhood leadership

An emerging body of EC leadership research attest to the critical role leaders play in guiding pedagogy, programs, and policy (Aubrey, 2016; Waniganayake & Stipanovic, 2016). Studies have also identified that leadership is an agent of change in schools (Taran et al., 2014; Coleman et al., 2016) and the relationship between leadership and school quality (Pont et.al., 2008; Robinson et al., 2009). These findings situate leadership in a position of significant power and influence within educational organisations. Furthermore, the culture of performativity described by Ball (2003) as ‘a mode of regulation that employs judgements, comparisons and displays as means of incentive, control, attrition and change’, is becoming increasingly omnipresent in social and educational systems and leadership serves as a conduit to achieve broader educational and national policy objectives.

The groundswell in recent years of evidence-based research on the benefits of early years investment (Barnett, 2008; Heckman, 2011) has given rise to heightened interest from the government sector in early childhood care and education (ECCE). Many countries have sought to reform their ECCE system with the awareness of its link to human development. In countries where the economy is dependent on the quality of its labour force, this need has grown even more critical (Li et al., 2016). This has led to a worldwide movement to promote changes in nations’ ECCE policies and increased governance of their early years sector (OECD, 2017).

Policymakers run the risk of their paradigmatic and theoretical assumptions creating a conflict with those very persons for whom the policy implementation is applied (Lea, 2014). As an agent of change, leaders can find themselves trapped in the fishing lines of policy interpretation and enactment. For example, the Australian government has expressed interest in recruiting educational leaders to implement policy reforms (Fleet

et al., 2015; Waniganayake, 2015) while in the United Kingdom, leadership programmes are viewed as a way to develop greater network governance (Lea, 2014). Leaders are viewed as potential policy change agents and research has shown that their role and identities can be affected by such systemic changes (Moshel & Berkovich, 2018) though there is little research on how policies directly affect the work of EC leaders.

In recent times, an emerging body of research supports the understanding of EC leadership as a socio-cultural construct that is influenced by the history, culture, and realities of its contexts (Hujala & Puroila, 1998; Palaiologou & Male, 2018). Inspired by this lens, this study attempts to understand how early childhood leadership is exercised in the context of a developed Asian country with a cosmopolitan outlook. Additionally, with sweeping reforms affecting the early childhood sector, this study aims to capture the effects of policy on leadership during a phase of intense government policy change.

1.3 Background of early childhood education in Singapore

A high quality of education is critical to a human resource-dependent country such as Singapore and although the nation, at the age of just 56, is young, its education system has already gained recognition globally for its high-performing, rigorous and excellence-driven education system. Singapore students achieve consistently high scores in international assessments such as the Programme for International Student Assessment (Goodwin et al., 2017) and aside from excelling in student output, Singapore has also ranked first in Asia in the Worldwide Educating for The Future Index (WEFI). Given its record, it does not come as a surprise that Singapore has emerged as the region's top country for providing the best education policy environment (Economist Intelligence Unit, 2017). A 2011 report by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) attributed part of the Singapore education success story to the political will and educational leadership of the country's Ministry of Education, in aligning policy and practice along with its focus on nurturing teacher and leadership capacity (Boon, 2018).

This deserving accolade would be reflective of the successes of Singapore's public education system which concentrates on the primary, secondary and higher education sectors. The same cannot be said of ECCE, where the pace of development has been less remarkable. It is important to note that ECCE in Singapore has historically, functioned, as a privatised sector, existing just beyond the strong grip of governmental control. Consequently, neoliberalism has continued to

exert its influence over the sector for decades, which has resulted in it becoming highly marketised and corporatised, characterised also by inequalities in affordability and accessibility to quality services (Lim, 2017).

A turning point for ECCE emerged in 2013 when the *Starting Well Index* ranked Singapore 29th out of 45 countries based on scores related to accessibility, affordability, and quality (Economist Intelligence Unit, 2012). Since then, the Singapore government has responded swiftly, by enacting critical reforms that have brought about greater governance of the ECCE sector. These reforms include an unprecedented level of national investment in the sector together with a slew of policy initiatives that have redefined the landscape.

These decisions had to consider factors which quietly undergird social and family development policymaking in Singapore. In any effort to develop ECCE, the government has to consider its role in family development and balance that against the responsibilities parents are expected to undertake within society. Secondly, it needs to weigh the role of education and the priority that education is given over the care and development of children (Hasan, 2007). In Singapore's case, education continues to be the cornerstone of public policy decision making due to the nation's need for a high-quality workforce (Lim & Lipponen, 2019). Any discussion of Singapore public policy needs to be cognizant of this political mindset, and the critical lever that education plays in the country's success. With the robust governance and disciplined framework that often accompanies such policymaking (Neo & Chen, 2007), it is only to be expected that any reform brings with it a wave of change and the need for adaptability.

1.4 The historical development of early childhood education in Singapore

Over the last ten years, ECCE has witnessed major policy shifts that have affected the regulation, structure, and quality of early childhood services. These recent changes have been largely motivated by the desire to regulate ECCE service provision, to leverage education as a social leveller and to manage labour force quality and quantity. Efforts to transform and centralise the governance of the ECCE sector have proved challenging as the capitalist and marketised-driven approach has to accede to new performance measures.

This conflict can be traced to legacy factors in the evolution of ECCE. Childcare in Singapore began in the 1940s, driven by a strong social welfare objective - to address health and nutrition issues that emerged in the aftermath of the Second World War

(Khoo, 2010; Lim, 2017). In the 1980s, the government introduced policy initiatives to expand the provision of childcare and so encourage mothers to return to the labour force. This meant that ECCE was not just a sector in and of itself, but was also an economic pivot in the government's strategy to boost Singapore's labour supply (Lim, 2017). Childcare was, however, regarded as an important provision for social care more than for its educational value. The structural complexities of providing such services, at scale, led the government in that period, to develop ECCE as a private sector under the regulatory oversight of the education and the social government ministries.

This neo-liberalisation of ECCE, however, fuelled growing concerns, that built to a crescendo some forty years on, reflected in a public outcry over high fees, low workforce salaries and an inconsistent quality of education (Goy, 2016). Despite its success in boosting the female labour force participation rate, this policy plank had the unintended consequence of exacerbating social inequity due to the variegated provision of ECCE services (Lim, 2017). The issue coincided with a focus across the global community, on research that linked positive EC experiences with a reduction in cost to societies over time (Heckman 2008; Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000). The combined effect of these developments presaged an unprecedented shift in ECCE policy, as the investment in the sector was now seen as critical for long term human development.

1.5 Economics as a driver in Singapore policymaking

The Singapore government upholds the idea that the success of a small country with limited resources rests on ensuring a governmental approach that is meritocratic, pragmatic and economically oriented (Tan, 2017). This extends to its management of the early childhood education sector, although Lea (2014) cautions that any epistemological driver of policymaking that views early childhood education as a preparation for employment risks elevating economics above social objectives.

As reflected in a recent speech by the former Deputy Prime Minister, Mr Tharman Shanmugaratnam, this economic objective continues to be the locomotive of education policy,

what we do in education, starting very early in life, what we do in SkillsFuture to help people push their potential through life; will remain critical to our economic progress. (Shanmugaratnam, 2018)

Labour competitiveness and workforce skills management continue to be issues of priority debated in the Singapore parliament. In 2018, Singapore topped the Human Capital Index list, launched by the World Bank that same year, which measures how effectively societies devote resources to their people. The report which tallies the achievements of the country, reflects the prudent, progressive, and strategic economic policy driven approach of the Singapore government (Yulisman, 2018).

The transformation of the ECCE sector picked up its pace with the raft of reforms introduced in 2012 when the government embarked on a targeted national push to address Singapore workforce's skill-building and labour transformation. This led to the creation of Workforce Singapore (WSG), a government agency formerly known as the Singapore Workforce Development Authority (WDA). WSG, a statutory board of the Ministry of Manpower, was tasked with overseeing the transformation of the local workforce and industry to meet ongoing economic challenges.

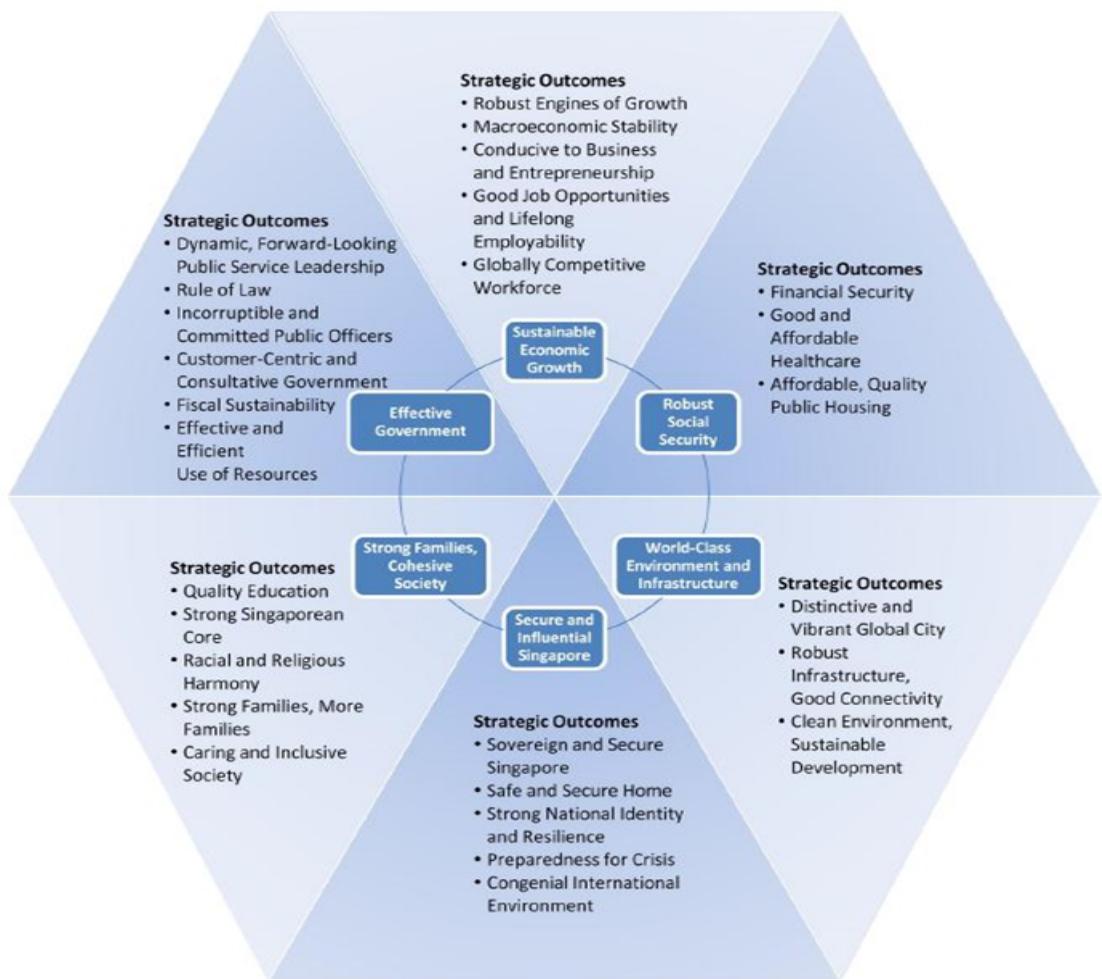
This initiative had a significant impact on the ECCE sector, which had long been stifled by low wages, a lack of career progression opportunities and high rates of attrition (Ang, 2012a; Lien, 2016). The establishment of this workforce agency meant that there was now a strategy at a national level to coordinate and support the development of ECCE. WSG, in collaboration with the newly established Early Childhood Development Agency (ECDA), was able to deliver improvements orchestrated as part of a National Industry Transformation Map (Toh, 2018). This reflects the Singapore government's pragmatic policy approach – one that is both flexible and nimble-footed - often characterised as a form of dynamic governance (Neo & Chen, 2007). In practice, this meant that there was now an increased number of public policymaking agencies involved in the transformation of ECCE.

1.6 The approach to policymaking in Singapore

One of the known strategies adopted by the Singapore government in its policymaking is the Whole-Of-Government (WOG) approach, which it often applied to manage complex and challenging issues (Ho, 2017). In a small nation such as Singapore, national issues may transcend ministerial boundaries and a high degree of liaison is expected of public agencies to address issues more effectively (Hong & Lugg, 2015). Government ministries collaborate in this way to achieve WOG outcomes, whilst each individual ministry identifies relevant indicators to track their own progress. This approach engenders a horizontal flow of information that will enable agencies to manage connections across sectors more efficiently. In this way, agencies achieve expected national outcomes more effectively by combining their

resources. Figure 1.1 illustrates strategic outcomes identified by the Singapore Public Service. Within this approach, it can be surmised that ECCE lies within the outcome of achieving ‘Quality Education’ nested within the segment ‘Strong Families, Cohesive Society’. The figure shows that any national policymaking efforts make careful hand-in-hand consideration of developments across different sectors.

Figure 1.1: A model of Whole-of-Government Strategic Outcomes
(Singapore Public Service Outcomes Review Report, 2010)



The WOG approach has the advantage of creating a strong linkage of resources across policymaking decisions. The WOG’s strength lies in determining a strategic priority that extends beyond sectoral interests and aligns instead, with more extensive national interests (Ho, 2017). Nevertheless, overcoming bureaucratic silos and the work practices of individual institutions may pose a challenge for this approach to be

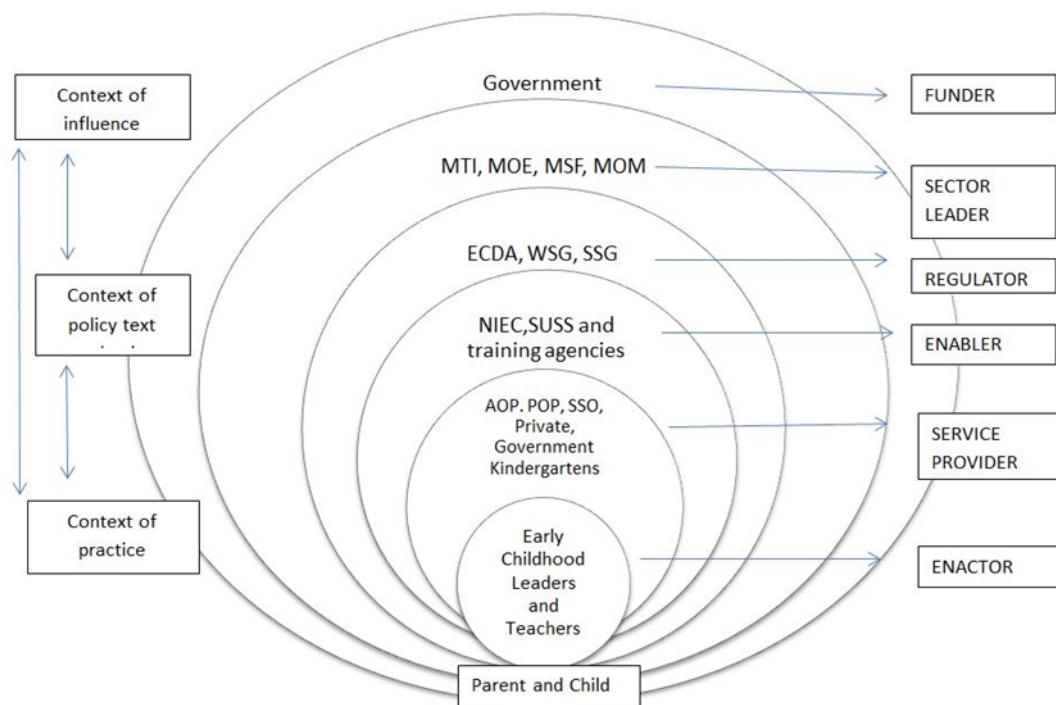
applied effectively in practice. Although it is imperative that complex problems be tackled, there is still no guarantee that results can be easily achieved.

In the Singapore government's 2016 Budget, which is the remit of the Ministry of Trade and Industry (MTI), it was announced that S\$4.5 billion would be invested as part of an Industry Transformation Programme. Reflecting its WOG approach, this programme sought to integrate restructuring efforts to address issues and deepen partnerships between government and stakeholders (MTI, 2017). The improvements targeted four pillars of the Industry Transformation Map: Productivity, Jobs and Skills, Innovation, and Trade and Internationalisation. Out of the twenty-three industries listed, ECCE was identified as an 'Essential Domestic Service' with the Ministry of Education named as the lead government agency.

This underscores the position of ECCE in Singapore and establishes the perception that ECCE, within the local context, fulfils a service that contributes to the development of national trade and industry. This marks a notable shift from its social welfare roots of the 1940s and the role that it played in lifting female labour force participation rates in the 1980s. ECCE is now regarded as critical in shaping Singapore's vital economic resource, that of the quality of its people.

1.7 A multi-agency approach to early childhood policymaking

Figure 1.2: The multi-agency approach in the development of the early childhood industry



The plans to transform the ECCE sector are based on a governance model that accommodates change, adaptation, and collaboration. Figure 1.2 highlights the interaction of organisations involved in operationalising these restructuring efforts. ECDA, the regulatory and developmental agency for the ECCE sector, is overseen by the Ministry of Education (MOE) and Ministry of Social and Family Development (MSF) and is tasked with managing the regulation, planning, professional development, and public education of ECCE services. It also manages the licensing of all ECCE development centres excluding the MOE kindergartens. The WSG oversees the local workforce and industry's transformation and collaborates closely with SkillsFuture Singapore (SSG), a statutory board under the MOE, which drives and coordinates the national SkillsFuture movement along with promoting the pursuit of skills mastery quality education and training. SSG developed the Singapore Workforce Skill Qualifications (WSQ), a national credential system that trains, assesses, and certifies the workforce's skills and competencies. SSG is instrumental in ECCE development as it collaborates with ECDA to develop the Skills Framework for early childhood leadership.

Along with the MTI, which coordinates economic transformation of sectors, these four ministries operate through inter-agency platforms, established to promote information sharing among ministries (Ho, 2018). These agencies work with the National Institute of Early Childhood Development (NIEC), a newly established national early childhood training institution, set up by the MOE, to uplift early childhood training quality and professional development. Aside from NIEC, the Singapore University of Social Sciences (SUSS) and several private agencies, together provide a suite of training courses to meet the sector's needs. In combination, these organisations form a complex network of partnerships to support the development of ECCE in Singapore.

1.8 From a private to a government-supported majority

Historically, the ECCE sector operates predominantly as a privatised and marketised economy comprising 'for-profit' and 'non-profit' childcare and kindergarten centres. The Anchor Operator (AOP) scheme was introduced in 2009 in an effort to introduce a strategic policy lever to help manage the sector. The scheme provided funding support to selected preschool operators to increase access to good quality and affordable ECCE and was expanded five years later as five AOPs were selected, based on their financial stability, governance processes, programme quality, affordability, and ability to increase capacity. In 2016, a similar initiative, called the Partner Operator (POP) scheme was introduced to support smaller organisations. It

attracted 23 POP operators running 250 childcare centres (ECDA, 2019). The formation of these government-supported preschools meant that such centres were obligated to achieve the national ECCE objectives of quality, affordability, and accessibility – objectives that were stipulated in their funding agreements.

In 2014, the government introduced a system of public preschools known as MOE Kindergartens (MKs) to broaden ECCE provision and facilitate greater access to affordable and quality preschool (Goy & Sin, 2017). From an initial five schools, it is projected that the number of MKs will reach 60 centres by 2025 (ECDA, 2019). In addition to the preschools under the AOP and POP schemes, it is estimated that eighty per cent of preschoolers are projected to have a place in a government-supported preschool by 2025 (ECDA, 2019).

The emergence of MKs heralds a newly developed public preschool model within a predominantly market-driven and privatised ECCE industry. Being government sponsored, MKs are exempted from ECDA regulatory requirements, and so enjoy a distinct operational advantage over their private sector preschool competitors. Without the pressure of balancing operational costs with licensing and funding obligations that private and government supported preschools do, enrolling at an MK is attractive thanks to affordable fees and a special affiliation with co-located primary schools (Koh, 2017). The establishment of MKs has, however, inevitably intensified market competition in an already competitive sector. The direct involvement of the government in setting up preschools has also shifted the role of the government in the ECCE landscape, from that of a supporter of ECCE development, to that of a privileged service provider (Ng, 2020).

1.9 Singapore early childhood policy initiatives

Several researchers have characterised the various phases of ECCE initiatives as 'policy waves' (Ang, 2012; Lim, 2017; Sum et al., 2018). The policies implemented during these phases have been instrumental in developing the national ECCE goals of accessibility, affordability, and quality. Table 1.1 shows the researcher's adaptation, that builds on 'policy waves' outlined by the aforementioned writers, enhanced with the addition of a 'policy actors' column, who have been identified from attributions in documents or linked to organisations bearing influence in the policy area. The addition of the policy actor's column is of interest to this study, as it identifies the range of agencies involved in ECCE policymaking and EC leadership development.

Table 1.1: Overview of early childhood policy and leadership initiatives

(Adapted from Ang, 2012; Lim, 2017; Sum et al., 2019)

Wave	Date	Initiative	Policy Actors
Policy Wave 1	1984	Taskforce on female participation in Labour Force developed a plan of action to increase female labour force participation	Government ministries, employer organisations, unions, professionals
	1985	<i>Education Act</i> requires all kindergartens to be registered as private schools under MOE	MOE
	1985	An experimental project of the Community Childcare Centre model using a Tripartite model (government, NTUC, community). Basic training centre set up by NTUC	Bernard van Leer Foundation
	1988	<i>The Child Care Centres Act</i> and the <i>Child Care Centres Regulations Act</i>	Ministry of Community Development
	1991	Certificate in Preschool Teaching and Certificate in Preschool management and Administration by NIE	National Institute of Education (NIE)
	1994-1997	Training Awards for full-time Early Childhood Care and Education courses sponsored by MCYS	MCYS
	1999	Preschool Steering Committee set up to review the quality of ECCE in Singapore through licensing, training, curriculum and research	MOE & NIE
	2000	Ministry of Education introduced <i>The Desired Outcomes for Preschool Education</i>	MOE
	2000	MCYS and MOE introduced a common training pathway for Childcare & Kindergarten Teachers and Supervisors-Cert in ECCE & Diploma (Teaching and Leadership) in ECCE	MCYS & MOE
	2001	Preschool Qualification Accreditation Committee set up by MOE and MCYS	MCYS & MOE
	2003	Introduction of <i>A Framework For A Kindergarten Curriculum</i> by MOE	MOE
	2003	MCYS launched <i>Good Practices Handbook: Nurturing Early Learners</i>	MCYS
	2005	WSQ introduced. All courses developed under WSQ guidelines. WDA (Singapore Workforce Development Agency) launches WSQ training to enhance the professionalism of industries	WDA
	2006	MOE Policy Framework Standards for Kindergartens Pursuing Excellence at Kindergartens	MOE
	2006	Intervention programmes by MOE to enhance the school readiness of preschool children. FLAiR (Focused Language Assistance in Reading initiative introduced in 10 kindergartens)	MOE & AECES
	2007	Committee on Improving Quality of Preschool Education set up by MOE	MOE

Policy Wave 2	2008	Training bursaries for preschool teachers by MOE and MCYS	MCYS & MOE
	2008	MOE <i>A Kindergarten Curriculum Guide</i> was published	MOE
	2008	MCYS announces plan to build 200 new childcare centres by 2013	MCYS
	2009	MCYS introduced Early Childhood Research Fund (capped at S\$8K)	MCYS
	2010	MCYS launches the Child Development Network (CDN) to build and connect the community of stakeholders in early childhood care and education and as a way of championing the quality of early childhood education in Singapore	MCYS
	2011	MOE introduces a national accreditation and assessment framework for preschool services: The Singapore Preschool Accreditation Framework (SPARK).	MOE
	2011	Increase in the eligible monthly household income criterion for the Kindergarten Financial Assistance Scheme (KiFAS) by the Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports	MCYS
	2011	MCYS introduced <i>Good Employer's Tool Kit</i> to help employers recruit and retain teachers	MCYS
	2011	Introduction of <i>Early Years Development Framework (EYDF)</i> for children from 2 months to 3 years by MCYS.	MCYS
	2011	MCYS set up Early Years Qualification Accreditation committee (EYQAC) to accredit Educarers and Teacher Training Institutes	MCYS
	2011	MCYS launched two courses for Educarers - Higher Certificate in Infant care (Infants aged 0 to 18 months) & Advanced Certificate in Early Years (Infant & Toddlers 0 to 3 years)	MCYS
	2011	MOE announces plans to review the <i>Kindergarten Curriculum Framework</i> by the end of 2012	MOE
	2012	MCYS launched <i>Continuing Professional Development Framework for Teachers</i>	MCYS
	2012	MOE announces Quality Assurance Consultancy scheme in partnership with the Association of Early Childhood Educators Singapore (AECES) to support Kindergartens in achieving the SPARK certification.	MSF & MOE (MCYS is rebranded as MSF)
	2012	MCYS announces funding of close to S\$10m for approximately 600 scholarships and teaching awards over the next two years.	MSF
	2012	Lien Foundation released the Starting Well report. Vital Voices for Vital Years published.	Lien Foundation

Policy Wave 3	2013	Early Childhood Development Agency (ECDA) is formed	ECDA
	2013	MOE launched refreshed MOE Kindergarten Curriculum Framework henceforth known as Nurturing Early Learners (NEL)	MOE
	2013	CPD masterplan announced. Focus on the professional road map, CPD courses, incentives and recognition	ECDA
	2014	5 MOE kindergartens launched	MOE
	2014	Three new preschool Anchor operators appointed	ECDA
	2014	Childcare Registration management system introduced	ECDA
	2015	Partner Operator Scheme introduced Professional Development Programme announced	ECDA
	2015	14 ECDA fellows appointed	ECDA
	2015	Launch of Place and Train Programme for Infant and Educarers	ECDA
	2016	SkillsFuture Study Award for ADECL introduced	ECDA, SSG
	2016	Professional Development Programme commences with a batch of 138 preschool teachers	ECDA
	2016	Lien Foundation launches Principal Matters programme	Lien Foundation
	2016	Skills Framework for Early Childhood launched New initiatives for aspiring educators Early Childhood Manpower Plan. Part of national SkillsFuture movement. Developed by EC tripartite Committee. To attract 4000 educators by 2020. Current 16000 educators today.	ECDA, WSG, SSG
	2017	4 AOP run mega childcare centres to open in 2018	ECDA
	2017	Early Childhood Development Centres Act passed in parliament	Government
	2017	New PDP L leaders announced. Guide for Educarers launched.	ECDA
	2018	The government sets aside S\$5 million for the next three years to develop leaders in EC	Government
	2018	Early Childhood Development Centres Regulations	Government
	2018	Early Childhood Industry Transformation Map introduced	ECDA, WSG, SSG, ASSETS, unions, and operators
	2018	Three-year National Campaign to raise the profile of EC profession	ECDA
	2019	Vital Voices 2 published	Lien Foundation
	2021	Refreshed Skills Framework for Early Childhood launched	ECDA, SSG, WSG

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The list combines from ECDA website and newspaper reports. Items in bold are initiatives related to leadership development. Some minor initiatives have been omitted for clarity. 	Legend MCYS : Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports MOE : Ministry of Education MSF : Ministry of Social and Family Development ECDA : Early Childhood Development Agency WDA : Singapore Workforce Development Agency WSG : Workforce Singapore (formerly WDA) SSG : SkillsFuture Singapore
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Policy Wave 1, which took place from 1984 to 2007, highlights the bifurcated nature of ECCE governance that existed within the sector (Khoo, 2010). Childcare regulation was managed by the Ministry of Community Development (later renamed Ministry of Community Development Youth and Sports in 2004 or MCYS) whilst the Ministry of Education was responsible for kindergartens. This division of responsibilities affected licensing and legal requirements, as childcare providers had to comply with the *Child Care Centres Act*, while kindergartens were subject to the *Education Act*. The two regulators also produced policy texts targeted for their respective sectors. An example of this was the 2003 publication of *A Framework for A Kindergarten Curriculum* by MOE, which focused on principles in kindergarten practice, whilst in the same year, MCYS launched its *Good Practices Handbook: Nurturing Early Learners*, which focused on care practices.

The second phase straddled a relatively brief four years – from 2008 to 2012 - and was marked by a growth spurt in the early childhood industry as the number of childcare centres and kindergartens mushroomed from 1,200 to 1,500 in number. During this stage, the sector went through a more formal development of its systems and governance with the introduction of a quality framework, a professional development framework and a preschool accreditation process to support improvements in service delivery. The rapid changes in ECCE during this period raised some concerns about practices in the sector, such as uneven quality of provision, high teacher attrition rate and the perception that high fees suggested better programme quality. This attracted the attention of private advocacy driven foundations, such as the Lien Foundation to participate in the efforts to improve the sector. This phase witnessed multi-agency participation in ECCE policy development as it widened out to include government ministries, non-government organisations, preschool operators, and training institutions.

A third policy wave, which began in 2013, proved to be a watershed moment for ECCE in Singapore as a hitherto mixed system of governance was consolidated with the formation of ECDA as Singapore's single regulatory agency for ECCE. During this phase, other new national agencies began to be involved in ECCE policymaking such as SkillsFuture Singapore and Workforce Singapore (formerly Singapore Workforce Development Agency). This phase was particularly significant for early childhood leadership development, as several initiatives for leaders were undertaken, indicated in **bold** type in Table 1.1. This phase also witnessed a new *Early Childhood Development Centre Act*, the *Early Childhood Masterplan*, and the *Industry Transformation Map*, three policy moves that would charter ECCE development in Singapore on a new course. This third wave featured a greater degree of involvement by the government in the sector and its regulation of it, as it refined previous initiatives (Sum et al., 2018).

In summary, Lim (2017) noted that the various policy waves addressed four areas of high-leverage: child outcomes, teacher quality and professional status, government regulatory frameworks and policies to promote accessibility and affordability (p.19). ECCE policymaking has been embedded in a complex, fluid space that has intensified over the years. The influence of multiple stakeholders with varied agendas raises concern over the impact of such changes to the ground (Ng, 2020). The profit-driven obligations of private companies are now mixed with the need to address a wider national agenda. This creates a conflict of priorities and pressure, particularly for leaders who are responsible for the day-to-day operations of preschools. This need to balance organisational and national demands sets a challenging arena for EC leaders to work in.

1.10 Analytical framework

This study examines Singapore's early childhood policymaking processes across different groups of stakeholders such as teachers, centre principals and the policy elite. Within this space, the understanding of policy texts, legislation and enactment will be explored using the Bowe, Ball and Gold (1992) trajectory model of policymaking as an analytical tool (see Figure 2.1).

This model identifies three contexts involved in policy creation, namely influence, policy text production and practice. Firstly, Bowe et al. (1992) describe the context of influence as one where public policy is created, and discourses are constructed by interested groups seeking to further their own cause. This allows for an exploration

of the underlying motives of stakeholders in policymaking and of the processes involved in devising policies.

The context of policy text production meanwhile, refers to the use of texts to represent policy. In this study, this refers to legislation and official documents related to leadership that will be analysed. Bowe et al. (1992) explain that these texts are often written in the language of the public good, but some presuppositions need to be understood when using these texts. In using these texts, readers need to ensure ‘intertextuality’ is practised across and within texts. This minimises misunderstanding and the potential for contradiction and misrepresentations, which may easily occur (Bowe et al., 1992).

Finally, the context of practice refers to the implementation of policy. Much as with the other two contexts, the processes here are complex. Bowe et al. (1992) stress that this stage may involve reinterpretation and recreation of the text by practitioners. This text then emerges as ‘policy’, and the process continues cyclically. The dynamic inter-related nature of the model provides a good representation of policymaking’s organic process in practice. Whilst adding valued insight to a typology-dominated field, the model has the flexibility to accommodate the potential for inter- or intra-context themes that may emerge during this exploratory research.

1.11 Positionality

My interest in this topic stems from my work experience in Singapore’s ECCE sector over the last two decades. The work knowledge I acquired as a preschool teacher, preschool leader, curriculum specialist and lecturer across various organisations, has enabled me to understand the work challenges faced by different stakeholders in the ECCE arena. The exposure that I gained across multitudinous ECCE settings informed my understanding of the operational work of specific organisational set-ups and the influence that that has on leadership practices.

In addition to my formal professional work roles, during the period between 2015 and 2019, I was appointed to be the lead mentor in a privately funded, nation-wide preschool leadership development project in Singapore known as Principal Matters. The experience allowed me to interact with a vast network of EC leaders and furthered my understanding of the work challenges faced by principals in early childhood centres. This vast sectoral experience and professional network has facilitated my access to key individuals and diverse stakeholders and maintained my currency of practice and knowledge of sectoral developments.

The research has pushed me towards a constant process of reflexivity. Throughout this study, I engaged in discussions with peers about the challenges faced by the early childhood community in managing policy initiatives. The position I occupied as a practitioner, coupled with my strong interest in policy matters, enabled me to view leaders' challenges from a micro and macro perspective. I hope this ability to understand the work of EC leaders from multiple viewpoints allows me to clarify and articulate the challenges faced by these leaders.

1.12 Research questions

The primary question that this study seeks to address is:

- What is the policy-to-practice context of early childhood leadership in Singapore?

In relation to this core research focus, the following questions will also be addressed:

- What does policy require early childhood leaders in Singapore to do in terms of implementation?
- What are the views, understandings, and beliefs about early childhood leadership of a range of stakeholders?
- What are the reported early childhood practices and experiences of early childhood leaders?
- How is early childhood leadership enacted in a range of Singaporean settings?
- Who leads the leaders?

1.13 Terminology

- Early Childhood Leader and Early Childhood Leadership

This study will focus on the work of the Centre Leader (CL) who is also known as the 'principal' within the Singapore ECCE context. The CL undertakes the primary leadership role in the ECCE centre, differentiating their leadership work from those of the Lead Teacher, Senior Lead Teacher, Senior Centre Leader or Pinnacle Leader, which are all other leadership roles identified in the Skills Framework for Early Childhood. Henceforth, any mention of early childhood leader within this study will be in reference to the CL role unless otherwise specified. For variety, the terms 'principal', 'leader' and 'CL' will be used interchangeably within the text.

- Early Childhood Care and Education

The term 'Early Childhood Care and Education' or 'ECCE' as it has been used thus far, refers to services rendered for the care and education of children below the age of seven, as recognised by ECDA. In some documents, this may be referred to as 'Early Childhood Education' or 'ECE'.

- Preschool and Early Childhood Development Centre

The reference to early childhood centres in this thesis refers to preschools that provide educational and care services for all children under the age of seven. However, the official nomenclature for Singapore preschools is known as 'Early Childhood Development Centres' or 'ECDC' which is a combined term of reference for kindergartens and childcare centres. For ease of general understanding, the term 'preschools' or 'EC centres' will be used as it presents a more commonly used term.

For other terms used that may not be expressed here, please refer to the section titled 'Abbreviations'.

1.14 Thesis structure

This thesis is divided into eleven chapters.

- Chapter 1 has introduced the study, the background and context of ECCE in Singapore and its policymaking process. It explains the analytical framework that will be used and outlines the research questions that are the crux of the study. It ends with a summary of this section which presents the structure of the thesis.
- Chapter 2 discusses the theoretical influences that underpin this study. The Bowe et al. (1992) model will be expounded and used as a tool for analysis.
- Chapter 3 presents a literature review of EC leadership.
- Chapter 4 explains the methodology used in the study.
- Chapter 5 presents the findings from Phase One, focusing on quantitative data from teachers and leaders' questionnaire survey.
- Chapter 6 presents the results from the teacher and leader interviews.
- Chapter 7 discusses the 'Day in the Life' observations and notes.
- Chapter 8 presents the results from the interviews with policy elites.
- Chapter 9 offers an analysis of policy documents and leadership related material.
- Chapter 10 provides a discussion of all the findings and answers the research questions outlined in the study.

- Chapter 11 presents the conclusion of the research, the implications and limitations of the study, its contributions and recommendations for future research.

1.15 Conclusion

This chapter has highlighted the Singapore early childhood education policy context within which the study resides. The next chapter will review international and local literature related to policy and practice in EC leadership.

Chapter 2 – Theoretical Influences

2.1 Introduction

This chapter aims to discuss the key concepts and theoretical influences that underpin the study. It strives to understand policy study approaches, educational leadership, power, governmentality, culture, and contextuality in EC leadership.

2.2 Policy sociology as an approach

There has been much debate among policy researchers about the varied and interchangeable terminology used in policy analysis studies. These differences often arise from methodological objectives employed in such research. This can be described as studies ‘of’ analysis for policy, or studies of analysis ‘for’ policy (Gordon et al., 1977, p.27). Some of the standard terms used in the literature include ‘critical policy analysis’ (Marshall, 1997; Taylor, 1997), ‘critical policy scholarship’ (Grace, 1998) and ‘policy sociology’, although it is the latter that seems to be the more commonly used term in educational policy studies (Lingard et al., 2005).

The policy sociology approach is rooted in the social science tradition and is historically informed. One of its characteristic features is the use of qualitative and illuminative techniques (Ozga, 2006; Ball, 1990; Bowe et al., 1992). This approach gives space to values, politics, history, and discursive practice, and allows for a critical examination of relationships between different interest groups (Regmi, 2017). In the policy-to-practice approach to the study of EC leadership, the policy sociology approach adopts a more dynamic lens to explore the intricacies of ‘who impacted whom and with what result’ and also ‘identifies who made the decisions’ (Kagan & Bowman, 1997). Adopting a policy approach can support objectivity and helps keep educational issues that embattle practitioners (Peers, 2018) at arms’ length. This might be a preferred approach in problematic areas of study, such as leadership.

2.3 Policy analysis as a toolbox of concepts and theories

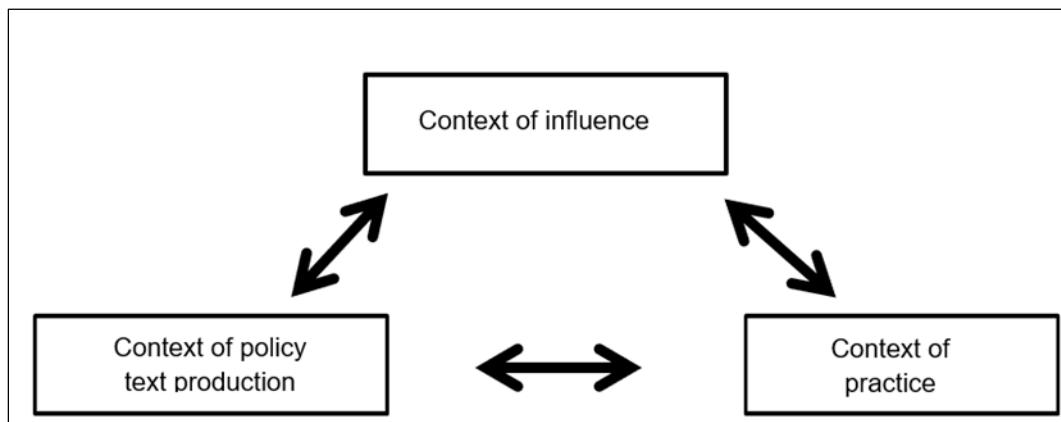
Explicit knowledge of the policy process is required to understand the impact of policy and the role that leaders play. A central area of concern in policy studies relates to developing an understanding of ‘what we mean by policy, how should we conceptualise it and how should we research it’ (Ball, 2015; Taylor, 1997). Ball (1994) adopts a dual view of ‘policy as text’ and ‘policy as discourse’. As a text, Ball describes policies as:

Representations which are encoded in complex ways (via struggles, compromises, authoritative public interpretations, and reinterpretations) and decoded in complex ways (via actors, interpretations, and meanings in relation to their history, experiences, skills, resources, and context). (Ball, 1994, p.16)

Ball (1993;1994) advocates that a ‘toolbox approach’ to policy could be used to provide some allowance for theoretical eclecticism. This is particularly advantageous in the study of an emerging field, such as EC leadership. Ball (2009, p.5) contends that there is a need for ‘more than one theory to make sense of the social world’ while his interest lies in the way ‘theories relate’, rather than the things that separate them.

Ball’s (1993) proposal is for a policy trajectory approach that enables tracing policy formulation, struggle, and response from within the state through to policy recipients, which is particularly useful for this study. The Bowe et al. (1992) policy cycle model (see Figure 2.1) refines this idea further and classifies the policymaking making process as an interaction between the context of influence, context of policy text production, and context of practice.

Figure 2.1: The Policy Cycle
(Bowe et al.,1992, p.20)



As a policy analysis tool, the model features a cross-sectional analysis of the intention, response, and effects of policy. The strength of the model lies in its proposal of a non-linear policy development process. Here, policy acts as both a ‘policy’ and ‘product’ in a continuous cycle of implementation and change. This flexibility is advantageous in a study such as this, where policy in the sphere of education is seen as a ‘complicated and sophisticated’ process (Lim, 2016). Understanding policy within the school environment is often characterised by a ‘creaky social assemblage’ (Ball et al., 2011, p.637). Hence, studies such as this, on policy and schools can be more

complex due to the presence of multiple dynamic forces which influence processes. This challenge can be overcome by the use of this tool which presents a strategic and systematic approach to explore, in this instance, the elusive phenomenon of leadership, which Bennis & Nanus (1997) describe as:

invisibly taking place like, an abominable snowman, whose footprints are everywhere but nowhere to be seen. (Bennis & Nanus, 1997, p.14)

2.4 Policy as text

Central to the reading of ‘policy as a text’ is the process of policy enactment. This involves policy actors making meaning of official texts for their use in specific contexts and practices (Braun et al., 2010 in Lim, 2016). In early childhood environments, such texts can refer to curriculum documents, mailers, and operational documents, to name just a few. Nevertheless, this process relies heavily on putting texts into action (Ball et al., 2011).

Ball et al. (1992) cautions that texts may be presented in a form which can influence a response. Some texts assume a ‘writerly’ form, which encourages the reader to engage in some creative interpretation of the text. Others have a ‘readerly’ form that imposes a uniform and non-negotiable meaning. School leaders face the challenging task of interpreting these texts, which may be construed as expressions of information, ideas, and intentions (Olssen et al., 2004). To some extent, the ‘writerly’ texts would involve some level of being able to read the minds of policymakers, which may, however, result in policy writers losing control of the meanings of their texts (Bowe et al., 1992, p.22).

It is vital to recognise that policy texts are not necessarily complete and may be laden with values and agendas of interest groups (Ball, 1993). Rizvi and Kemmis (1987) describe this process as ‘interpretations of interpretations’ which leaders are forced to undertake. In schools, the policy process can be particularly tricky as the processes can continue to linger well beyond their initial implementation to influence schools’ workings (Ozga, 2000).

The policy process described within the schools applies to early childhood centres in Singapore too. The unique set-up of a predominantly private ECCE operation that is simultaneously accountable to public governance creates a space where policies are continually interpreted to meet differing agendas. The varied sources of policies, as previously mentioned in Table 1.1 implies that the ECCE sector is acclimated to

managing the ‘messy business’ of policy work. The interfacing role of the CL, between teachers and management, positions them to interpret, develop and articulate policies that are appropriate for the respective stakeholders.

2.5 Policy actors

Ball (2011, p.626) elaborates on this concept by introducing the role of ‘policy actors’. In his study of policy in schools, Ball (2011) describes eight types of ‘policy actors’ and their perceived roles within a school system. These positions provide a taxonomy of roles that illustrates how policy actors engage and contribute to the policy process. The roles are classified as follows: Narrators, Entrepreneurs, Outsiders, Transactors, Enthusiasts, Translator, Critics and Receivers (See Table 2.1).

Table 2.1: Policy actors and policy work
(Ball et al., 2011)

Policy Actors	Policy Work
Narrators	Interpretation, selection, and enforcement of meanings, mainly done by headteachers and senior leadership
Entrepreneurs	Advocacy, creativity, and integration
Outsiders	Entrepreneurship, partnership and monitoring
Transactors	Accounting, reporting monitoring
Enthusiasts	Investment, creativity, satisfaction and career
Translators	Production of texts, artefacts and events
Critics	Union representatives, monitoring of management, maintaining counter-discourses
Receivers	Mainly junior teachers and teaching assistants coping defending and dependency

A brief description of the roles is as follows: Narrators refer to those who interpret texts and enforce their meanings. Within the school, this role is undertaken mainly by those in some position of leadership, such as heads of schools. Entrepreneurs refer to actors who champion policies and engage with others in the policy process. Middle managers in schools fit into this category. Outsiders refer to those who play a role in interpreting policies such as consultants, while transactors undertake the work of ensuring that policy work is accounted for with supportive evidence. Enthusiasts comprise those who actively model the policy in their practice and can sometimes be

translators who bridge policy to others. Critics are those who voice dissent and question policy while receivers lack power and comply with policies.

These roles are non-specific and not mutually exclusive, as actors can take on multiple roles. In some school settings, the roles may be more prominent, and there could even be the specialisation of one type of policy work in certain schools (Ball et al., 2011). School leaders and institutional policy entrepreneurs play a crucial role in articulating such policy through what may be called policy work ‘storytelling’ (Ball et al., 2011). This process involves policy actors weaving disparate policies into a ‘grand narrative’ aimed at creating a vision for the organisation or the public. If done well, this meaning-making process can be oppressive - by subordinating other policy actors, although it can also fail when there is incoherence or a gap in the narrative concerning policy.

In Singapore, the operational expansion of ECCE to meet key performance indicators set by the government has created a more complex assemblage of policy actors within the system. Rapid policy changes will require these ECCE organisations to mobilize key personnel who need to exercise resilience in making sense of the policy text. Leaders play a key role in policy translation as their work is at the coalface of service provision. However, the close-knit nature of ECCE environments often means that narratives require careful construction. Given the complexity of leadership, it would be advantageous if it were analysed through multilevel perspectives of leaders and followers (Gronn & Ribbins, 1996). The current methodological limitations of leadership research also suggest that a policy approach can provide a useful framework to broaden the understanding of EC leadership.

2.6 Policy as discourse

Policy discourse occupies the space that lies within and between policy texts. Foucault (1983) defines the idea of discourse as statements of ‘things said’. Such statements may represent events tied to a historical context, which may be repeated (Olga et al., 2014) while Ball (2015) explains that policy discourses provide us with ways of thinking and talking about our ‘institutional selves’, which may evolve to form a ‘regime of truth’ by those involved in the meaning-making process. In defining policy, Ball, et al. (2012) define it not merely as ‘texts and things’ (legislation and national strategies) but as an active and discursive process, which are complexly figured, contextually mediated, and institutionally rendered.

Policy work is described as non-linear and at times non-rational in a manner that could invite heavy contestation by policy actors who work in varying contexts and interpret policy differently from one another (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010; Gale, 2013). There is a recognition that while many policies which are applied in schools emanate from the government, policymaking at all levels involves negotiation and contestation. There may also be a locking of horns between different groups, some of whom may lie outside the formal machinery of official policymaking (Ozga, 2000, p.113) yet as people, systems and organisations develop, understanding the policy discourse can help identify the sources of tension.

Policy discourse in ECCE is particularly challenging given Singapore's traditionally linear and mechanistic approach to policymaking (Lim & Kuah, 2014). Since the early 2000s, evidence of participatory governance has been observed within the political space to encourage greater public dialogue. Despite these efforts, the intense introduction of ECCE policy initiatives by several government policy actors has created challenges in its implementation. Trowler (2003) attributes the challenges in implementing policy to three sources. Firstly, there could be conflict among those who make policy as well as those who put it into practice. Secondly, policy statements may be open to a vast array of interpretations. Thirdly, policy on the ground may involve situations that are extremely complex. The interplay of these factors may provide insight into the impact of ECCE policymaking on the leader's work.

Ball (1994) suggests that policy is not only a text, but a power relation and that power is exercised through the production of 'truth and knowledge as discourses'. Ball adds,

We do not speak a discourse; it speaks us. We are the subjectivities, the voices, the knowledge, the power relations that a discourse constructs and allows. [...] we are spoken by policies, we take up the positions constructed for us within policies. (Ball, 1994, p.22)

The analysis of policy discourse helps uncover what is said as well as what is 'unsaid'. In understanding how policy works, Ball (2015) draws our attention to 'how we do not do policy but how policy does us'. The effect of policy is one that can limit responses to change and exercise power by eliminating the ability to think otherwise (Ball, 1994).

2.7 Governmentality and the politics of the early childhood space

The metamorphosis of ECCE systems into a neoliberal, marketised economy and heightened governance of ECCE systems present a serious challenge to practitioners

globally. In both scenarios, governmentality has emerged as an important force where communities are influenced by subtle and effective practices that shepherd their actions towards the desired form of behaviour (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005). Several researchers have discussed the politicisation of early childhood education, both of the workforce, and the workspace (Moss, 2007; Millei & Kailo, 2018; Dahlberg & Moss, 2005).

Moss (2007) explores the possibility of viewing preschools as institutions of 'democratic political practice'. He argues that preschools are not just places for 'technical practice' focused on building human capital but could also be where attitudinal orientations, ideologies and purposive activities are exercised. This call to assert democratic practice is seen as a form of resistance to the neo-liberal ECCE practices that steer learning towards predetermined outcomes. It suggests that education policies may promote market freedoms at the expense of social justice and welfare. Although his concern stems from the need to invigorate children's rights and political agency as an ideal, Moss (2007) contends that being able to exercise these rights is a challenge in reality because of the different paradigms that policymakers and practitioners use.

Millei and Kallio (2018) suggest that this is only possible when the nature of 'mundane politics' that exists in early childhood environments is embraced. This refers to instances when practitioners assert their ability to exercise professional discretion when encountering politics in their daily decision-making processes. Dahlberg & Moss (2005) describe these political interactions as 'small and petty details.... concerned with the here and now... the everyday'. These involve pushback against limitations and action within small spaces that render preschool as sites for minor politics.

Rose (1999 in Dahlberg & Moss, 2005) cautioned that these minor politics are not to be underestimated. Such instances of politicisation can merge with other issues and embed itself in 'major politics' that can influence public policy. Ball (1997) refers to these interactions as 'micro-politics' and explains that this can exist in school organisations through conflict, domination, power and change in school operations. Within preschool settings, early childhood leaders are at the centre of a politically charged environment, locally and globally, bestowing upon them the role of critical policy subject and policy actor (Ball, 2011).

2.8 Power relations

The discussion on governmentality brings to bear the idea of power hierarchy and control within early childhood centres. Ball (1993, p.13) acknowledges that ‘policies typically posit a restructuring, redistribution and disruption of power relations, so that different people can and cannot do different things’. However, policy issues are seldom value-free and the notion that knowledge, power and resources are distributed inequitably, is an essential element of a critical view of policy studies (Young, 1999 in Regmi, 2017). In Foucault’s view, power relations ‘are very complex’ (Foucault, 1983, p.209). The Foucauldian approach provides an understanding of power that contrasts with traditional Marxist and liberal-led theories. Foucault (1983) proposed three ideas about power. Firstly, power is exercised rather than possessed. Secondly, power is seen to be productive and repressive. Thirdly, power rises from the bottom upwards. Power relations exist in early childhood settings with variations in the way that they are exercised and perceived by different stakeholders.

Another aspect of Foucault’s ideas would be understanding the ‘micro-processes of power’ or ‘microphysics of power’. Foucault argues that control can be achieved with the subject via disciplinary practice and surveillance (Foucault, 1977). Such a power examines the way individuals respond to ‘disciplinary practices of power’ as imposed through social regulation and control by the institutions which they are part of. This can be seen in the regulatory requirements imposed on leaders and performative standards expected of them (Ball, 2003). Foucault conceptualises such powers as influencing the behaviours of individuals and even their physical forms. Power of this kind exists in a type of relation between individuals but also has the potential to be a source of subjectivity and tension (Olssen et al., 2004). Understanding concepts of power between leader-teacher and leader-system can offer insights into leadership struggles.

At a macro level of society, such powers can exist in governments’ exercise of control over the population. Foucault (1991) refers to governmentality as ‘a form of activity aimed to guide and shape conduct’. Another concern of governments that Foucault identifies is the need for security. Through the engagement of tactics and strategies, the state is involved in dealing with unpredictable events, evaluating costs and consequences (Olssen et al., 2004). The need to manage these concerns result in a need to exert a level of control to minimise risk. Such governmentality has long been the hallmark of Singapore politics. The recognition of early childhood development as a current national concern has since heightened this need for urgent control over the

ECCE sector that has historically developed with minimal regulation and government oversight.

2.9 Conceptual framing of EC leadership

The research is influenced by the evolution of concepts of leadership over the years. Studies have consistently conceptualised EC childhood leadership as 'problematic' (Hujala, 2015; Aubrey, 2013). Traditional leadership models, rooted in management and public-school settings, have limited applicability in helping comprehend preschool leaders' work in the context of a female-dominated, relationship-based work environment (Hard, 2008; Woodrow & Bush, 2008). The paucity of leadership research implies that as the understanding of leadership continues to develop, the challenge would be 'in formalising the leadership knowledge that practitioners believe, imagine and reflect upon that, while legitimate, must also be warranted with solid evidence provided to justify the new knowledge claims being made'. (Aubrey et al., 2012, p.27). Since then, country-specific studies have depicted EC leaders in conflict, caught between the demands of a neoliberal education sector and pedagogical aims.

The importance of the social aspects of leadership has also piqued the interest of researchers. Hujala and Puroila (1998) emphasise understanding leadership in relation to its community and social-cultural characteristics, and its recognition as 'a situational, socially constructed and interpretive phenomenon'. Studies in leadership have been challenged to espouse 'a lens that is as wide as it is deep'. In recent times, a postmodern lens has been attempted and reconceptualised ECE practice as drawing on multiple forms of knowledge (Campbell-Barr, 2014; 2018). The postmodern view understands leadership as non-linear, ambiguous, and uncertain, open to tension and conflict (Nicholson et al., 2018). Researchers have also positioned leadership as a praxis, some leaning towards the pedagogical (Male & Palaiologou, 2017). In recent times, the view of leadership as 'an assemblage' has also been explored (Fairchild, 2018). The study asserts the need to draw from this rich mosaic of leadership frameworks to understand the nature of policy interaction within these concepts.

2.10 Culture in leadership practice

The dominance of Western-based theories on leadership and management has prompted educational leadership researchers to question whether they are transferrable, and remain relevant to, Asian societies (Dimmock & Walker, 1998; Goh,

2010; Hallinger, 1995). Schein (1992) defined organisational culture as a pattern of shared basic assumptions learned by a group, which are taught to new group members as the way to perceive and think. Gardenswartz et al. (2003), suggest that there are at least three types of cultural influences within an organisation: personal culture, national culture, and organisational culture. Within a school environment, the organisational culture presents itself in the form of institutional beliefs along with vision and mission statements. Dimmock & Walker (2005) argue that the leader is responsible for that culture as leadership is essentially a social and cultural process, while Schein (1992) adds that culture and leadership are two sides of the same coin because leaders shape cultures, but once these cultures are established, it determines the type of leadership necessary for practice.

Yan & Hunt (2005) demonstrate that perceptions of leadership can vary from one culture to another, and that being aware of cultural differences is critical to understanding what is considered effective leadership. Singapore's context of a Western-influenced political system and multi-racial society represents a unique juxtaposition that complicates if not certainly challenges the process of trying to understand the influence of culture on systems and society. Hofstede's (2011) work on the culture within organisations is particularly relevant in understanding leadership relations and perspectives. Hofstede identified four dimensions in his model: power distance, individualism versus collectivism, masculinity versus femininity and uncertainty avoidance.

Power distance refers to 'the extent to which the less powerful members of institutions and organisations within a country expect and accept that power is distributed unequally' (Hofstede et al., 2011, p.61). In societies with a low-power distance, the leader is seen as democratic and resourceful, and relations are pragmatic. In groups where a high-power distance exists, centralisation is a popular approach and subordinates expect to be told what to do (p.76). High-power distance is more commonplace in Asian countries where traditional bureaucratic systems continue to exist such as those observed in the leadership studies conducted in Hong Kong and China (Ho, 2015; Wang, 2019). In this respect, Singapore, as a cosmopolitan, multi-racial society that is largely driven by Confucian values, yet one that operates within a Western-influenced organisational system, represents a potentially unique study of power tensions.

According to Hofstede's second dimension, individualism refers to prioritising oneself or one's family above collectivism, where people are integrated into strong groups

throughout their lives. A ‘collectivist mentality’ is evident in the workplace when relationship prevails over task. In contrast, individualist groups focus on employer-to-employee relations as a contract and management of individuals is prioritised over the group.

In the third dimension, masculine societies are seen as assertive and tough, whereas feminine societies reflect a modest and tender approach in interaction. In managing feminine societies, management is through intuition and consensus, whereas leadership in masculine societies is structured and decisive.

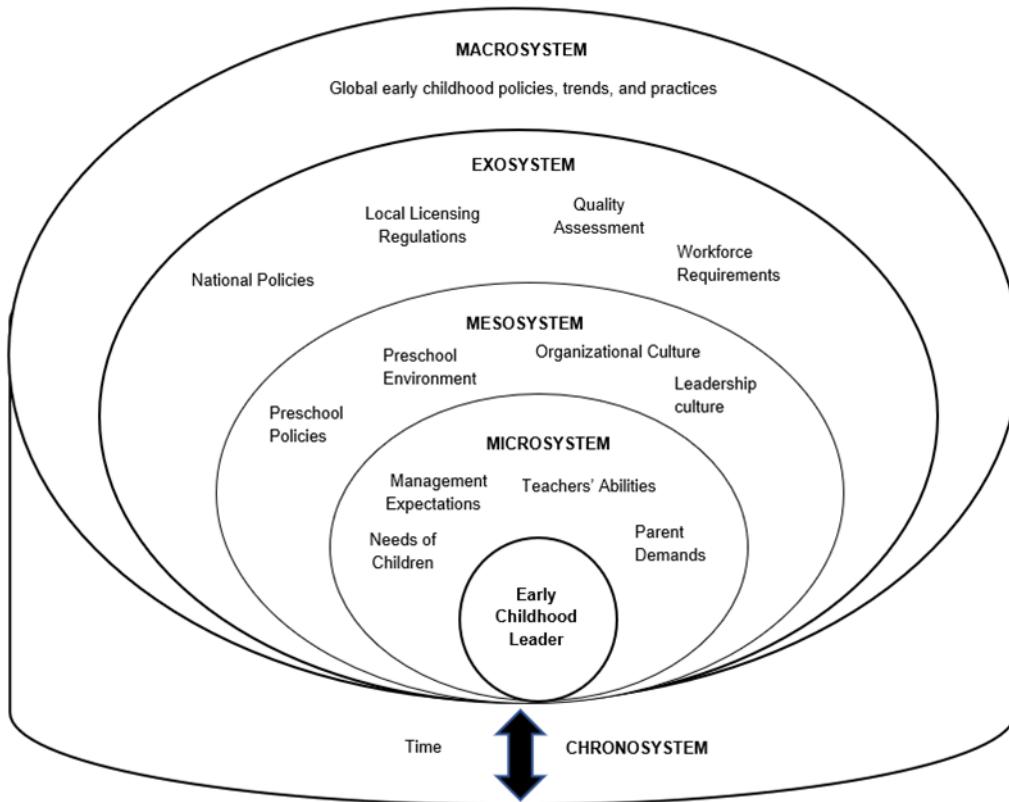
Lastly, ‘uncertainty avoidance’ refers to the ability to tolerate and cope with change and the unpredictability of situations. Societies with high uncertainty avoidance believe in rules, precision and formalisation whereas those with low uncertainty avoidance tend to be better at tolerating ambiguity and chaos. Hofstede’s model offers a useful lens to understand the relational complexities and leadership perceptions that may emerge in the study. It also provides insight into the variations in leadership interactions that may be associated with different preschool set-ups.

2.11 Context, ecology and change in EC leadership

EC leadership studies have not been strongly theorised and show limited connection to key concepts in educational, public, or business leadership literature (Muijs et al., 2004). Literature to date has focused primarily on understanding the roles and characteristics of EC leaders, effective leadership practice, and leadership training (Aubrey, 2016). Gronn and Ribbins (1996, p.454) argue that the significance of context is under-theorised in educational leadership and propose ‘a contextualised perspective’ that better connects agency and structure. Since then, Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) ecological theory has been applied to help understand EC leadership by way of its five subsystems (micro, meso, exo, macro and chrono) (Nivala, 2002). This model has proven particularly worthy as it links the ECCE operating environment to societal values and institutional structures that may define leadership practice (Aubrey, 2011).

Figure 2.2 shows a representation of the potential influences on EC leadership in Singapore using Bronfenbrenner’s ecological model (1979). It is noteworthy that policy processes often exist and operate within these systems and are interlinked in practice. It provides a model of how changes within the subsystems could influence human development - in this instance, the role of the EC leader.

Figure 2.2: Ecological influences on EC leadership



The EC leader is directly exposed to influences such as management expectations, teachers' abilities, the demands of parents and the needs of children at the micro level. At the meso level, factors such as preschool policies, the preschool environment, organisational and leadership culture can have an impact on the work of the leader. At the national level (represented by the exosystem), local government policies, licensing regulations, quality assessment and workforce requirements are identified as possible influences. Global early childhood policies, trends and practices at the macro level can impact a leaders' professional beliefs. Lastly, the chronosystem constitutes a range of influences that may unfold over time.

Policy texts, actors and discourses work within this ecological system as people, practices and ideas interact with one another. Forces within these subsystems impact and can effect change on each other (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The combined effect of these influences is to create a dynamic flow that can impact the work of the leader, creating challenges and opportunities for that role. Understanding the contexts within which leaders work is important to comprehend the underpinning influences. The

following statement best captures the need to recognise context in policy research- ‘Policy creates context, but context also precedes policy’. (Ball et al., 2012, p.19).

The use of context helps frame the complex work of schools and leadership in a fair manner to avoid a ‘hasty, presumptive and immodest’ approach in educational research. It also reminds researchers to think carefully about their ‘grasp on the social world’ (Ball, 2006, p.9) that is expected of critical policy studies. Ball et al. (2012) argue that research texts in education policy rarely convey any sense of the built environment from which the data are elicited or of the financial or human resources leading to policy being dematerialised. Contexts should be incorporated into policy analysis to make better sense of policy enactments. In their study of schools, four contextual dimensions are proposed as a way of viewing the importance of contexts:

1. situated contexts (e.g., locale, school histories and intakes)
2. professional cultures (e.g., values, teacher commitments and experiences and policy management in schools)
3. material contexts (e.g., staffing, budget, building, technology and infrastructure)
4. external contexts (e.g., degree and quality of local authority) support; pressures and expectations from broader policy context, league table positions, legal requirements and responsibilities)

Ball et al. (2012) recommend that policy analysis should include material, structural and relational elements to make better sense of policy enactments. This offers a broad consideration of factors and the intricate relationships that may present itself in policy study. The use of context provides,

a grounded account of the diverse variables and factors (the what), as well as the dynamics of context (the how) that shape policy enactments and thus to relate together and theorise interpretative, material and contextual dimensions of the policy process (Ball et al., 2012, p.20).

The need to consider multiple factors of influence alludes to the dynamic nature of leadership work. In relation to this, a body of research has emerged in educational leadership literature that focuses on the relationship between the organisation, leadership and change (Fullan, 2002, 2006; Rodd, 2015; Morrison, 2013). The ability to manage change is associated with leadership competency and a skill that the early childhood sector is familiar with (Rodd, 2015, p.13). Increasingly, as early childhood organisations evolve in size and function, concepts related to distributed leadership and systems thinking have progressively been incorporated into the work of EC

leaders (Heikka & Hujala, 2013; Senge, 2006; Rodd, 2015; Douglass, 2017). Douglass (2017) notes that much like the ecological framework, systems thinking requires EC leaders to recognise the inter-relatedness of early childhood work and the need for leaders to adapt to changes as part of their work. Douglass (2017) adds that a key ingredient of leadership sustainability in times of change is developing quality relationships as this enables EC leaders to transcend rigid organisational structures and navigate policies with people and stakeholders more effectively.

2.12 Conclusion

These theoretical approaches and concepts have primarily influenced the methodology and approaches to this study. As a piece of exploratory research, maintaining this theoretical eclecticism will be integral to achieving a richer understanding of leadership as phenomena. However, the study will employ the policy cycle (Bowe et al., 1992) model as a tool of analysis, which offers a critical lens to help address the research questions. This will position the study deep within the policymaking process but also shed light on other factors that may emerge during the course of this study.

Chapter 3 – Literature Review

3.1 Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of the literature related to EC leadership. Using the framework of Bowe et al. (1992) for its structure and as a tool of analysis, general and local EC leadership literature will be discussed in relation to the context of influence, the context of policy text production and the context of practice. The context of influence will centre on macro factors such as global influences on early childhood practices and the increased political interest in early childhood education. The context of policy text production will focus on policy documents that pertain to improvements in early childhood and leadership. Lastly, the context of practice will address leadership practice as currently understood in EC leadership studies.

3.2 Context of policy influence on early childhood leadership

3.2.1 Globalisation and early childhood policymaking

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the World Bank have been instrumental in influencing global ideas about early childhood policymaking. At the time of submission, the OECD published six systematic review reports in its *Starting Strong* series, which outline critical elements and perspectives of successful EC policies. These reports support equitable access to high-quality early childhood education and care, primarily within OECD countries (OECD, 2021).

The World Bank shares a similar view about promoting early childhood as a social investment with a keener focus on social equity and poverty reduction reflecting its mandate. It achieves this through efforts in ECCE programming, the dissemination of scientific research, and impact evaluations (World Bank, 2019). Adopting a multi-disciplinary approach, the organisation's report, *Stepping up Early Childhood Development* offers strategic interventions and principles for the successful design and implementation of early childhood development strategies, primarily in developing nations.

The World Bank's focus, on poorer nations, is in stark contrast to the OECD's focus on the world's richest nations. Together, the reports cover both ends of the spectrum, which highlights the importance of ECCE across the world. Given the rigour and richness of the transnational data contained in these reports as compared to a dearth of robust early childhood data in most countries at a localised level, the information generated by these two key organisations has been instrumental in shaping the early

childhood policy strategies of many nations. Mahon (2010) emphasised adopting a critical look at the workings of the knowledge network that has supported this paradigm change within these organisations, explaining that the positions espoused by these organisations stem from their individual remits, their geopolitical operations and the political influence of their member countries. However, the combined force of their work and the organisations' philosophical underpinnings have the potential to influence perceptions and practices in early childhood education and the global discourse on ECCE (Mahon, 2010; McBride & Mahon, 2009).

Ozga and Jones (2006) viewed education systems as agents of economic change where productivity and performativity were regarded as important measures. Paananen et al. (2015) argued that these discourses have the effect of framing the importance of early childhood education in relation to the theory of human capital. They elaborated that the discussion on ECCE is often linked to the issue of the participation of mothers in the workforce and supported the argument that a strong female labour force could positively contribute to children's learning. These viewpoints have engendered a favourable shift in early childhood investment among governments, while some observers have argued that they have also contributed to the neoliberalisation of early childhood services (Adriany, 2017; Baltodano, 2012; Kagan et al., 2018; Maloney et al., 2019).

3.2.2 Early childhood education as an investment

The emergence of longitudinal, data-driven studies has helped to position early childhood education as a critical phase of human development. The renowned economist James Heckman explained that early intervention can positively impact children beyond their IQ development (Heckman, 2011, p.20) while the longitudinal study of children who participated in early childhood intervention programmes such as the *Perry Preschool Project* and the *Abecedarian Programmes* revealed that participants experienced long term beneficial effects from early intervention. These participants were reported to be more successful in holding down jobs, achieved higher income levels and were less likely to spend time in prison. They also displayed skills such as motivation, sociability, focus and impulse control (Heckman, 2011).

The publication of neuroscience research supported these findings by integrating the results from scientific fields to inform the study of child development. Shonkoff and Phillips (2000), with their landmark report *From Neurons to Neighbourhood: The Science of Early Childhood Development*, paved the way for a science-driven agenda in the field of early childhood development and parenting while Schweinhart (2016)

explained that these longitudinal studies have had a strong impact on governments' policymaking decisions on early childhood care. Although science has been effective in advocating for early childhood programmes, this approach has also proven to be problematic, as the impact of EC programmes has not been well understood. Although these studies have been significant, they fall short of being conclusive. Hence, there is a need for researchers and policymakers alike to continue to work more closely to ensure the effectiveness of future policy initiatives (Schweinhart, 2016).

3.2.3 Neoliberalism

ECCE continues to be delivered via private or public services, and within a wide range of system structures, across the world. Several writers such as Moss (2012) and Sims (2017) have discussed how neoliberalism has led to the discourse on childcare 'as a commodity' and on the marketisation of early childhood services. Abendroth and Portfilio (2015, p.7) defined neoliberalism as an 'anti-democratic force that give the corporate elite of global capitalism the power of nation-states'. Connell (2013) elaborated that neoliberalism emphasised free-market principles and minimal government intervention, which prioritised productivity and efficiency. Baltodana (2012) argued that neoliberal policies in education focused on standardisation and promoted compliance monitoring and regulatory control as a process to achieve quality. This is most evident in the increased importance given to accountability measures and the homogenisation of curriculums in education. Sims (2017) cautioned that neoliberalism could have an impact on curriculum practice through the 'vocationalisation of teaching', a targeted focus on academic knowledge as well as an overemphasis on testing.

In early childhood education, neoliberalism has visibly extended its reach across countries reflected in increased tension and challenge to practice. In Finland, Paananen et al. (2015) described how it had spawned a form of 'hybridisation' in ECCE policymaking where policy goals and resulting processes seemed to be in conflict. In this instance, social democratic ideals that should be achieved by education are now governed by an economic imperative. In a study of education in Australia and New Zealand, Press et al. (2018) explained that neoliberalism created a marketisation of services which threatened key curricula concepts of 'belonging' and devalued the social-cultural dimension of care work in communities.

Lim (2017) offered an Asian perspective, arguing that neoliberalism in Singapore's preschool industry had resulted in a predominantly corporatised sector where high

quality is perceived to be correlated to hefty fees. Focusing specifically on leadership, Cumming et al. (2015) and Waniganayake and Sims (2019) described how neoliberalism had impacted the work of early childhood leaders. Their studies showed that the need to address profitmaking agendas created a conflict in the leader's discretionary decision-making process. Robson & Martin (2019) further illustrated how neoliberalism created ethical dilemmas for leaders in the United Kingdom (UK) and explained how they coped, by developing a personal, tacit 'theory of ethics'. Ang (2014) also highlighted that such dilemmas created tension in a leader's ability to negotiate pedagogical spaces. Neoliberalism, as a phenomenon in ECCE, has posed a multi-layered challenge for EC leaders, having impacted operational, structural and human processes within early childhood settings.

3.2.4 Understanding quality

The impact of neoliberalism on early childhood education is best reflected in the perceptions of quality practice. Siraj-Blatchford & Wong (1999) explained that quality definitions often prescribe the terms in which the provision of education is evaluated. Research shows that high-quality ECCE has contributed to optimal development in children with far reaching implications in influencing their development as adults (Melhuish et al., 2004; Sylva et al., 2004; Heckman, 2011). Nevertheless, Dahlberg & Moss (2005) and Siraj-Blatchford et al. (2006) have shown that conceptions and processes related to the understanding of the concept of 'quality' were essentially problematic. Fenech (2011) explained that the problem here lay with the discourses that were prevalent in such research. One such example would be the prevailing global discourse on early childhood education. This was based primarily on a Minority World model of early years education, itself based on the notion of 'developmentally appropriate practice' (Smidt, 2006). This discourse differed from that proposed by early childhood development advocates in which quality was viewed as a relative concept, based on values and beliefs. The advocates asserted that quality processes needed to be dynamic, continuous and democratic (Dahlberg & Moss 2007 in Mahon, 2010). In contrast, the objectivist discourse, often adopted by organisations, viewed the image of the child as one that was uniform, homogenised and favoured a closed, defined and predetermined approach (Huggins, 2013). These contrasting views of quality underpin the philosophical tensions in assessing and interpreting quality standards.

Campbell-Barr & Leeson (2016) explained that this was further complicated by the use of quality as a political tool. Taken to the extreme, quality became 'a value-laden

term that shapes understandings as to the purpose of early years services and what they should look like' (Campbell-Barr & Leeson, 2016). The notion of quality continues to be an elusive and nebulous concept, with much debate and little agreement among policymakers and academics (Dahlberg et al., 1999; Fleer & Kennedy, 2006; Sylva et al., 2003). Despite the ambiguity of 'what is quality', a relationship between leaders and the attainment of quality has been identified in general educational leadership literature. School leadership research links effective leadership to the achievement of school quality (Leithwood et al., 2006) and is echoed in ECCE where leaders are seen as standard-bearers and purveyors of quality within their settings quality (Rodd, 1998). Research has shown that effective leadership enhances quality early childhood provision through the growth of teams, professional learning communities, monitoring and reflection (Rodd, 2005).

Furthermore, it is important to note that there is no clear definition of the term 'effective leadership'. The characteristics and traits that may be considered 'effective' vary significantly in their interpretation and the parameters within which they operate (Siraj-Blatchford & Manni, 2006). For example, policymakers interpret quality through a lens of predictability, standardisation and control instead of one that embraces innovation (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005). However, EC leadership research, such as the 2019 OECD report from the *Starting Strong* survey series, uses process quality, which focuses on the quality of children's interactions and experiences, to measure leadership effectiveness (OECD, 2019). Hence, assessing the quality of leadership practice vis-à-vis the quality of a preschool may not be a straightforward task due to the large range viewpoints and mixed terminology.

3.3 Context of policy influence in Singapore

3.3.1 Economic pragmatism

Education is recognised as an area of high leverage in Singapore and is evidenced by the fact that the sector accounts for the second-highest chunk of the national budget after security (Ministry of Finance, 2020). Education policies often evolve alongside economic policies and policy decisions are guided by nation-building and economic development priorities (Ho & Koh, 2018). In particular, the education of its people is closely managed because Singapore, as a small country, regards its people as its primary national resource. Consequently, the government upholds a strong governance of its systems, especially education development, and exercises strategic pragmatism to ensure that its systems are nimble enough to adapt to change (Schien, 1999 in Sum et al., 2018).

Quah (2016) explained that this pragmatic approach is particularly evident in the country's economic decision-making processes. With rapid industrialisation in the 1970s, Khoo (2010) noted that the need to encourage women to return to the workforce was one of the primary reasons to develop the childcare sector. The responsibility of caring for one's child was seen as holding back mothers from returning to the workforce and so contribute to the economy. In addition, on a societal level, childcare was viewed unfavourably as it was associated with a service predominantly linked to the working class (Khoo, 2010). Hence, in 1984, the *Taskforce on Female Participation in the Labour Force* proposed a range of recommendations to uplift the childcare sector. Khoo (1989) described this as a watershed year for childcare centres as initiatives included nationwide quality childcare, a campaign, systematic training for childcare staff, and government financial assistance.

This perception of early childhood care shifted from the perspective of custody to one that showcased developmental priorities. However, Chua (1997) highlighted that the drivers of policy improvements remained closely aligned to human labour and economic priorities. One example of this approach was the regulation of childcare operations. As childcare centres were seen to be expensive, it was considered cost-effective for the government to outsource childcare services to the private sector while the government exercised control through licensing and 'soft measures' (UNESCO, 2007). This economic efficiency approach was reflected in its adoption of a 'best sourcing' strategy, which refers to an optimal approach to delivering services most efficiently and effectively (UNESCO, 2007). The decision to allow market forces, instead of the government, to influence the development of the early childhood sector, was seen as a pragmatic one, deemed appropriate at the time.

Ironically, it was strategic pragmatism that has prompted the government to adapt its earlier approach to the governance of ECCE within the last decade. In an interview with *Time Magazine*, the Singapore Prime Minister, Mr Lee Hsien Loong, explained that the government prioritises 'solutions that work' rather than follow ideological presumptions. Despite the success of its guiding principles, the government would not shy away from playing an active role in a free market to ensure that the outcomes benefit the greater good (Lee, 2015 in Sum et al., 2018). This strategic policy flexibility and economic pragmatism have been a cornerstone of effective policymaking in Singapore, prompting government intervention when necessary. In this instance, escalating the governance of the ECCE sector as a necessary response to issues

that emerged from market forces dictating the operational services of a highly privatised ECCE industry (Bull et al., 2018).

This strategic pragmatism has also influenced a shift in Singapore's approach to ECCE policymaking. Global recognition of the importance of early childhood development highlighted the need for high quality early childhood education (Heckman, 2011). Research on this front led to a progressive change in the narrative used to discuss ECCE issues in Singapore. The provision of ECCE, once considered a heavy economic burden, is now viewed as of greater importance and as a critical factor in nurturing Singapore's most valuable economic assets - its people. This economic argument, directly related to human capital development, was a lynchpin that resulted in the government's decision to invest in early childhood education (Lim & Lim, 2017; Lim, 2017; Bull & Bautista, 2018). The importance of quality ECCE became well ensconced within the government's overall economic framework, as explained by the Deputy Prime Minister, Mr Tharman Shanmugaratnam in his interview with *The Straits Times*,

We have an education system that is very well-regarded internationally. What we are doing is that we are now starting much earlier, but we are also continuing through life. So, what used to be an education system that was focused on the school years and the tertiary years, is now extending in both directions – starting much earlier and continuing through life. Both these shifts are critical. SkillsFuture and what we are doing to reinvest in people through life is not just an economic strategy. It serves the needs of an innovative economy, but it is fundamentally a social strategy too. (Tharman, 2018)

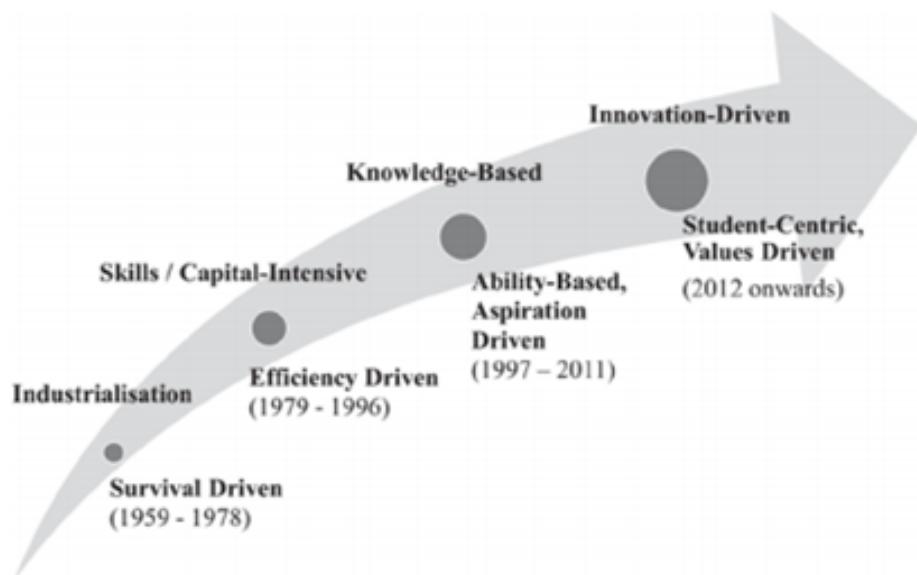
Sum et al. (2017) posit that the early years was seen to be important as it formed a part of the larger continuum of Singapore's nation-building narrative. With pledged investments of S\$1.2 billion by 2023 for the expansion and quality enhancement of the sector (Prime Minister's Office Singapore, 2017), much can be expected of ECCE development in the future.

3.3.2 Educational leadership in Singapore

An understanding of the role of educational leaders in Singapore's public schools may provide insights into EC leadership practice. For ease of reference 'public school leaders' in Singapore will be referred to as 'school principals' henceforth. Studies on educational leadership in the Singapore public school system have documented the development of school principals in tandem with the phases of school development

(Koh & Hung, 2018; Boon, 2018). In her study of Singapore school principals, Boon (2018) mapped the four milestones of educational leadership in relation to the four educational phases of the historical development of public education (See Figure 3.1).

Figure 3.1: Educational phases aligned to Singapore's economic development
(Ho & Koh, 2018, p.31)



Her study uncovered a connection between national and ministry level objectives and their impact on school principals' roles at each phase (Boon, 2018). It was reported that at the 'survival-driven phase' of education development, the school principal's role seemed to be limited to implementing policy and providing feedback (Lee, 1972 in Ho & Koh, 2018). Boon (2018) described the school principal's role as 'conduits of instructions and resources' for materials and information that emerged from the MOE. The Minister for Education then, described the role of school principals as one where 'principals and teachers are often the implementers of government policies rather than initiators' (Goh et al., 1987).

This is supported by Bell & Stevenson (2006) who argued that there would be little opportunity for school leaders at the institutional level to shape their own policy agendas and that the power of external structures often has a stronger influence in their work. Wright (2003) stated that school leaders may exercise 'second-order values' such as teamwork but would be unable to challenge 'first-order' values such as system aims and outcomes.

Nevertheless, Boon's (2018) study noted that a 1987 report by 12 school principals resulted in a ground-breaking change during the 'efficiency-driven phase'. The suggestions, put forth by the school principals in the report, led to a constructive change in the work undertaken by educational leaders and led to greater autonomy being given to school principals, enabling a model of leadership decentralisation (Ho & Koh, 2018). However, this autonomy was permitted with the caveat that it operated 'within the framework of national educational policies' (Bush & Chew, 1999, p.44). The role of school principals today continues to be one where principals are 'stretched in multiple directions' by different stakeholders with high expectations that they perform roles as a pedagogical and transformational leader whilst also sustaining achievement in student learning, teacher engagement and organisational effectiveness (Ho & Koh, 2018). In practice, these changes have resulted in a paradox – namely a 'centralised decentralisation' of leadership, where the work of the school principal is premised on strategic alignment and tactical empowerment (Ng, 2017, p.76).

A number of leadership and policy academics have written extensively on the unique and successful features of Singapore school leadership (Darling-Hammond, 2017; Dimmock & Walker 2005; Koh & Hung, 2018; Ng, 2019; Tan, 2013). The example of Singapore's school principals demonstrates that school leadership development in Singapore has been a dynamic and evolutionary process. Leadership roles have adapted to the needs and stages of school development, driven by needs relevant at the time (Ng, 2017). It also reflected the agility of the system to accommodate changes that would lead to improved outcomes while the culture of educational leadership practice reflected a strong tendency for schools to align their goals and visions with that of national objectives (Ho & Koh, 2018).

A pillar that has undoubtedly contributed to the development of strong public school leadership in Singapore is the tripartite relationship between the schools, the MOE, and the national teacher training institution known as the National Institute of Education (Goodwin et al., 2017). This relationship has ensured the transmission of policy directives and the development of a symbiotic relationship among all stakeholders. This laid the foundation for a 'centralised decentralisation' working model which accommodates the practice of pedagogical flexibility within schools whilst also maintaining a system of accountability (Tan & Ng, 2007). These practices have contributed to the successful management of public schools and anchored a strong policy lever in leadership practice.

Academics have noted the exclusion of ECCE from the pipeline of the main school system (Gopinathan, 2015; Lim, 2017; Lim-Ratnam, 2012; Lim & Lim, 2017; Ng, 2020). The Education Statistics Digest (2020) revealed that the main school system (primary, secondary and junior colleges) was made up of 342 public schools and 28 private institutions. In comparison, the ECCE sector comprised 36 government kindergartens, otherwise known as MOE kindergartens (MOE, 2021) and 661 private early childhood development centres (ECDA, 2020). Although the ECCE sector is a highly privatised sector, the alignment of its operations with national goals is imminent with the introduction of the government supported AOP and POP, as outlined in Chapter 2. The leadership experiences of school principals can be expected to trickle down to EC leaders given the strong regulatory structure now in place in government supported preschools. EC leadership could borrow a page or two from the main school playbook and drive its own transformation, in tandem with the unique phases of change in ECCE. As these changes are still taking place, only time will tell how the impact of these changes on EC leadership practice might play out.

3.3.3 Pedagogical priorities

In his study of Singapore schools, Ng (2017) explained how educational policy changes, at the macro level, resulted in an outcome that was opposite to the intended effect of the policy intervention. He explained this using the ‘centralised decentralisation’ model where the centralised approach was adopted to drive efficiency and to enable the system to reap economies of scale and better utilise scarce economic resources while policy initiatives, which supported decentralisation, were implemented to drive innovation (Ng, 2017; Koh & Hung, 2018). This approach meant that the MOE undertook a dual role - that of steering as well as driving the education system (Kagan et al., 2018; Ng, 2020). This centralised decentralisation model was, in essence, paradoxical, and resulted in tensions where leaders had to balance micro school-based initiatives with meeting macro national needs. For example, school principals were expected to develop programmes that were aligned with MOE directives without compromising students’ holistic needs. This meant that school principals were continuously under pressure in balancing pedagogical and administrative priorities in their decision-making processes (Koh & Hung, 2018).

Family structures play a strong role at a societal level in the lives of Singaporeans. Confucian ideals of the role of the family, instead of the state, feature strongly in the way society functions and is reflected in the country’s adoption of a neoconservative approach to social welfare (Bull & Bautista, 2018). Over time, meritocracy and a

growing sense of individualism evolved, and the Singapore social-cultural milieu became known for its emphasis on academic excellence and intensive competitiveness (Lim, 2013).

Public perception showed that this pursuit for excellence would begin at preschool. Parents viewed ECCE as a critical springboard for the next level of schooling and discounted its importance for a child's holistic development (Ang, 2006; Sharpe, 2002). Preschool choice is a heavily weighted matter, as it is perceived to have such a direct bearing on a child's academic future (Lim, 2017). In the absence of a uniform system of early childhood provision, parents resorted to pricing and programme differentiation as indicators of high-quality education (Tan, 2020). The demand for such programmes, coupled with service provision in a privatised and profit driven ECCE sector, created the space for parents to exercise influence over the pedagogical priorities of preschools.

In the *Early Childhood Parenting Landscape Study* (ECDA, 2020), parents cited physical and intellectual development as the two most important objectives that preschools should prioritise (ECDA, 2020). Local research studies support this and have reflected the society's strong preference for academic excellence over social and emotional development (Lim-Rathnam, 2013; Lim, 2017; Bull et al., 2018). As mentioned previously, EC leaders play a key role in the quality of programme delivery, hence maintaining pedagogical quality is an area of high priority for EC leaders. However, Lim and Lipponen (2019) cautioned that this would not be easy for them because they could face conflicts when exercising pedagogical priorities within the commercial environments in which they work. EC leaders would face challenges balancing the holistic goals of the *Nurturing Early Learners Framework* and the *Early Years Development Framework*, with the academic preferences of the parents they serve.

3.3.4 Divided governance

Governance of the ECCE sector has changed dramatically over the last decade. The historical evolution of the arena has been well documented by local scholars who have studied its growth in tandem with policy developments (Khoo, 2010; Tan, 2017). Since the 1980s, the ECCE sector had traditionally operated under a split and parallel system where MOE managed kindergartens whilst MSF (then MCYS) addressed childcare matters (Khoo, 2010; Lim, 2018; Bull et al., 2018). Since 2013, however, with the formation of ECDA, which was jointly overseen by MOE and MSF, the regulation of ECCE matters has been streamlined to improve the consistency of

standards and practice. Within the MOE, the Preschool Education Branch provides curriculum guidance to the ECCE sector while SkillsFuture Singapore, a statutory board of MOE, oversees the education and skills training guidelines of the preschool sector to meet the changing needs of the nation (Bull & Bautista, 2018). Ho (2017) explained that the WOG approach was adopted to strengthen the process of policy implementation. The presence of multiple stakeholders working together resemble a ‘mosaic approach’ to ECCE governance in Singapore.

Local academics have noted that although ECCE policy leadership reflects inter-ministerial co-operation, there remains in practice a clear division of functionalities (Sum et al., 2018; Lim, 2017). The policy process seems to suggest that MOE plays a strategic role in setting the direction for the sector, particularly in curricular leadership, taking the lead on quality and standards through a policy framework (Sum et al., 2018). Lim (2013) explained that this was achieved through MOE’s measured involvement in high-leverage areas and seen to have a significant impact on future learning outcomes. These levers include developing frameworks which address standards, accreditation and assessment. Firstly, MOE was instrumental in introducing the *Desired Outcomes for Preschool Education* which critically aligned the goals of early childhood education with national education objectives. Secondly, MOE developed the kindergarten curriculum framework, known as *Nurturing Early Learners* (NEL), which is used as a curriculum and programme guide across all early childhood settings. These represented official statements of quality in a pre-school environment, and a national endorsement of what a preschool curriculum should look like (Ang, 2006, p.205). Beyond this, MOE strategically introduced the Singapore Preschool Accreditation Framework (SPARK) in 2011. This was a quality accreditation exercise which measured a centre’s quality standards using eight criteria, that included leadership, environment and pedagogy among others. Although it was introduced as a voluntary exercise, this initiative was also seen as coming about from the pressure to address mixed quality standards in the sector. Since then, many schools now have SPARK certification, though there has been no conclusive research yet that shows the impact that SPARK has had (Lim, 2019; Bull et al., 2018). Despite the lack of explicit governmental control, it could be surmised that within this structural mosaic, MOE plays a strong role in influencing the quality of pedagogical practices through the implementation of its frameworks.

The enforcement and implementation of policy frameworks within a splintered system would be cumbersome in a privatised ECCE landscape. Hence, a single-agency approach was adopted in 2013 with the creation of ECDA, which serves as the

regulatory and developmental authority for the early childhood sector in Singapore. It governs key aspects of children's development below the age of 7, encompassing both kindergartens and childcare centres. ECDA functions as an autonomous agency overseen jointly by MOE and MSF, though organisationally it sits within the MSF (ECDA, 2019). ECDA's regulatory role enabled a more seamless process in the implementation of policies. Bull and Bautista (2018) described this approach as a 'hybrid' model of ECCE in Singapore and described ECDA as responsible for the alignment of values and goals. From an operational standpoint, this decomplicated the workload of ECCE organisations, as they now needed to liaise with only one agency for operational support, also enabling policy dissemination and implementation processes to be better managed.

Although ECDA could exercise regulatory control over kindergartens and childcare centres that were considered Early Childhood Development Centres, ECDA's control was not all encompassing. Lim (2017) noted that there were still gaps in addressing the quality of playgroups and enrichment programmes that were not regulated by ECDA. More noteworthy was the exclusion of MOE kindergartens under ECDA's governance. As Singapore's only government kindergarten, it was to be directly regulated by MOE. Although MOE kindergartens accounted for a small portion of the sector, it showed that the governance of the ECCE sector remained divided in policy structure despite its developments.

The hand of government was also evident in the AOP and POP schemes described in Chapter 1. Preschools that have been nominated are made responsible for offering support and ensuring accessibility, affordability and quality of preschool services (ECDA, 2019). Despite being privately managed, these preschools are considered 'government-supported' and their ranks are expected to swell. As has been mentioned earlier in this thesis, it has been forecast that 80 per cent of preschoolers could have a place such schools by 2025 (ECDA, 2019). Like the management of the mainstream public school system, it is clear that tactical empowerment and strategic alignment have been applied to the governance of the ECCE sector – moves that have been described as a calculated approach to improving ECE with a 'light touch' approach (Lim & Lim, 2017). These well-crafted structural underpinnings affirm that the government has successfully engineered a strong level of control over the ECCE industry despite its privatised status.

3.3.5 Multi-agency influence

Though much of the discussion has focused on the role of the government in private sector operations, it is worth noting that non-governmental agencies have also been involved in developing the ECCE sector at critical points of change. In 1983, the Bernard van Leer foundation was heavily involved with the National Institute of Education in the first longitudinal study of its kind, focused on the social and cognitive development of children in Singapore. In 1985, it funded an experimental community childcare project with the National Trades Union Congress (NTUC) to develop a five-layer training strategy, a resource library, early childhood programmes and a training and demonstration centre (Khoo, 1989). This support led to the establishment of the Bernard van Leer Regional Training and Resource Centre (subsequently renamed SEED Institute), which evolved into a key early childhood institution that provided quality early childhood training in the sector. This occurred at a time when early childhood education was not heavily recognised as an education sector in and of itself. The involvement and collaboration with external organisations contributed to the foundation of childcare programming, training and professional development in the sector.

Another key external influencer, Lien Foundation, emerged almost three decades later, in 2012. The Foundation commissioned the publication of two reports which highlighted the strengths and gaps in the early childhood education sector. The *Starting Well Index Report* by the Economist Intelligence Unit addressed Singapore's performance in early childhood provision and ranked it in 29th place out of 45 other countries. The study showed Singapore's performance as 'average' in the areas of affordability and availability but lowest in terms of quality (Economist Intelligence Unit, 2013). Another study, *Vital Voices for Vital Years* (Ang, 2012) provided an analysis of the systems and processes in ECCE and recommendations on key areas of preschool improvement. It sparked a public discussion and a closer review of the current state of ECCE. A slew of initiatives followed in the next five years with preschool education was included as a topic in the Prime Minister's National Day Rally speeches in 2012, 2016 and 2017 (PMO, 2020). Bull and Bautista (2018) have acknowledged that philanthropic and non-government organisations have played a vital role in the involvement and financing of research and can be considered catalysts in the rapid implementation of new policies. The role of these external organisations has been critical to accelerate the development of the sector.

The policy waves outlined in Chapter 1 identified the range of stakeholders involved in policymaking. In the last wave, the industry has also witnessed a stronger involvement of multiple government agencies in the early childhood policymaking process. In 2015, three new ministerial positions were created ‘to address a more complex policymaking environment and the need to coordinate responses to challenges involving multiple ministries’ (Yong & Yong, 2015). Headed by Deputy Prime Minister Tharman Shanmugaratnam, this observed a strategic shift where policy processes of the MOE were now linked to the MTI and the MOM:

Two Ministries – Ministry of Education (MOE) and Ministry of Trade and Industry (MTI) – will have two Ministers each. Their scope of work has expanded considerably. MOE, for example, previously used to oversee education from Primary 1 to tertiary institutions. Now the tertiary sector has grown larger and more diverse with many more students, many more institutions, and more different kinds of institutions. Even the universities are not the same as one another. MOE has also widened its role, from developing pre-school education at one end, to Continuing Education and Training – the SkillsFuture part -- at the other end. MOE has to work closely with MTI and the Ministry of Manpower (MOM) on SkillsFuture to make sure graduates have skills that help them find jobs. (Lee, 2015, para 5)

This multi-agency approach has been a deliberate move to ensure policy shifts are made with co-ordinating agencies operating in tandem. Although it reduces the potential for blind spots and gaps in the policy implementation process, it does not guarantee an equal footing for all agencies involved. In this respect, the context of policy influence on EC leadership is wide ranging due to the scope of influences that may emerge locally, nationally and globally. The dynamic nature of the ECCE field and the rapid development of ECCE in Singapore enlarges the breadth of its influences even further. This can only aggregate the challenges that the EC leader will face when these policies are enacted in practice.

3.4 Context of policy text in early childhood leadership

There has been much interest in EC leadership research, but there are limited policy documents, reports or guidelines that offer a consistent view of the topic. This section explores local and international policy documents and their assessment of EC leadership.

3.4.1 Global policy documents

Unlike literature on early childhood development, there is still much to learn about EC leadership development. Unsurprisingly, there is only a limited pool of policy documents that offer an understanding of EC leadership from a global perspective. In this research, the reports and papers on EC leadership produced by international organisations such as the OECD and the World Bank would be the closest material resembling global policy texts. The global reach of these documents juxtaposed again a scarcity of material on this growing topic of interest, which mean that these reports can potentially influence perspectives of EC leadership where local research studies may fall short.

The World Bank's organisational literature is focused mainly on school leadership in non-EC settings. Much of this interest stems from the belief that leadership is inextricably linked to learning and the quality of education. It has been suggested that the role of effective school leaders involves improving teaching quality, and the effective use of resource, which contribute to the overall quality of schools (World Bank, 2018). It should come as no surprise that the World Bank's focus is not on school leadership, as its mandate has always been centred on development, poverty and equity issues (World Bank, 2007).

This was in stark contrast to OECD's strong interest in educational development. Not surprisingly, the OECD conducted more studies on educational leaders, covering both mainstream school levels and the early childhood sector. In 2013, OECD published its first volume of *Leadership for the 21st Century Learning* which adopted a broad definition of school leadership. It views leadership as a role that is important for creating and sustaining environments that would prove conducive for innovative learning (OECD, 2013). In addition to this report, the OECD conducted two studies of teachers and leaders as part of the *Teaching and Learning International Survey* or TALIS for short. Additionally, the OECD published its first volume of *Teachers and School Leaders as Lifelong Learners Report*, which provided perspectives on the knowledge and skills of teachers and leaders (OECD, 2019). The most significant document of this type of research would be the TALIS report from the *Starting Strong Survey 2018*, which focused on the early childhood workforce. This multi-country study captures information related to early childhood leadership characteristics, education, professional development and working conditions. The study discovered that EC leaders experienced stress due to the changing requirements of authorities, a lack of resources and a shortage of staff (OECD, 2019, p.127). The study also noted

that leaders felt supported and valued by society, discussed the policy implications and suggested recommendations on approaches to support staff and leaders (OECD, 2019). The document is expected to empirically inform and enrich the EC leadership discourse further (Turan & Bloem, 2019). As most research in the understanding of early childhood leadership has evolved through qualitative studies, this represented an effort to provide quantitative data in the understanding of childhood leaders at a global policy level. It is difficult to measure the impact of these texts on policymaking, but it can be surmised that the OECD exerts a strong influence by providing evidence of what good early childhood leadership may look like.

In addition to this, the National Centre on Education and Economy (NCEE), a leader in U.S. education, focusing on policy to practice, produced a two volume book series which examined ECCE systems across six countries (Kagan & Landsberg, 2019). Singapore's EC leadership initiatives were discussed alongside those of Australia, England, Finland, Hong Kong and South Korea. As a seminal work on ECCE systems and governance, it provides substantive information to guide directions in national policymaking. More importantly, the book recognises two roles played by leaders in the improvement of ECCE systems. First, it highlights their role as visionary leaders and agents for creating new narratives and leading innovation. Second, it concludes that their actions produce positive social change as they work with others collaboratively and differently to forge new paths (Kagan & Landsberg, 2019, p.182). The study highlights that leaders often demonstrate a close understanding of their contexts and successfully respond in a manner that works best given their respective economic and political realities.

In conclusion, the World Bank, OECD and NCEE are multinational organisations that exert influence on EC leadership, either directly or indirectly, through their educational research studies, publications and reports. Although their focus of concern is ECCE systems, it would not be unreasonable to expect that their policy recommendations might trickle down into generative action by leaders in practice.

3.4.2 National policy texts and contexts

Although these reports provide a global overview of EC related policies and perspectives, EC leadership information may often be couched within national quality frameworks and local workforce requirements. In countries such as Hong Kong, EC leadership positions are recognised within national frameworks but are limited in its scope of practice. The Free Quality Kindergarten Education Policy (FQKEP)

document, for example, identified leadership using a simplified three-level staff hierarchy model (Rao & Lau, 2018).

The Finnish model, on the other hand, emphasises the pedagogical dimension of leadership and that leadership roles appear to be less formalised in structure (Kumpulainen, 2018). In Australia, attempts to distil leadership roles clearly led to the creation of a National Quality Framework (NQF), a document which outlines two key roles in leadership. The first describes an educational leader who is responsible for the pedagogical aspects of education and learning while the second describes a supervisor responsible for the aspects of management that emerges with leadership tasks. The document defines the roles of educational leaders clearly and links this to the outcomes set out in the National Quality Standard (NQS). Despite this explicit delineation of roles in leadership texts, the study by Fleet et al. (2015) revealed that educational leaders decry a lack of clarity about their roles signalling the challenge of balancing such roles in practice. Kagan et al. (2018) explained that the tension between pedagogical and administrative roles seemed to be an inherent challenge for early childhood leaders while Semann (2018) added that the true process of pedagogical leadership required some internal reflection that was not visible to others. This implied that, leadership practice was elusive and that it would not be so easy to link outcomes to quality leadership practices conclusively.

Ball et al. (2012) noted a tendency for research into the effectiveness of schools to focus on educational outcomes. However, there has been greater interest in the influence of organisational principles and contextual variables on such outcomes. Gunter (2001) noted that research on school leadership reflected a diversity of settings and that this impacted the understanding of leadership across sites. In studies of educational leadership, Thrupp and Lupton (2006) suggest a need to focus on the differences between schools in terms of their organisation and practice. They highlight the need to recognise that ‘effective management and teaching in one context is not the same as effective management and teaching in another’(p.312). Similarly, the NCEE study of early childhood systems echoes the significance of contextuality in understanding ECCE systems and the need to understand its building blocks to comprehend practices (NCEE, 2019). It also stresses the importance of cultural and contextual variation in recognising pedagogy and practice (Kagan & Landsberg, 2018). Semann (2019) describes leadership as a ‘cultural practice’ and posits that leadership requires a context-specific consideration.

3.4.3 Complexity of the policy process

The conditions under which policy texts were produced is another notable area of attention. Bown et al. (2009) emphasised the influential role Australian politicians played in the decision-making process of the country's ECCE policies. The study showed that subjectivity, discourse, power, cultural fields, context and time all affected the views of politicians, culminating in their support of certain policy paths over others. Hasan (2007) explored this at an international level and showed how the workings of government mechanisms created complexities in the planning and delivery of services. In the case of the UK, Sylva et al. (2004) expounded the challenge of the governmental political process in limiting the extent of policy impact. Sylva et al. (2004) also elaborated that the UK lacks a cohesive national strategy for early childhood governance and policy implementation rested on the effectiveness of cross-departmental collaboration. The situation in the UK is exacerbated by the overlapping responsibilities of government ministries and its traditionally politically charged climate. This is compounded by the practice of policymaking which adopts a specific time bound inter-ministerial task force to address early childhood issues, leading to a distinct ad-hoc approach. In the UK, policy initiatives ceased once these workforces were disbanded after the goals were achieved at the end of their time frame. These examples illustrate the point that in reality, checkered processes have the ability to undermine the effectiveness and value of any policy texts.

3.5 Context of policy text in Singapore

3.5.1 Leadership through the lens of legislation and governance

Three legislative reforms were made statute in Singapore to address the nation's early childhood care issues. The first was *The Creche Establishments Act 1985* followed by *The Child Care Centres Act 1988*, which was revised in 1989 and then again in 2012. The third measure is the *Early Childhood Development Centres (ECDC) Act* which came into effect in 2017. As legislative documents, it is important to note that these Acts focused mainly on regulation of licensing and operations of early childhood centres. Guidance documents designed to articulate practices would usually be published to support implementation processes.

As explained in Chapter 1, the governance of the ECCE sector was a mixed system. Up to 2013, kindergartens in Singapore, which provided academic rather than care services, were registered under MOE, which itself was governed separately under the *Education Act 1957*. This meant that the ECCE sector always functioned with a

‘Two Acts, Two Systems’ structure. However, under the new *ECDC Act*, all early childhood centres and private kindergartens would be licensed by ECDA with the exception of MOE kindergartens, which were accountable directly to MOE (Bull et al., 2018). The absence of a ‘One Act to rule all’ was significant as it retained the line of division within the ECCE sector. The preschool sector is now subject to an Act with exclusions based on the type of operations. In the past, ECCE was governed in accordance with the type of service operations (kindergarten or childcare) whilst the current system – that of differentiated governance of full preschool provision, operates along the lines of public and private ownership.

3.5.2 Leadership from policy texts

Since 2013, several national-level documents have emerged that have specifically addressed EC leadership. These include the *Skills Framework for Early Childhood Leaders*, which outline the roles and functions of leadership roles in the centre (SkillsFuture, 2016) and the *ECDC Act 2017*. The launch of a *Refreshed Skills Framework for Early Childhood* in 2021 outlined new career pathways for EC leaders while also revising technical skills and competencies (Goh, 2021). As a workforce document, the emphasis on accountability, technical skills and competencies was a key feature in the language of these policy texts. Ball (2013) explained that discourses embody the meaning and use of propositions and words (p.14) and in the analysis of texts, positions are often constructed within policies. The texts, in its approach, represented ‘readerly’ texts, which offered limited interpretation to readers (Ball et al., 2012).

The old and new acts varied in their leadership terminology. Similarly, Kagan et al. (2018) observed that this inconsistent pattern of nomenclature use related to leaders within and between countries in their multi-country study. Campbell-Barr & Leeson (2016) highlighted that the plethora of titles used revealed a historical pattern that reflected the culture of the time. The role of the early childhood leader was recognised in the *Child Care Centres Act 2012* (p.5), when the role of the ‘supervisor’ was specified as the ‘person who plans and directs the programme of a childcare centre and who is directly in charge of the children and staff of the childcare centre’. In the revised *Child Care Centres Act 2017*, this leadership role was renamed ‘principal’ with specific operational tasks attached to its description:

- a) To manage the staff of a centre to ensure the proper provision of early childhood development services at the centre.

- b) To ensure the proper accounting of the receipts and payments of money in respect of the centre.
- c) To ensure that the daily operations of the centre are carried out effectively.

(*ECDC Act 2017*, Part 15)

In contrast, the *SPARK Quality Rating Scale* (QRS) document uses the term ‘Centre Leader’(CL) to refer to ‘Principal/ Supervisor and Vice-Principal’ (ECDA, 2019). This views centre leadership as a collaborative role, a clear distinction from regulatory documents. This suggests that the definition of the role of the CL carries a temporal and documentational variation.

Policy texts also offer a varied interpretation of leadership work tasks. The *ECDC Act* offers a broad articulation of the operational role expected of EC leaders. This operational and management role of the principal was further reiterated in the ECDA document for Regulation Standards:

Principals oversee the day-to-day running of the centre and are responsible for programme planning and staff supervision. Every centre should have a principal to ensure continuous and effective management, supervision and operation of the ECDC, staff and children. (ECDA, 2017, p.6)

The importance of operational accountability is also evident in the new *ECDC Act*. Goy (2017) identified three key provisions of the new act, namely a common licensing framework, more investigative powers of ECDA and a graduated penalty framework. Bull et al. (2018) explained that the *ECDC Act* served to solidify ECDA’s position as the sole regulatory authority, thereby ensuring that all provisions will be subject to the same accountability criteria.

Campbell-Barr & Leeson (2016) explained that policy often plays a strong role in the constructions of leadership and management, but that the historical development of early years leadership and contextual understandings should also be considered. Drawing on the experience of Singapore, Lloyd (2012) examined the dangers of a marketised industry that focused on market competitiveness and profitability. Consequently, this development had translated itself into misuse of market power with higher fees and at times, low quality services (Lim, 2013). The *ECDC Act* resulted in a shift in a sectoral leadership shift where the interests of the private sector were now subject to the monitoring of centralised national governance and close quality monitoring systems.

The changes brought about by the Acts also reflected a tendency for policy documents to be ‘evolutionary’ that adapted to the changing ECCE landscape rather than ‘revolutionary’ in its approach. Reid et al. (2018) describes this action as one which accommodates changes for altered contexts. In addition to the change in policy intentions, the *ECDC Act* included the role of a ‘Key Appointment Holder’, a ‘Chief Licensing Officer’ and the addition of ‘Licensee’ within the document. This reflected a recognition of changes in the bureaucratic structure of early childhood organisations and the increased pattern of corporatisation. The emergence of these policy changes reflects a strategic and measured approach in early childhood policymaking and responsive accommodation of sectoral shifts.

Commensurate with its policymaking approach, changes in early childhood policy texts reflect a strong sense of pragmatism in relation to the changes (Tan, 2012). Where the government once adopted a ‘light touch’ approach, this has since evolved into strongly regulated management of the sector in respect of both operational licensing and workforce management. Tan (2012) explained that such strategic policymaking can be quick to respond to threats and opportunities yet has the potential to result in conflict and produce unexpected consequences with a negative impact in the future.

3.5.3 Pedagogical and administrative tension

Two types of documents are created in policymaking, namely laws in the form of regulatory documents and guidance documents (Reid et al., 2018). Although the latter may not have the same legal authority, it is equally important in ‘proclaiming ideologies and laying the groundwork for future policies’ (p.41). The government of Singapore devises initiatives by making use of several platforms, one of which is the parliamentary session known as the Committee of Supply (COS) Debate which provides an opportunity for Members of Parliament to debate and scrutinise government policies and programmes. The COS 2018 was particularly significant to the ECCE sector as it led to the announcement of new initiatives targeted at ECCE quality improvement. It included more concrete plans for career progression and leadership development for early childhood professionals. Although the career and progression paths had been documented previously, this also marked the first time that a distinction was made between organisational and curriculum roles of EC leaders. Proceedings from the session stated that:

The new senior professional positions in AOPs will not only include organisational leadership roles (e.g., CL), but also pedagogical leadership

roles (e.g., Lead Teacher) to cater to different interests and aspirations (ECDA, 2018).

Ball et al. (2012) described this as a process of ‘translation’ which identified the third plank of policy and practice. During this process, texts are actioned during talks, meetings and events. Furthermore, the policy actor, who is in this instance a Member of Parliament, has been chosen to articulate the leadership roles. At times, this requires the policy actor to rationalise disparate policies into an institutional narrative. Ball et al. (2012) explains that this often takes place under an ‘improvement’ plot of some kind. In this case, a tiered structure of leadership was unveiled along with a clear definition of roles:

The senior professional positions will cover both organisational and curriculum leadership roles, such as Cluster Leaders, Centre Leaders and Senior Teachers. Centre leaders will oversee the overall management of a preschool, while Senior Teachers will drive the preschool's teaching and learning approaches and take on active roles in mentoring other teachers. (ECDA, 2018)

The document suggested a differentiation between organisational and pedagogical roles where CL assumed a managerial focus and the Senior Teachers would undertake a more pedagogical role. A description of these job roles appears in a document related to career progression pathways in the sector known as the Skills Framework for Early Childhood (SFw) (SkillsFuture, 2016). Jointly developed by ECDA and the WDA, the document was borne from the SkillsFuture movement, to promote mastery and recognition of skills, and to foster a culture of lifelong learning in the early childhood education sector (SkillsFuture, 2016). Within this document, a separate section called Skills Framework for Early Childhood – Skills Standards for Leaders (SFw-SSL) outlines the leadership track. This consists of five different positions, which cover centre or teacher leadership roles in both kindergarten and childcare centres. The designations are identified as Lead Teacher, Centre Leader, Senior Lead Teacher, Senior Centre Leader and Pinnacle Leader. *A Refreshed Skills Framework for Early Childhood* (see Appendix 5) was also released in October 2021 and revealed a new career pathway for leadership that consisted of five redefined leadership roles. This new framework featured an improved career pathway for leaders with a differentiated leadership focus by way of two new categories, ‘Direct Practice’ and ‘Management Roles’. This suggests an effort by the sector regulators to update work roles in line with evolving ground practices. Within this pathway, the

Lead Early Years Educator, Lead Preschool Educator and Curriculum/ Pedagogy Specialist are considered Direct Practice leadership roles, whereas the Deputy Centre Leader, Centre Leader and Senior Centre Leader are regarded as management roles.

As these developments took place at the time of the submission of this thesis, reference will be made only to the SFw policy texts prior to 2021. With reference to the previous SFw-SSL (2016), the pedagogical and administrative roles seem to overlap within each category of leadership. In their review of leadership positions, Kagan et al. (2018) identified Pinnacle Leader, Centre Leader, Senior Centre Leader, Lead Teacher and Senior Lead Teacher as administrative leadership roles and described them as responsible for the organisation and management of the ECCE centre encompassed instructional/pedagogical responsibilities. They also observed that it was common for a single individual to be charged with a panoply of these responsibilities at the same time. McDowall et al. (2012) highlighted a difference between management and leadership roles, with management linked more to outcomes and procedures in contrast to EC leadership which is linked to process and the well-being of staff and children. A study of EC leadership tasks by Hujala et al. (2016) showed that EC leaders spent the bulk of their time engaged in pedagogical leadership, service management and daily managerial tasks. Leaders also viewed pedagogical leadership as the most important task. However, this push to undertake pedagogical tasks while balancing the pull of the administrative work seems to place EC leaders in a position of conflict. Lim & Lipponen (2019) describe that this pedagogical and administrative obligation appears to be a point of critical tension for EC leaders elevating the challenge of leadership work further.

3.5.4 Quality and outcomes

Early childhood policy texts address quality though these may be challenged in practice. SPARK is used by the sector as a recognition of efforts to improve quality or in some cases as a ‘quality branding’ (Bull et al., 2018). Nevertheless, Lim (2017) noted that the time-consuming processes of external assessors were unattractive to preschools that felt it unnecessary to show proof of their quality. Hujala et al. (2016) observed that SPARK influenced the focus of the leader’s work with a shift of focus on pedagogical roles. Bull et al. (2018) noted that although anecdotal evidence alluded to some improvement in centre quality, detractors have nevertheless questioned the impact that SPARK has had on children’s learning outcomes and have criticised the administrative burden that it places on centre leadership (p.142). The

reliability of SPARK is open to interpretation too, as there are currently no studies to examine its effectiveness (Bull et al., 2018).

Urban and Dalli (2008) explained that the improvement of early years systems is often linked to a workforce development strategy. In the case of Singapore, frameworks that map ECCE technical skills and competencies are often viewed as initiatives linked to quality improvement (Goh, 2021). Kagan et al. (2018) described the SFw-SSL as a notable example of leadership inclusion as it integrated three paths of career progression. Within the SFw-SSL, individuals who can fulfil the required qualifications and competencies could become EC leaders. The *Refreshed Skills Framework for Early Childhood* extended this even further, by integrating leadership pathways across the fields of Learning Support and Early Intervention (ECDA, 2021).

Nevertheless, such formalisation within the system could prove to be a liability when shifts in the workforce occur (Kagan et al., 2018). With the lack of manpower reported within the industry (Elangovan, 2020), the delineation of roles may result in roles being unfulfilled due to the lack of candidates with suitable qualifications. Employees may also be less encouraged to fill roles when such elaborate work tasks are attached to the positions. In addition, a rigorous outline of competencies could result in greater pressure to meet work targets. Ball et al. (2012, p.74) referred to this as a 'discourse of standards that promoted performativity'. Barber and Mourshed (2007) caution that implications could arise from such hierarchies of expectation. They state that this could create a pressure for performance that could result in imbalances resulting in a focus on work task priorities at the expense of purpose.

3.6 Context of practice in early childhood leadership

3.6.1 Leadership and management

Research interest in early childhood leadership drew much of its influence from business and management literature (Rodd, 1998; Thornton et al., 2009). These traditional notions supported 'the great man' theories of leadership (Hard, 2008) which valued hierarchical, authoritative and masculine notions (Kagan & Bowman, 1987; Woodrow & Busch, 2008). These constructions did not address issues of gender and were ill-suited to help understand a profession that which was female-dominated (Osgood, 2004; Siraj-Blatchford & Manni, 2007). The work of early childhood professionals was often interwoven with ideas of care and nurture which was seen to be an important feature of childcare (Sanders, 2002). As an engendered profession, Scrivens (2000) explained that the leadership style of women was more

relational and participatory in approach. Dunlop (2008) added that the concept of leadership was more aligned with reciprocal relationships akin to pedagogical approaches practised in early childhood education. These masculine notions ignored the central characteristic of early childhood workplace which was essentially care driven.

EC leadership in practice is complicated by the ambiguity between concepts of leadership and management (Rodd, 2005; Siraj-Blatchford & Manni, 2007). Rodd (1998) explained that EC leaders, whose roles had expanded from direct care and education, were often uncomfortable with their management roles. Osgood (2004) explained that the nature of this entrepreneurial management approach did not match the community-based nature of the profession. This assertion is supported by Campbell-Barr & Leeson (2016) who identified that current market models, along with the deficiency model of early years services, required leaders to reconcile two conflicting roles, namely the ethics of care with a profit-oriented managerialist agenda.

Much of the earlier EC leadership research had focused on the roles, traits and tasks of leadership (Rodd, 2001; Heikka & Waniganayake, 2011; Siraj-Blatchford & Manni, 2007) and was supported by studies in the UK which showed leaders undertaking a wide range of roles such as administrative, pedagogical and supportive ones, among others (Rodd, 1997; Aubrey, 2011). Another recent comparative study, by Hujala et al. (2016) showed that it was common for leadership to undertake a multitude of tasks, such as pedagogical, service management, resource management and daily managerial tasks. Kagan et al. (2018) showed that despite one's specialisation, a leader, might exercise both pedagogical and administrative leadership. This will occur in roles where a leader's time is split between two clear functions or where both functions are specified in the job description. All of the studies found evidence that leaders encountered challenges in balancing these roles.

3.6.2 Modernist and postmodernist ECCE Leadership constructs

A number of researchers have sought to address concepts of leadership constructs to facilitate a better understanding of EC leadership. With a burgeoning volume of publications on early childhood leadership still grappling with the difficulty of definitions, Nicholson et al. (2018) examined the epistemological approaches of leadership examined in the literature. In the review by Nicholson et al. (2018), the existence of modern and postmodern perspectives that underpinned notions of leadership was discussed. Modernist thinking viewed leadership as a linear

progression where strict binaries existed, and leadership was identified using stable character qualities, such as confidence. The postmodernist perspective posited that leadership was ambiguous with tension central to its understanding. It was also heavily influenced by social, cultural, political and historical contexts and that EC professionals assumed multiple identities when they exercised leadership (p.5).

In contrast, the modernist perspective viewed leaders with clearly defined and sequenced roles, and progression of authority (Aubrey, 2011; Rodd, 2005). The postmodernist view, supported by writers such as Murray & McDowall Clark (2013), viewed leadership as participative pedagogy involving a co-construction process and stakeholders. Hujala (2013) and Waniganayake (2014) supported the idea of leadership as one that was socially constructed and contextual. Although there was a tendency to use both constructs across the literature, Nicholson et al. (2018) noted that there was an increased emphasis on the postmodern discourse of late, as more researchers have conceptualised leadership as a complex and situated process.

This reframing of leadership has led to the use of popular constructs such as 'distributed leadership' which sought to explain the interaction across levels and stakeholders (Aubrey, et al., 2012). Although the definition of distributed leadership continues to be contested (Haltunnen, 2016), there has been a substantial body of work to describe the nature of this shared leadership practice, particularly in Finnish preschools (Heikka et al., 2014; Sims et al., 2015; Haltunnen, 2016; Kangas, 2015). Pedagogical leadership constructs have also been widely used in Finnish studies (Fonsen, 2013; Heikka & Waniganayake, 2011).

More recently, scholars have proposed viewing leadership through the lens of a 'pedagogical praxis' (Palaiologou & Male, 2018; Aubrey, 2019). Previous perceptions of pedagogical leadership were concerned with the direct relationship between the teacher and the learner (Heikka & Waniganayake, 2011; Fonsen, 2013). However, the current leadership research has emerged from countries where specific contexts exist. This has created a challenge in trying to bridge leadership theory and practice using the available research evidence (Palaiologou & Male, 2018). The use of a pedagogical praxis lens would accommodate a discussion despite such variations and would enable actions to be seen as appropriate in a given situation (Male, 2006). This fluidity allows a clearer understanding of how leadership is exercised within its context. Aubrey (2019) agreed that this leadership-as-practice model supported a truer understanding and could overcome the limitations of discourses that emanated from traditional management and leadership theory.

3.6.3 Socio-cultural influences in leadership practice

Researchers have indicated a need to widen the understanding of contextual variations and cultural differences that govern EC leadership (Gronn, 1999; Ebbeck & Waniganayake, 2003). Ebbeck (2002) explained that specific cultural realities should be considered in any discussion about quality that related to human services. Hofstede (1983) stated that leadership and management were culturally dependent, concluding that foreign leadership approaches should be adapted to suit local conditions. Furthermore, the monocultural nature of leadership research has meant that issues of gender, identity, class and ethnicity should be given due consideration (Fitzgerald, 2003; Whalley, 2011).

Ho's (2012) study of two kindergartens in Hong Kong showed the strategic use of relationships to balance tensions and power conflicts in leadership practice. The study highlighted the 'paradox of power' that was the by-product of a decentralised Western system where traditional hierarchical cultures remain. The study revealed how leaders experienced conflict when traditional expectations required a leader to be fully responsible for outcomes but where the system divided accountability. Yang's (2018) study of curriculum leadership in Chinese preschools revealed the importance of a leader negotiating contextual notions of quality, which had to be understood from the local perspective. Leaders had to adopt a hybrid leadership model and demonstrated that a progressive undertaking of actions were required before pedagogical change could even be attempted. In another Chinese example of leadership in Taiwan, a paternalistic style of leadership was observed where 'face-saving' was a highly regarded act. In a Saudi Arabian study, the ability to exercise pedagogical leadership was greatly influenced by the leader's relationship with the community (Alameen et al., 2015). The cultural practices within this conservative masculine society were seen as crimping the leader's role and reducing it to managing rather than leading. The study also showed that internal pedagogical parameters (Male & Palaiologou, 2013) such as the leaders' beliefs, values and religion, influenced decision-making. The importance of personal beliefs also surfaced in an Azerbaijan study, which focused on educational change and the applicability of the transformational leadership theory (Mikailova & Radsky, 2013). This study illustrated a leader's effort to shift pedagogical practices away from a strong Soviet-influenced academic focus to a more creative approach. However, the study showed that cultural pressures were so significant that the leader's educational consciousness forced the leader to revert to traditional methods by the end of the intervention. The case study also underlines the importance of the leader's self-

motivation in effecting micro-level institutional change. These examples highlight the interplay of cultural influences on leadership and demonstrate the need to maintain harmony as an important consideration in the execution of leadership tasks. In the process of adopting Western models of leadership, preschool leaders have had to adapt these models and modify their application in practice.

3.6.4 Operational environment and settings

The internal and external challenges of operational environments have been identified as a significant factor in EC leadership (Aubrey, 2017; Siraj-Blatchford & Manni, 2007; Hujala, 2013; Rodd, 2005). Nivala (2002) proposed an understanding of leadership based on specific contexts using Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological model. The contextual model highlighted the need to recognise the operating environments within which leadership was exercised. Waniganayake et al. (2012) supported this idea and expounded it using the elements of the person, place and position which influenced leadership activity (p.11). The 'place' in this case refers to the professional setting of the centre, its location, resources and organisational elements (Waniganayake et al., 2012).

Haltunnen's (2013) study of Finnish day care examines the impact of physical structure on the way leaders managed their meetings. The study explained how organisational changes resulted in Finnish day care centres that might be quite some distance from one another in terms of physical location. This resulted in leaders managing face-to-face meetings in different ways and a need to adopt new tools to better organise leadership tasks (Haltunnen, 2013). Conceptually, the model of the solitary ECCE institution is transitioning into one that requires a more collaborative approach with systems thinking applied in its operations (Siraj-Blatchford & Sum, 2013). This shift in ECCE work approach poses a challenge to EC leadership. Aubrey (2011) illustrated this in a study where leaders were compelled to work as part of a multi-agency team delivering integrated services in England. The challenges involved overcoming differences in personnel background and work practices. Strehmel's (2016) account of German EC leaders managing stakeholders both within and outside their own institution showed the challenges of team collaboration. Moshel and Berkovich (2018) explained that national administrative reforms in the preschools sector resulted in a new systemic hierarchy and the creation of middle-level managers. The creation of these new leadership roles was also witnessed in Norway when kindergartens were merged by their municipality (Moen & Granrusten, 2013). Siraj-Blatchford and Manni (2007) emphasised the need for leaders to develop a

'contextual literacy' in their work and the ability to exercise flexibility. Aubrey et al. (2012) supported this and highlighted the role of EC settings as a factor in developing an understanding of leadership theory and practice.

3.6.5 Characteristics and roles of EC leaders

Kagan and Hallmark (2001) suggested that there are several characteristics of leadership that can be considered universal, such as vision, courage and ethics. However, research has suggested that there could be leadership characteristics that might be singular to the EC profession. Rodd (1998) described personal attributes such as kindness, patience and empathy to also include being goal-oriented, assertive and confident, as critical to EC leadership. Other writers have also identified the demonstration of professional and pedagogical knowledge along with values and principles, as highly desirable attributes (Siraj-Blatchford & Manni, 2007; Jones & Pound, 2008). Skills in EC leaders such as teamwork, motivation, decision-making and empowerment were highly valued too (Scrivens, 2000). Others have also cited key leadership attitudes, including exhibiting authenticity, a moral compass, and a strong relational ability (Bloom, 2000; Moyles, 2006; Dalli, 2006; Siraj-Blatchford & Manni, 2007). Recent studies have identified the importance of leadership traits within a broader consideration of context, community and change. Thornton (2005), for example, highlighted that the traditional 'single-person traits' lens should be reviewed in consideration of the collaborative work of current leaders.

Aubrey (2011) found differences in attitude towards leadership among EC professionals from varied backgrounds. In her study of English leaders, EC professionals with postgraduate qualifications favoured 'leaders as guides' and favoured qualities that exuded warmth, rationality and coaching (p.30). Those with National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) favoured 'leaders as motivators' and preferred leaders who demonstrated systematic planning, proactivity and empowerment. In a New Zealand study, leadership was framed from the perspective of leadership dispositions (Ryder et al., 2017) and based on the idea that dispositions preceded the development of knowledge and practice (Flumerfelt et al., 2007). This study opined that effective EC leaders needed to be suitably disposed such that they could adapt to new situations and environments. It included being a good communicator, being relationally connected, providing care and support, leading growth and change and acting as a critical friend. Rodd (2015) explained that the laundry list of leadership qualities, skills and roles can be a 'daunting, overwhelming and disheartening' exercise (p.39). However, she highlighted that above all else, the

desire to learn would scaffold and support the requisite qualities and skills, particularly in times of change.

3.6.6 Leadership training and workforce development

The report on the *Effective Provision of Pre-school Education Project* established a strong relationship between the training and qualifications of a centre manager and the quality of service provision (Muijs et al., 2004, p.7). Other research studies support the link between professional leadership competencies and the provision of high quality early childhood programs (OECD, 2012; Siraj-Blatchford & Manni, 2007; Waniganayake et al., 2015). Waniganayake (2014) asserted the need for adequate leadership preparation programmes to meet the current profile of early educators whose role required engagement with a wide range of stakeholders (p.67).

Studies have noted that leadership roles were often undertaken by ‘accidental leaders’ with minimal training and little prior leadership experience (Ebbeck & Waniganayake, 2003; Rodd, 2005). Oftentimes, the lack of leadership training has resulted in a lack of preparedness for leaders to undertake their tasks (Muijs et al., 2004). Leadership training has been inadequate, and Rodd (2005) emphasised that there was a need for research to be conducted to identify the type of leadership training and the requisite skills needed to put leadership into practice (p.2).

A scan of the literature showed a paucity of research in effective leadership training available for early childhood leaders though the US and UK offer up some success stories. In the US, some 55 self-reported leadership programmes from 50 different organisations, agencies and institutions of higher education, have been recorded (Goffin & Janke, 2013). In the training provided by McCormick Centre for Early Childhood Leadership, Bloom & Bella (2005) showed how leadership training improved leadership knowledge and skills by helping leaders to be reflective about their leadership behaviour. In the UK, the National Professional Qualification in Integrated Centre Leadership (NPQICL) reported success with its programme, which was found to have had a positive impact on the confidence, leadership knowledge, skills and attitudes of its participants (National College for School Leadership, 2008). Globally, however, little has been written on this subject.

3.7 Context of practice in Singapore early childhood leadership

The current literature on early childhood leadership in Singapore comprises a limited number of independent reports, journal articles based on small scale studies and

several unpublished theses. Though this may not be deemed extensive academic research, it provides some understanding of the scope of challenges that Singapore early childhood leaders may face.

3.7.1 Policy leadership in Singapore

The challenges of the early childhood sector gained national attention following Ang's (2012) *Vital Voices for Vital Years* independent report commissioned by the Lien Foundation. Although a number of academic articles on Singapore ECCE had been written, this marked the first report on the development of the early childhood sector that was being made available to the public. Bull & Bautista (2018) noted that along with the *Starting Well* report (Economist Intelligence Unit, 2012) this proved to be a catalyst that led to the implementation of new policies. Based on the perspectives of 27 local leaders with varying levels of early childhood involvement, the report provided a thorough examination of the sector, discussing its developments as well as suggesting actions that would help push it forward. The last chapter of the Lien Foundation study focused on leadership with an emphasis on governance, practice and the development of future leaders (Ang, 2012).

The writer acknowledged the importance of policy leaders and recognised that 'leaders, policymakers and politicians are the ones who are responsible for the long-term vision of the sector' (p.93). Ang (2012) also noted the importance of effective national leadership and the crafting of good policies that would bring about a difference in the sector. Additionally, the strong role of the government was recognised, and the writer identified the critical role of EC professionals to 'translate strategic policy into practice and respond to government initiatives' (p. 93). In particular, the role of leaders in the policy process was emphasised with the need to 'embrace the latest government policies but to ensure clarity on what the policies mean in practice' (p. 95).

3.7.2 Leadership challenges

- Multiple job roles

The early childhood sector in Singapore operates within a neoliberal economy balanced delicately under the purview of centralised governance (Lim & Lim, 2017). A key challenge for this hybrid model was to align the values and goals of multiple agencies that participated in the development of the sector (Bull & Bautista, 2018). In a study of 24 EC leaders, Lim and Lipponen (2019) identified the critical conflicts that

they faced with various stakeholders. Several opposing forces were viewed as challenges for EC leaders, namely the increased demands of quality demands from the licensing government, profit-driven expectations of their organisations, academically competitive expectations of families and pedagogically child-centric intents of teachers (p.168). Leaders struggled in their ability to balance daily operations and at the same time construct a vision of the curriculum that would comply with SPARK requirements as well as meet the needs of parents and children. Ang (2012) reiterated this and described the multifaceted role facing Singapore EC leaders as 'educators, motivators, strategists, decision makers, administrator and entrepreneurs'. The struggle to balance administrative, managerial and pedagogical roles was also observed in Saidon and Soh's (2017) small scale study of 30 principals, which described the difficulty that leaders faced in managing staff from varied backgrounds while ensuring licensing and quality compliance, as well as managing children with special needs.

- Workforce challenges

A number of writers have debated the issue of staff shortages that have contributed to the leaders' work struggles (Ang, 2012; Tay, 2013; Craig, 2013; Lien Foundation, 2016; Karuppiah, 2016; Lim, 2017; Pek-Greer & Wallace, 2017; Kagan et al., 2018). Although there have been no official statistics about this, the Lien Foundation (2016) stated that the annual attrition rate among preschool teachers was estimated to be 15 to 20%. Karuppiah (2016) explained that the low salary and remuneration had created a poor image of the profession and, therefore, led to poor retention rates. Hujala et al. (2016) concurred, explaining that teachers, exasperated by the tedium of the SPARK process, often felt compelled to resign from their jobs. It was also noted that although the entry qualifications of preschool leaders and teachers were raised, the salary was not made commensurate with the higher entry requirements and teacher training (Karuppiah, 2016). This, coupled with the rapid expansion of the industry, has exerted mounting pressures on leaders to stabilise the management of their centres.

Hujala et al. (2016) mentioned that most of the principal's time was spent on improving and developing teaching practices. In Singapore, the introduction of the NEL curriculum framework in 2012 suggests a possible reason for this occurring during the time of study. Unlike the previous framework, NEL focused on a purposeful play approach. Despite its developmental appropriateness, many preschools were still academically oriented, focusing on preparing children for the rigours of Primary

One (Karuppiah, 2016). Nyland & Ng (2016) explained that Singapore teachers struggled to introduce play at the recommendation of the government, but this conflicted with Singapore society's inherently competitive culture which prioritised academic excellence (p.474). Bautista et al. (2016) discovered a similar attitude in their study of 123 in-service kindergarten teachers, who were found to have a very traditional view of education, that of prioritising academic competencies.

Ebbeck and Chan (2011) emphasised that the process of implementing pedagogical change required leaders to embrace the process of change willingly. In their review of policy changes which encouraged greater pedagogical documentation, the writers highlighted the need for support from management, parents and policy makers alike, to ensure that change was sustainable. This view was supported by Ng (2011) in her study of kindergarten teachers, who adapted from an academic-based curriculum to a curriculum based on play. The writer asserted that the transition process needed to be sensitive to the larger context of Singapore's education climate and acknowledge the perspectives of teachers. One example of this is evident in Wu's (2017) case study in which a principal adopted key elements of pedagogical leadership in a programme aimed at developing positive child outcomes. The process showed that the practices of pedagogical leader encompassed three key roles, that of gatekeeper, reviewer and assessor. The success of the pedagogical leader also rested on the emphasis on relationship-building with the leader's staff, with parents and children. Another study, by Carter and Dasson (2017) illustrated the use of distributed leadership in the implementation of a character development programme in Catholic preschools. Leaders exhibited flexibility in creating and adjusting to a common vision. Several leadership roles were identified in this process of change: 'Principal as Lead Manager', 'Principal as coaching teacher' and 'Principal as discerning monitor'. The pedagogical processes required leaders to be mindful of the context within which they operated.

Another source of pressure has been the strong role of parents in early childhood education. The market-driven nature of the early childhood sector meant that parents 'called the shots' as school fees were the main source of funding (Lim-Ratnam, 2012). The writer explained that parental anxieties translated to a demand for certain academic outcomes as parents were anxious about the transition to primary schools (Ebbeck & Chan, 2011). This tension led to a teacher-directed classroom with a reduced focus on the holistic development of the child (Ebbeck & Gokhale, 2004; Ang, 2006). The concept of 'parentocracy' where parents exert a strong influence on educational systems, became a factor of influence in relation to the education of

children in Singapore (Tan, 2017). Parents became better informed and questioned teaching and caring practices more than ever (Ebbeck & Gokhale, 2004). Parents have, verily, become a challenge for EC leaders.

- Leadership support

Ebbeck et al. (2014) conducted a small-scale action research project study of 64 practicing teachers to explore how early childhood teachers would be ready to take on a leadership role. Respondents from the study highlighted the lack of experience, mentoring and a preference for teaching, as factors which dissuaded them from accepting leadership roles. In contrast, the subjects of the study said that the factors that encouraged them to take on a leadership role included their prior experience in EC or other fields, their self-belief in their leadership competencies, and the view that leadership would entail career progression. Leadership training was also mentioned as an area of concern in leadership development. In 2016, it was observed that less than 20 per cent (or seven) out of 47 of the courses in the ECDA prospectus on Continuing Professional Development cater exclusively to principals (Lien Foundation, 2016).

Teo's (2016) unpublished thesis on early childhood leadership training in Singapore showed that leaders perceived mandatory leadership training as helpful but falling short in terms of effectiveness. The weaknesses specified included supervised practicum, topic insufficiencies, application challenges, retraining needs and policy considerations (Teo, 2016, p. 261). This dimension of behavioural competencies was explored in the White Paper produced as part of a Singapore early childhood leadership programme called 'Principal Matters' funded by the Lien Foundation. The study highlighted the challenge of early childhood leaders, most of whom were young and qualified, but were expected to manage a heavy workload. This White paper identified five trends that impacted the early childhood sector. These included complex family dynamics, structures and lifestyles, the increasing demographic diversity of leaders, teachers and parents, growth of the sector and increased regulatory requirements, the increasing need to cater with children with special needs, and new technologies (Lien, 2016, p. 4). The paper proposed a focus on behavioural competencies as a more effective way to manage and sustain performance beyond just the prerequisites of skills and knowledge, and focused on developing the self, the team and the community. The study showed that early childhood leaders faced challenges in their work due to the demands of multiple stakeholders such as parents, teachers, operators and the government. In addition,

the commercial settings of their work environment create critical conflicts in their motives and decision-making processes. This included managing internal and external expectations, asserting professional autonomy, and calibrating parent expectations and staff autonomy (Lim & Lippinen, 2019). These studies revealed the multiplicity of roles and responsibilities leaders in Singapore face in practice, which differed in relation to the environments within which they operated.

Several other local writers further explored the topic of approaches to leadership development. Ebbeck & Geok (2018) focused on the use of coaching to enhance teacher's participation in centres. The study flagged an improvement in the relationships that leaders had with their staff. In addition, coaching enabled leaders to become positive agents of change. The collective capacity building of leaders and organisations was explored in a study of professional learning communities (Vijayavedar et al., 2019). It tracked two professional learning communities, noting, as a result, some shifts in leadership approaches, such as building relational trust with teachers, demonstrating more confidence in teachers' abilities and listening, among others (p.87). Interestingly, the extent of collaborative leadership practices was seen in this study as constrained by cultural sensitivities that seemed to lean towards a paternalistic leadership culture. This seemed to support the findings of the study by Hujala et al. (2016), which identified how EC communities in Asian settings exhibit low individualism and a large power distance (p.414) in the way they work.

3.8 Conclusion

Using the policy trajectory model as a frame for discussion, the literature review has revealed the complexity of issues within early childhood leadership research. Although there has been a steady increase in the number of published studies, helping push the leadership agenda forward, there remains still much work to be done to consolidate this information towards theorising this field adequately. Early childhood leadership literature in Singapore has also shown evidence of exceptionally strong governance, affirming the role of the political establishment as a leader within the field. This characteristic would be a noteworthy feature to be considered in its impact on leadership.

Chapter 4 – Methodology

4.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the methodology used in this research and is organised into the following sections: philosophical worldview, research design, mixed-methods approach, case study approach, participant and sampling strategy, methods, data analysis and reliability issues.

4.2 Philosophical worldview

Research is influenced by the researcher's worldview, which itself is shaped by the researcher's experience in collecting and analysing the data (Creswell, 2012). The methodology is critical to understanding the lens through which the researcher has chosen to situate a study. This study resides broadly within the critical tradition of education policy sociology (Bowe et al., 1992) and as such is constructivist in its epistemology through its focus on interactions between people who actively produce forms of knowledge through social processes and practices (Burr, 2003). This constructivist paradigm assumes a relativist ontology (there are multiple realities), a subjectivist epistemology (the knower and subject create understanding), and a naturalistic (in the natural world) set of methodological procedures (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003).

This primarily interpretivist approach attempts to address culturally derived and historically situated interpretations of the social life-world (Crotty, 1998, p.67). The need to understand teachers' and leaders' perceptions and experiences as well as the context of their settings, roots the study firmly within the paradigm of phenomenology.

4.3 Research questions

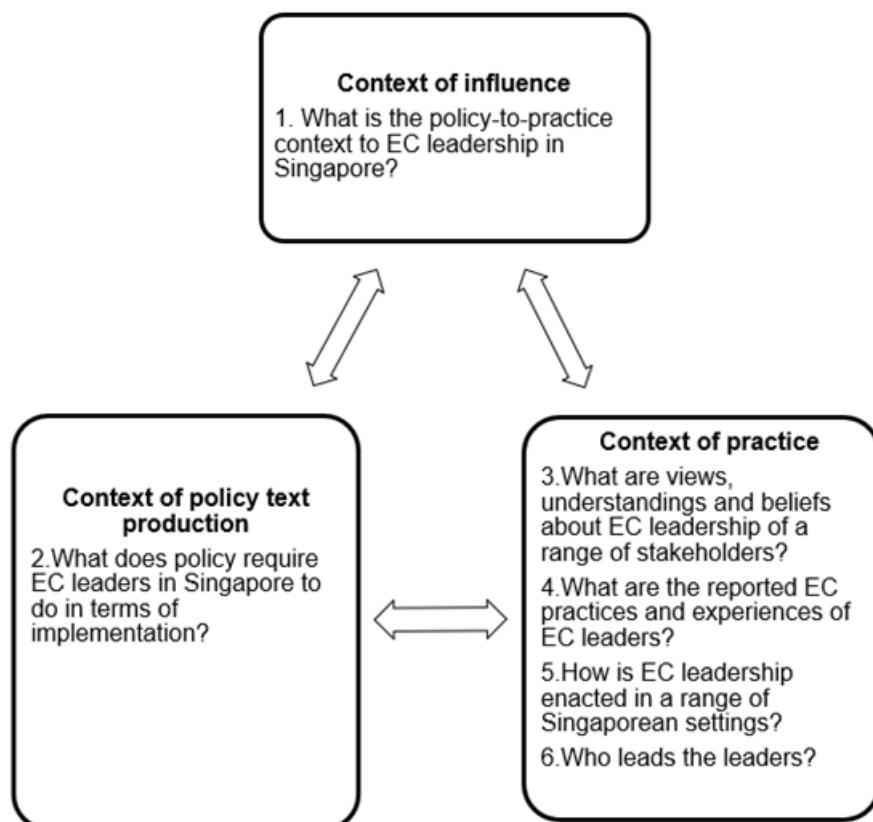
The research will attempt to answer the following questions:

1. What is the policy-to-practice context to early childhood leadership in Singapore? (CORE)
2. What does policy require early childhood leaders in Singapore to do in terms of implementation?
3. What are the views, understandings and beliefs about early childhood leadership of a range of stakeholders?

4. What are the reported early childhood practices and experiences of early childhood leaders?
5. How is early childhood leadership enacted in a range of Singaporean settings?
6. Who leads the leaders?

The research questions and methods are based on the trajectory model of policymaking by Bowe et al. (1992), which will characterise the policy process, offering a framework and a tool of analysis. As there is limited published research available on this topic, the questions were designed to ensure maximum variation by including a range of stakeholders such as teachers, leaders, senior managers and policy elites, as well as capturing a wide range of perspectives of leadership in the form of views, practice and policy statements. The model proposes three contexts involved in the process of policy creation, namely the context of influence, the context of policy text production and the context of practice. The research questions have been mapped within the model as shown in Figure 4.1:

**Figure 4.1: Research questions within policy trajectory model
(Bowe et al., 1992)**



4.4 Research design

The study features a mixed-method sequential case study approach (Stake, 2000; Yin, 2014) using multiple sites. The mixed-method approach uses aspects of qualitative and quantitative inquiry and addresses paradigm pluralism, which may serve as a practical solution for the study given the conceptual challenges currently faced in the field. This methodological eclecticism contends that we are free to combine the best methodological tools in answering our research questions (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2011, p.289).

4.4.1 Mixed methods approach

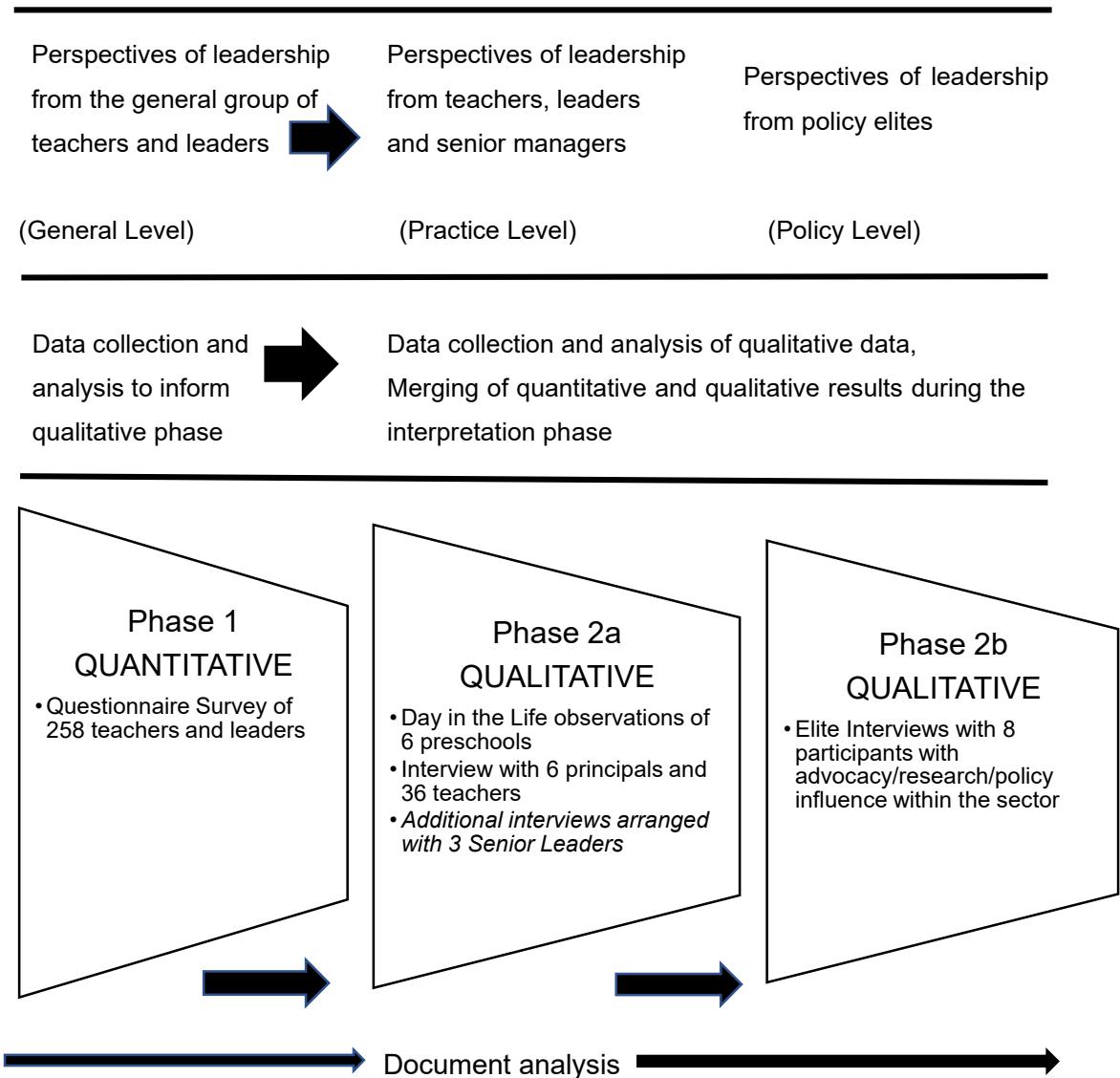
The mixed-method approach has been used extensively in educational and social research although currently debate continues to revolve around recognising mixed-methods as a research paradigm in its own right (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2011; Creswell & Clark, 2011). The paradigm wars between quantitative and qualitative methods have primarily centred on understanding the epistemological concerns of the nature of knowledge and the nature of reality (Burke et al., 2007). As a study that aims to address views of leadership, the mixed-method approach provides an opportunity for the researcher and the participants to engage in an exchange that would accurately reflect beliefs and values (Howe, 2004).

In choosing a mixed-method approach, several typologies of mixed-method design commonly used in educational and social behaviour research were explored, including those by Teddlie and Tashakkori (2003), Creswell and Plano Clark (2011) as well as Gutmann and Hanson (2003). Creswell (2015) noted that the specific mixed-method design should pay close attention to timing, weighting, and mixing the design process, and ultimately, match the research problem with the researcher's abilities. Considering the volume of data and the exploratory approach of the research topic, an ideal design would be one that offered flexibility and enabled a novice researcher to make adjustments where needed.

Upon this consideration, a sequential design was chosen to allow the input gathered from one method to inform the next stage, which it was deemed, would achieve more than if the methods were adopted in isolation (Morgan, 2014). The model that was considered most suitable for this study was the Mixed-Method Sequential Explanatory Design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). This consists of a two-phase process where the quantitative data is first collected, analysed and then used to build questions for the second qualitative phase (see Figure 4.2).

As the research question required exploring multi-level perspectives from a range of stakeholders, an additional qualitative phase was added to accommodate views from policy elites with recognition of setting variations. This Phase 2b of interviews enabled an in-depth analysis to address questions that needed further exploration from Phase 1 and 2a. The sequence of the design was divided into the phases as shown in Figure 4.2:

Figure 4.2: Adapted mixed-method sequential explanatory design with an additional qualitative phase



In this design, greater weight was given to the qualitative stages as the constructive worldview adopted meant the research question would be better answered with a qualitative priority (Morse, 1991). The sequential design suited the research as it meant one set of data could be collected at a time which was advantageous for a single researcher. It also allowed for improvements to be made in the second phase

to address the questions that required further exploration. In this case, the survey revealed that the leadership structure was much more complicated in reality, as there was a difference between operational power and decision-making power. This influenced the subsequent collection of data in Phases 2a and 2b.

Phase 2a included an additional group of three participants, namely the senior leaders, who existed between leaders and policy elites. Also, the results from policy questions necessitated a more explicit process of collecting policy-to-practice information from participants. This mixing strategy also occurred in the merging of quantitative and qualitative data sets at the interpretation stage. The breakdown of information sources used to map this integration is shown in Table 4.1:

Table 4.1: Research questions and methods

Framework	Research Questions	Methods	Information source
Context of Influence	1. What is the policy-to-practice context to EC leadership in Singapore? (CORE)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Questionnaire Survey • Teacher, Leader and Senior Leader Interviews • Day in the Life observations • Elite interviews • Document Analysis 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Questions were asked about their work within the sector, roles of leaders within the sector, leadership challenges, leadership development and policy implementation process in education
Context of Policy Text Production	2. What does policy require EC leaders in Singapore to do in terms of implementation?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Questionnaire Survey 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Open-ended question on three roles of an early childhood leader • Ranking of leadership practice based on typologies of leadership • Five questions based on Likert Scale on the relationship between policy and work of leaders
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Document Analysis 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policy documents from ECDA, QRS, Skills framework, • Relevant literature review (speeches, reports) • Roles and responsibility descriptions from organisations
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teacher, Leader and Senior Leader interviews 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Questions were asked about leadership tasks, influences on leadership, policy initiatives and their impact on leadership

Framework	Research Questions	Methods	Information source
Context of practice	3. What are the views, understandings and beliefs about EC leadership of a range of stakeholders?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Questionnaire Survey 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Open-ended question on three personal leadership traits Ranking of leadership traits Nine questions based on Likert scale on leadership work challenges within the centre
	4. What are the reported EC practices and experiences of EC leaders?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teacher, Leader and Senior Leader interviews 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Questions were asked about the experience of leadership, perceptions of leadership, examples of effective leadership Visual drawings of leadership
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Questionnaire Survey 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Questions on examples of effective and ineffective leadership
	5. How is EC leadership enacted in a range of Singaporean settings?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teacher, Leader and Senior Leader interviews 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Questions on positive and challenging experiences of leadership
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Day in the Life observations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Principal Time log sheet Video Vignettes Researcher Log Leader interview
	6. Who leads the leaders?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Leader, Senior Leader & Elite Interviews 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Questions on roles of leaders, the structure of organisations

4.4.2 Case study approach

Yin (2014) states that a case study is an empirical enquiry which ‘investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident’ (p.16). In the case of a complex phenomenon such as EC leadership, the case study approach allows for a real-world perspective of a case but also allows multiple perspective analyses. Flyvbjerg (2011) identifies four characteristics of the case study approach: it focuses on an individual unit, it is intensive, it stresses developmental factors, and it highlights a relation to the environment. These characteristics support the nature of the inquiry in the Singapore context where a wide range of delivery systems exist.

Yin (2014) also identifies four types of case study designs:

1. Single case (holistic) design
2. Single vase (embedded) design
3. Multiple case (holistic) design
4. Multiple case (embedded) design

Cresswell (2014) explained that a multiple case design allows a wider exploration of the research subject which involve multiple sources of information. Of interest to this study is the multiple case holistic design, which focuses on a key unit of analysis, in this case, the teachers' and leaders' perspectives on leadership. Using this unit of study also allows a comparison to previous context-based studies on early childhood leadership (Aubrey, 2011; Ho, 2011; Ang, 2012; Hujala, 2013).

4.5 Participants, sampling strategy and samples

Sampling design varies according to the paradigm and epistemological approach adopted (Creswell, 2002). As a phenomenological study, the purposive sampling method would be suitable as it would attain a sample that is representative of the teacher and leader population. This would facilitate data gathering of teachers' and leaders' common experiences, their meaning and relationships about leadership (Moustakas, 1994). As the study is strategically aimed at obtaining maximum variation, convenience sampling strategies were adopted to achieve representativeness.

- Questionnaire Survey Participants

The questionnaire survey aimed to gather teachers' and leaders' understanding of leadership. Permission was sought from two early childhood training institutes to distribute the questionnaires to trainees in the first half of their evening course and four organisations to distribute it in their monthly meetings. The administrator-in-charge selected the classes based on availability and response of the lecturers of the classes.

- Day in the Life Participants

Purposive sampling was used to select centres that would offer the maximum variation of early childhood settings available. In purposive sampling, the selection is usually based on a sample that represents the given population based on the researcher's knowledge and experience (Mills & Gay, 2016). To reduce inaccuracy,

the researcher created a matrix of the types of settings common in Singapore. These included public information about the organisation, such as the centres' business orientation, the type of programmes, and the size of the organisation. The availability of the principals and permission granted by their organisations led to the final sample selected below (see Table 4.2). Subsequently, the leader was asked to select six teachers that provided the greatest profile variation of her staff (e.g., a variety of nationalities and teaching experience) to participate in the face-to-face interviews.

Table 4.2: Case sites for Day in the Life observation

	Programme	Type	Enrolment of children	Staff size	Organisation Description
CS1	Kindergarten only	Not for profit	650	28	Single set up a faith-based kindergarten
CS2	Flexi-care with half-day and full-day programmes	For profit	110	20	Part of a large local childcare chain with local and international franchise
CS3	Half-day and full-day programmes	Not for profit	130	16	Single set up owned by a Chinese Foundation
CS4	Childcare and infant care programme	Non-profit Anchor operator	84	16	Non- profit co-operative chain with 130 centres
CS5	Kindergarten only	Non-profit Anchor operator	213	16	Part of a large community foundation with 376 locations
CS6	Childcare only	Non- profit Voluntary Welfare organisation	62	6	Part of an organisation which runs five childcare centres that cater to the Malay Muslim community

- Senior Leader Interview Participants

In the Phase 2a interviews, the researcher realised a leadership group that was not considered in the initial sample population. This group comprised of Senior Leaders who were considered 'leader of leaders' in large organisational settings. The policy documents recognised this leadership stratum, but little research was conducted on them or their roles. Recognising this to be important to the study, the researcher managed to secure interviews with three senior leaders, not associated with the six case sites, who were involved with decision making processes on the ground with insight into management practices.

Table 4.3: Description of senior leaders interviewed

Code	Organisation	Description of work role
SL1	Large non-profit anchor operator	This participant works in a large non-profit organisation as an Executive Principal and oversees three centres under her charge. As part of a major organisation, she reports to the Cluster Principal. She is in charge of supporting the principals under her care and ensuring that matters related to operations, quality, curriculum are supported.
SL2	Large profit-motivated EC provider	This participant is in charge of the curriculum across all the 20 centres in Singapore. She works co-operatively with the Operations and Business Administration departments and monitors the quality of delivery within the centre.
SL3	Medium-sized profit-motivated EC provider	This participant is the Executive Principal of an organisation with five centres. She works directly with the principals supported by Business and Marketing Departments. She is essentially responsible for the operations of the centres and matters related to quality and curriculum.

- Elite interview Participants

Harvey (2011) noted that there is no clear-cut definition of the term ‘elite’ and that different explanations have been adopted in social science. Dexter (1970) noted that elite interviews vary in the specialised knowledge that they possess. To obtain a policy perspective within the research, a sample of elites was chosen from participants whose positions had given them a role in influencing policy decisions within Singapore’s early childhood sector. Four of the elites were known to the researcher through her work in the field, while the rest were approached via email.

A set of questions was outlined for the interview, and all participants requested the questions ahead of time. Some flexibility of the process was allowed as the elite’s unique background meant that time was given to obtain their experienced views and attain relevant data related to their situation (Odendahl & Shaw, 2002). This enabled the researcher to draw on their expertise and, in this instance, link it to a broader understanding of power which their privileged position as an elite could offer (Phillips, 1998).

- Document Analysis

An emphasis was given to official policy documents which emerged from the key governmental agencies. Ball et al. (2012) state that such artefacts ‘mark’ policy directionality and serve as reference sources that represent the actions to be taken. Among this, only policy texts which directly addressed EC leaders within its content were selected. This narrowed it to four policy documents, essentially the Continuing Professional Development Framework (CPDFw), the Skills Framework for Early Childhood – Skill Standards for Leaders (SFw-SSL), the Early Childhood Development Centre Act (ECDC Act) and the SPARK Quality Rating Scale (QRS).

4.6 Data collection method and analysis

- Pilot study

A pilot study was conducted for each phase of the research study. This study was helpful as it enabled refinement of procedures and prepared the novice researcher for her task. De Vaus (2002) suggested that pilot studies address the ability of a question to discriminate, the validity and reliability of the questions, their redundancy and the response set. This was especially important as it enabled the researcher to craft questions for a better response.

As part of the pilot exercise for the survey questionnaires, the researcher sought other individuals’ help to clarify the questions asked. Gillham (2007) advises performing this exercise with a few people who were not part of the main group. The researcher’s two supervisors also reviewed the questionnaires. After several drafts, these were piloted with two peers who were experienced lecturers for the Diploma in Early Childhood Leadership Programme in Singapore. After receiving feedback, changes were made to the wording of the questions, and additional answer options were added to some of the questions. A trial run was conducted with two students to ascertain whether it could be completed within 20 to 30 minutes. Following this, hard copies were printed as printed questionnaires are known to have a higher return rate.

The pilot study for the Day in the Life phase was conducted at a mid-sized kindergarten centre. This enabled the researcher, a novice in this process, to trial the equipment and manage the logistics in the field on her own. Although it would have been ideal to follow up with the leader on the day of the recording, the long day meant the leader was often tired, and so the follow-up interviews for the main phase were scheduled for another day the same week. This also gave the leader and the

researcher alike time to review the notes. Due to the tight schedule in centres, it was thought that group interviews would be the most efficient way of collecting data. Arksey & Knight (1999) highlighted that power dynamics might be a concern within group sessions. In this case, the need to have teachers with varying backgrounds created some visible discomfort for some to speak, so it was decided that teacher interviews for the main phase should be conducted on a one-on-one basis instead.

The last pilot study was conducted for the elite interviews with two well-regarded veterans from the early childhood sector. This was critical to ensure the questions drew upon the participant's background and prepared the researcher adequately. The researcher noted the need to draw from the elite's background. Hence, questions were semi-structured, and a more open approach was decided appropriate for this group.

4.7 Questionnaire survey

The questionnaire design was adapted from the ESRC-funded research study of leadership in England by Aubrey et al. (2006). The questionnaire survey was distributed in person to teachers and leaders at two training institutes and four early childhood organisations who responded to the study. Prior arrangements were made with the lecturers to conduct the survey in the first 30 minutes of the session. At the appointed timings, the researcher arrived and gave a brief overview of the questionnaire. Trainees were allowed to be excluded from participating should they wish. Printed questionnaires were distributed to the consenting participants, and each was given an unmarked envelope to insert their completed forms. Saunders et al. (2012) advised that response rates could be dramatically improved by calling all respondents at a specific time. A request was also made to distribute the survey form to leaders of several organisations during their monthly meetups. Preparation was made prior to these sessions to ensure that the context would be suitable and that participants would have the choice to refuse participation.

A total of 258 responses were returned over the two weeks of data collection. Following this, the questionnaires were sorted into teacher and leader categories based on the work titles in their responses. In total, the survey was completed by 136 leaders, two of whom were male, and 122 teachers were female. In 2016, it was estimated that there was about a total of 16000 preschool teachers working in Singapore (Goy, 2016) calculating this study to represent about 1.6 per cent of the ECCE teaching community.

4.8 Day in the Life

The Day in the life was pilot tested in one centre and subsequently conducted in six centres that depicted a range of Singapore settings. An information brochure about the process was sent to the principal a few weeks ahead of the appointed date. One of the critical priorities of the researcher was to build rapport, as Oppenheim (1992) described this as an elusive quality that experienced and skilled interviewers possess. As such, a concerted effort was made to visit the centre before the actual day of the exercise with the aim of establishing familiarity between researcher and participant, and to allow the researcher to observe the centre's environment as part of her preparation.

The sessions stretched from 8 am until 5 pm and usually started with the leader and researcher discussing the leader's schedule for the day. The CL would inform the researcher on the segments that were confidential where no recording would be permitted. In such segments, the researcher observed from a distance. All CLs were given a log sheet to record their significant points of the day. As the researcher operated alone, several small cameras with a video capability were used for video recording. Due to the technical limitations of the devices, vignettes between 5 to 15 minutes were recorded instead of run-on recordings. These vignettes focused on the activities of the leader. In cases where children or other adults were present, care was taken to record from an angle that protected the identities of the persons the leader interacted with. These were supplemented with observation notes and a running record of events in the field observation book. The researcher returned the day after to have a follow-up session with the leader and interviews with the six staff members selected by the leader. The leader also completed a centre profile form that contained specific data about the centre.

4.9 Leader, Senior Leader, Teacher and Elite interviews

- Leader interview

This usually began with the leader reviewing her log sheet. Following this, a semi-structured interview using an aide-memoire was used to guide the interview, which helped to ensure consistency in the questions asked though the probes would vary with the interviewee's responses (Briggs et al., 2012). Gray (2014) suggests that improvisations may be the key to success in semi-structured and unstructured interviews. As the research goal was to understand leadership processes that may not be visible, greater time was given to address leadership intentions and power

dynamics within each setting. The interviewees, on average, lasted 1 to 1 and a half hours long. All interviews were audio-recorded and subsequently transcribed.

- Teacher interview

As far as possible, the teachers were interviewed individually although two were interviewed in tandem at one centre while a group interview was arranged in another to accommodate constrained staff timings. The teacher interviews took 20 to 30 minutes on average. For external validity, Rowley (2012) suggests that as a rule of thumb, around 12 interviews of approximately 30 minutes in length, or six to eight interviews of about an hour. As 5 to 6 teachers were requested from each site, a total of 34 teachers were interviewed. With the larger number of teachers involved and limited time available, more specific questions were asked. All interviews were audio-recorded and subsequently transcribed. The researcher had to reconduct the last part of one interview as the audio recording on the device had accidentally malfunctioned.

- Senior leader interview

The preliminary analysis of Phase 1 and the interviews in Phase 2 highlighted the significant influence of senior leaders. It emerged that power relations within centres may be more complex within larger organisational setups, and that the role of this layer of leadership was important. The three senior leaders were interviewed using the same set of questions. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed for analysis.

- Elite interview

The elite interviewees came from a variety of backgrounds but all of them had rather limited time for the sessions. Hence, care was taken to ensure the questions were related to their roles and considered their individual areas of expertise. These sessions were kept to between 45 minutes to an hour. All except one participant allowed themselves to be audio recorded and in this case the researcher sought the help of a friend who helped to log the responses during the interview, thus enabling the researcher to fully concentrate on the interview in hand.

4.10 Observation

The Day in the Life sessions offered a valuable opportunity to observe leadership practices. Observation involves the systematic viewing and recording of people's actions with interpretation of their behaviour. McDonald (2005) described the benefit of 'shadowing' for its ability to examine individuals holistically. It has the advantage of soliciting not just their opinions or behaviour, but both of these concurrently. The observation process allows the researcher to go beyond self-interpretations of attitudes and behaviours towards an evaluation of actions in practice (Gray, 2012).

Non-participant observation techniques were employed during the observations of leaders. To build trust with the leader, video recording was done using a camera mounted on a small tripod to facilitate manoeuvrability with the recording monitored on a camera LCD screen to obviate apprehension. The researcher maintained a distance of 2 to 3 metres from the CL. This enabled the researcher to be within earshot of the CL yet provided the CL enough personal space for comfort. As this method only captures the events of one day, the reliability of the events needed to be checked. The researcher followed the advice of McKechnie (2000), who suggests asking participants to discuss how 'normal' their day had been. The researcher did indeed act on this guidance, employing this question as an 'opener' during the follow-up interview session.

4.11 Document analysis

Four policy documents related to leadership were selected for analysis. All the documents were sourced online except for the Quality Rating Scale (QRS). The QRS booklet was obtained from a colleague who managed a centre. The documents represented primary policy sources that would reflect formal perspectives on leadership. Scott (1990) cautions that these documents should not be regarded as objective accounts and should be examined in the context of other sources. Consequently, a selection of documents from a range of sources was chosen. The documents used were:

1. SPARK Quality Rating Scale (QRS)
2. Continuing Professional Development Framework (CPDFw)
3. Skills Framework for Early Childhood Care and Education - Skills Standards for Leaders (SFw-SSL)
4. Early Childhood Development Centre Act (ECDC Act)

The documents addressed leadership from the viewpoint of quality accreditation, professional development, leadership training, competency framework and legal texts. The QRS, ADECL and ECDC Act were updated versions of former policy documents, but the latest versions were used in the analysis. Previous versions were used for reference and comparison. More importantly, the reliability of these texts was an important consideration in selecting documentation (Fitzgerald, 2007; Bush, 2012). The researcher noted that the concept of reliability could be problematic in interpretive research (Bush, 2012). Nevertheless, the notion of ‘trustworthiness’ of data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) was considered at length in the selection process aside from its authenticity, credibility, representativeness and meaning (Scott, 1990). Several critical friends with a longstanding experience in the ECCE sector were consulted before the final selection of documents was made.

4.12 Visual method

Question 19 of the survey questionnaire offered participants the opportunity to respond using text or visual images. This was considered appropriate to better capture some of the ideas that might have been difficult to express in words. Prosser (2011) discussed the benefits of engaging visual methods particularly in the case of less articulate respondents. The visual method is employed in this survey as a supplementary tool and has the potential to improve the quality and trustworthiness of data by drawing on the participant’s resourcefulness and ingenuity (Prosser, 2011). According to Gauntlett (2007), a visual response enables participants to ‘present information, ideas or feelings simultaneously without the material being forced into an order or hierarchy’. He adds that language may be needed to explain the visual, but the image remains the primary element. Visuals can show the relationships between parts most effectively (Gauntlett, 2007, p. 15). The use of images is also related to metaphors that can help ‘detect tacit information in individuals’ narratives’ (Steger, 2007). This method has been used by Jorde-Bloom (1998) in her study of early childhood directors’ career cycles and by Argyropoulou and Hatira (2014) in their study of perceptions of leadership roles and responsibilities. This section of the study builds on these previous works, which provides rich data for triangulation with the interview responses.

4.13 Data analysis

The data analysis adopts a multi-dimensional approach to capture the rich data emerging from the mixed method design. The questions from Phase 1 survey generated a small amount of data related to participants’ profile. The data sets of

leaders and teachers were analysed to derive frequencies and explore relationships. The open-ended questions were analysed using content analysis to identify any emerging themes and issues (Cohen et al., 2003). The drawings and symbols were coded into a themes category. These themes were then compared with the themes that emerged from the interviews. As this was the first time the researcher had undertaken visual coding techniques, a leadership researcher friend helped to check the themes for consistency and validity. Both researchers took a day to code the drawings using an inter-coder agreement (Creswell, 2009).

The data from Phase 2a and Phase 2b was voluminous and primarily qualitative which took a considerable amount of time to analyse. To facilitate the process, the researcher familiarised herself with several coding methods suggested by Saldana (2016). Several consultations were made with the researcher's supervisors before deciding on a method that would be manageable and suited the researcher's abilities. Greater detail of the analysis process will be discussed in the respective chapters for each data collection method.

4.14 The role of the researcher

The researcher is considered an instrument of data collection in qualitative studies (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). To support the study's credibility, it is important to address issues of bias, assumptions, experience, expectations and ethics that may inform or influence the processes involved in this research (Greenbank, 2003). In a constructivist paradigm, researchers recognise that their own backgrounds shape their interpretations. They position themselves in the research to acknowledge how their interpretation flows from their own personal, cultural, and historical experiences (Creswell, 2005). This acknowledgement involves reflexivity and a process of critical self-reflection as a researcher (Lincoln & Guba, 2000).

The researcher is undertaking this study as a lecturer in early childhood education in Singapore, having worked in this field for two decades. The interest in leadership research emerged after leading students in the Diploma in Leadership module and the realisation that little was known about the field of early childhood leadership. The researcher has developed a strong network in the field and recognises that power relations issues may exist. To reduce the effects of biases, the researcher undertook the study on a full-time basis and was not involved in any teaching work during the period of data collection. However, the researcher's role and network also offered an advantage, as it facilitated access to organisations and personnel who would otherwise be difficult to reach for a novice in the field.

According to Strauss and Corbin (1998), it is inevitable that the researchers will bring their background of professional and disciplinary knowledge and experience to the inquiry. The qualitative researcher is likely to spend extended time on site and is in personal contact with the case's activities and operations (Stake, 2000). As such, the researcher had a clear view of her role and took care to manage herself as a professional researcher during her interactions. Through the research journal and during data analysis, the researcher exercised reflexivity and sought to note the assumptions that may have influenced any response.

4.15 Reliability, validity and trustworthiness

Reliability refers to the extent to which the scores produced by a particular measurement procedure are consistent and reproducible whilst validity denotes the extent to which inferences can be accurately made based on test scores or other measures (Plano Clark & Ivankova, 2015). Reliability is often improved by triangulation; in this case, data and methodological triangulation have been employed across the research phases (Denzin, 1989). Bush (2012) argued that pilot testing is one way of assessing reliability. This was achieved by pilot testing all instruments used such as questionnaires and interview protocols.

Johnson and Christensen (2000) describe valid research as that which is plausible, credible and, therefore, trustworthy. As much as possible, opportunities were created for participants to elaborate on their answers during the interviews. In the questionnaire, a 'catch-all' question was included at the end of the closed questions to ensure participants were free to offer responses they considered relevant. The interview protocol also included open questions and participants were offered the choice to refuse an answer.

As a novice in mixed-methods, the researcher employed the use of both a 'friendly stranger' and a 'critical friend' to provide guidance and alert the researcher to her blind spots (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Costa & Kallick, 1993). This came in the form of the researcher's two supervisors and a group of peers who were completing their doctoral studies.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) highlighted the importance of prolonged engagement. Data was collected through surveys and interviews within the first two years of doctoral study. Due to the researcher's personal circumstance, a more extended time period was devoted to the data analysis phase than expected. This provided the researcher with the opportunity to fully immerse herself in the data sets and develop a depth of

understanding. The engagement also enabled the researcher to provide detailed descriptions (Cohen et al., 2011) that were important for exploratory research such as this.

4.16 Ethical issues

This research adheres to all ethical guidelines following the British Educational Research Association guidelines for educational research (2011), University of Warwick Research Code of Practice (2019) and British Psychological Society Code of Ethics (2014) and the Association of Early Childhood Educators (Singapore) (AECES, 2015). Additionally, all matters related to respect for participants' rights, dignity, privacy and confidentiality, consent, and protection was strictly upheld in the research process (Cohen et al., 2011). In line with the ethical guidance of the British Psychological Society, participants the researcher offered the choice for potential participants to be excluded at all data collection sites and all interviews were granted with written consent in advance from all stakeholders. Participants were made aware of the scope of the study and given time to read through all confidentiality and protection of anonymity documents before the commencement of the sessions. A clear explanation of anonymity and the use of audio/recording was also given where relevant. Participants were also informed of their right to withdraw at any point and interviewees of their right to amend their transcripts should they wish.

As the research obtained personal datasets of participants (age, race, educational qualification), participants were assured that personal identity markers would be used for general descriptive comparison and tracing to individuals would be difficult. This was particularly important in a small country such as Singapore where the community would be well-connected. The researcher also ensured that teachers felt comfortable providing perspectives about leadership. These conversations were organised in a private and enclosed room within the school where they would feel safe. At the beginning of the session, participants were reminded only to share information which they were comfortable with and not to name anyone they described in their sharing. During the elite interviews, extra time was spent to ensure anonymity was preserved and the locations of the interviews were determined by the participants.

In the management of the case studies, all teachers, CLs, senior leaders and elite interview participants were given an alphanumeric code for identification. Only the researcher has the codes for the identification of the participants. The anonymity of the participants was also protected in the case study write up to protect the identity of the preschools and the participants.

4.17 Conclusion

This chapter presented the researcher's philosophical approach and an overview of the research design and methods adopted in the study. It describes the relevance of the mixed methods approach to address the research questions and outlines the integration method for data analysis. The researcher adopted Denzin and Lincoln's (2003) idea of a 'bricolage' when making decisions based on a wealth of data collected through a variety of approaches. This meant deliberate, critical choices about the meanings and values of the data were made that would best contribute to the study. Nevertheless, the reliability, validity and trustworthiness of the research and its ethical considerations remained a fundamental factor in choosing appropriate tools and techniques.

Chapter 5 – Questionnaire

5.1 Introduction

The questionnaire survey sought to understand EC leadership views from the perspective of EC teachers and EC leaders. The questionnaire items were adapted from an established survey from an ESRC study of English early years leaders (Aubrey, et al., 2006). This survey's findings will help the understanding of the context of practice and policy text production of early childhood leadership as conceptualised by Bowe et al. (1992).

The survey aims to address the following questions:

1. What is the policy-to-practice context to EC leadership in Singapore?
2. What are the views, understandings and beliefs about early childhood leadership of a range of stakeholders?
3. What are the reported early childhood practices and experiences of early childhood leaders?
4. What does policy require of early childhood leaders in Singapore in terms of implementation?

5.2 Methods

5.2.1 Participants

Paper questionnaires were distributed to teachers and leaders attending leadership courses held at two early childhood training institutes in Singapore. This method ensured a high response rate and, at the same time, a representative sample of participants from various preschool settings and with a diversity of backgrounds.

5.2.2 Materials

The questionnaire was divided into four main sections. Section 1 required respondents to describe their personal and professional backgrounds followed by Section 2, which focused on their perspectives of leadership characteristics. Section 3 required respondents to identify leadership challenges while Section 4 featured questions that sought to address leadership in practice. To ensure that the questionnaire could be completed within a limit of twenty minutes, the questions adopted a mix of Likert scale, ranked response, and minimized open-ended answers. The draft questionnaire was piloted with the help of four friends who were teachers

and leaders in Singapore, with additional input from two supervisors and a fellow leadership researcher from the UK. Upon their recommendations, the final survey was shortened to twenty questions (see Appendix 1). An overview of the survey and its relevance to the study is shown in Table 5.1:

Table 5.1: Survey content overview

Section	Content areas	Relevance to Bowe et al., (1992) model (see Figure 4.1)
1	BACKGROUND INFORMATION <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Age • Race • Gender • Early childhood qualifications • Other related qualifications • Duration of whole working experience • Duration of employment in the current centre • Current work position • Type of centre 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Context of practice
2	LEADERSHIP CHARACTERISTICS <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify personal traits of an excellent early childhood leader • Identify essential roles of an early childhood leader • Factors which contribute to effective early childhood leadership 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Context of influence • Context of practice
3	LEADERSHIP CHALLENGES <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify five leadership work challenges in the current centre 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Context of practice
4	LEADERSHIP IN PRACTICE <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify five critical practices of early childhood leaders • Provide examples of effective and ineffective leaders • Views on policy and the work of early childhood leaders • Representation of leadership in a chosen form by the respondent • Final thoughts on leadership 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Context of practice • Context of policy text production

5.3 Procedure

In terms of disseminating the questionnaire, an email list was compiled, which included contact details of four training agencies and five large childcare operators. An introductory email was sent, requesting access to teachers and leaders in the organisation, with a research study pamphlet attached (see Appendix 2). Two training agencies and two early childhood organisations returned positive responses and in the subsequent weeks, logistical arrangements were made with key contacts in each organisation. The researcher conducted the questionnaire session at the appointed times scheduled by the organisations. In total, 258 respondents completed the questionnaire.

5.4 Analysis

The responses were classified into ‘Teacher’, and ‘Leader’ sets based on the description of each respondent’s current work position. In order to sort through an amalgam of work titles, the researcher worked with a critical friend with extensive ground experience to help distinguish and classify whichever roles appeared ambiguous. The data was keyed into a Microsoft Excel worksheet and later converted into graphs and tables for comparison. Briggs et al. (2012) indicated that the decision to use descriptive or inferential statistics depended on the nature of the research questions. The exploratory approach of this research meant that qualitative rather than quantitative data was prioritised in the sampling phase. As the quantitative data was not extensive, descriptive statistics was used to organize the data.

To facilitate the process of analysis, reference was made to the list of leader personal characteristics by Aubrey (2010, p.29), the tree typology of Moyles and Yates (2004, p.21) and the leadership typology of Rodd (2006, p.54) specifically to guide the coding process. In cases where several characteristics were specified in a sentence, the first trait listed was used to reflect the respondent’s ‘top of mind’ thinking

Textual analysis was used to analyse open response questions as this would allow meaningful interpretation of phrases and sentences. A process of reduction followed where phrases were converted into keywords, which were then verified with a fellow doctoral research colleague for reliability. Thereafter, a round of content analysis was conducted. Using Miles and Huberman’s (1994) model of qualitative data analysis, this was assembled into a matrix from which emergent themes were derived.

In the analysis of the ranked questions, a weighted mean ranking method was used. Each assigned rank was given a score in relation to its position. As such, an assigned rank of 1 was given a score of 1. The weighted total was calculated, and a weighted mean and median score was derived and used in the analysis and interpretation. By providing a comparison of the mean and median scores, a more accurate understanding of the variability within the distribution was possible (Framekel et al., 2015).

For the visual responses to Question 19, the first stage encompassed separating responses into ‘picture only’, ‘text only’ and ‘picture and text’ categories. As metaphor was used here as a tool of expression of beliefs (Monk, 2007), the image was prioritised over text in cases of ‘picture and text’ responses. Following on from this, each category was further subdivided into images such as animal, diagram,

expression, flora, journey, objects, people, and relationship. Content analysis was conducted on the images and a list of themes was subsequently derived.

5.5 Participant profile results

5.5.1 Respondent background

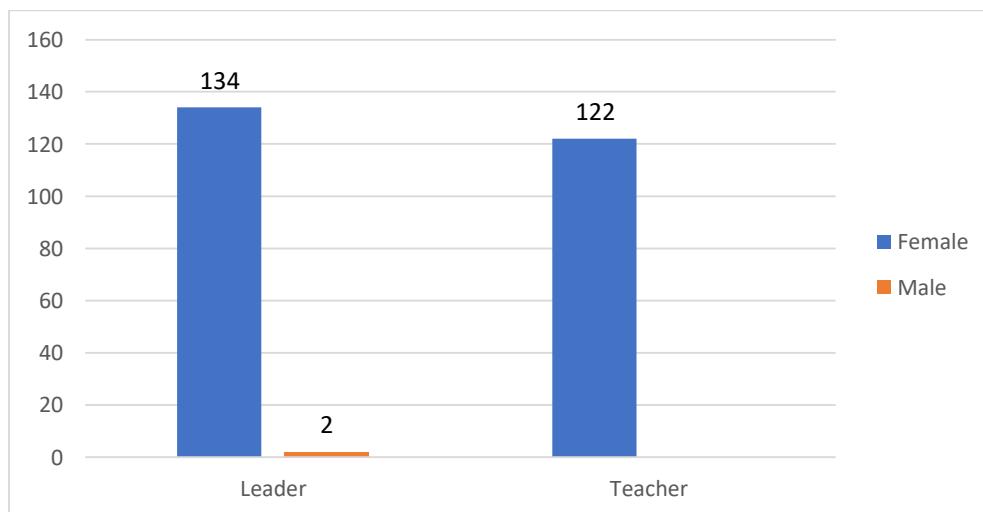
The wide variety of job titles that the respondents provided proved problematic for sorting. It was a fairly straightforward process for 'Teacher' positions, but the 'Leader' titles varied considerably. In response to this, a working definition was derived with input from three professional colleagues. In this survey, leaders were considered as stakeholders with a primarily non-teaching role, whose job involved leading educators in their work tasks. It was acknowledged that while some of the positions could be based in one centre, other leadership roles could involve cross-centre work, or be sited at the company headquarters.

Table 5.2: Category of leadership roles

Leadership Role	Range of titles used within the industry
Centre-based leaders	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Principal• Senior Teacher• Acting Principal• Supervisor• Assistant Supervisor• Centre-based Administrator• Centre Manager• Head of Centre• Head Teacher• Vice Principal
Non-Centre based leaders	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Cluster Director• Curriculum Developer• Director• Executive Principal• Head of Early Childhood• Head of Programme Quality• Lecturer• Managing Director• Training Developer

Figure 5.1 shows a balance of leader and teacher participants among the 258 survey respondents. Some 134 (52%) of respondents were female leaders, while two were male leaders – a ratio that accurately reflects the female-dominated nature of the profession. There was a total of 122 (47%) teachers, and all were female. With an estimated 16,000 practitioners and 1,700 centres in 2016 (Goy, 2017), this survey nevertheless represented less than 2% of the ECCE community.

Figure 5.1: Composition of leader and teacher respondents



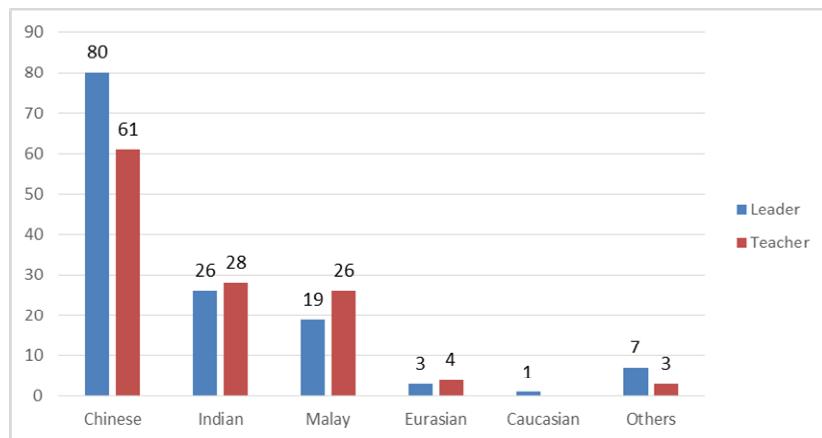
5.5.2 Ethnic background

The ethnic backgrounds of the leaders shown in Figure 5.2 were as follows: 80 (60%) were Chinese, 26 (19%) were of Indian origin, 19 (14%) were Malay, 3 (2%) were Eurasians, 1 (0.7%) was Caucasian, and 7 (5%) classified themselves as Others (Filipino, Sikh, Sri Lankan).

Among the teachers, 61 (50%) were Chinese, 28 (22%) were Indian, 26 (21%) were Malay, 4 (3%) were Eurasian, and 3 teachers (2.5%) considered themselves as Others (Filipino, Pakistani).

In practice, the Eurasian and Caucasian races would usually be classified under the 'Others' group. The responses reflect a diversity of non-Singaporean cultures among the respondents although the general respondent population is relatively representative of the actual ethnic distribution in Singapore as a whole, consisting of 74% Chinese, 13% Malay, 9% Indians and 3% Others (Singapore Department of Statistics, 2017).

Figure 5.2: Ethnic background of respondents



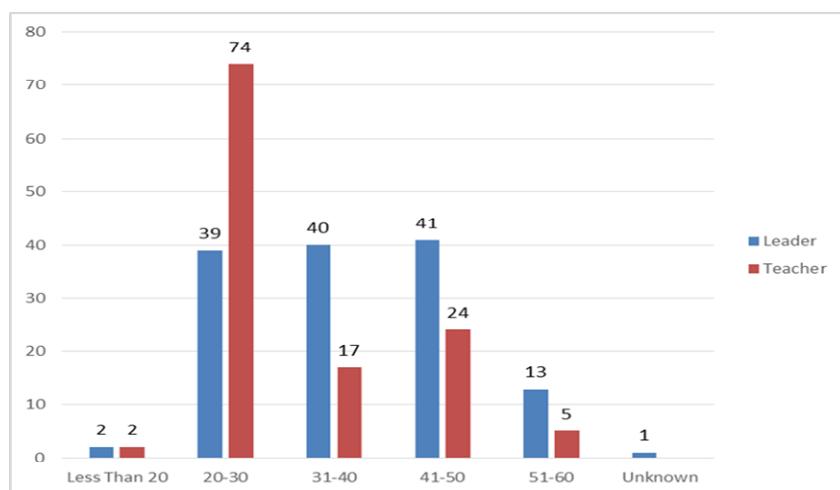
5.5.3 Age profiles

The leader group comprised 39 (29%) respondents, aged between 20 and 30, 40 (30%) were 31 to 40, 41 (30%) were 41 to 50, and 13 (9.7%) were 51 to 60.

Among the teacher group, 74 (61%) were aged 20 to 30, 17 (14%) were 31 to 40, 24 (20%) were 41 to 50 years, and 5 (4%) were in the 5 to 60 age range.

Overall, the distribution of leaders across the 20 to 50 age range was relatively even compared to the teacher population. There was a significantly high preponderance of young teachers among the respondents in this study as shown in Figure 5.3:

Figure 5.3: Age distribution of respondents



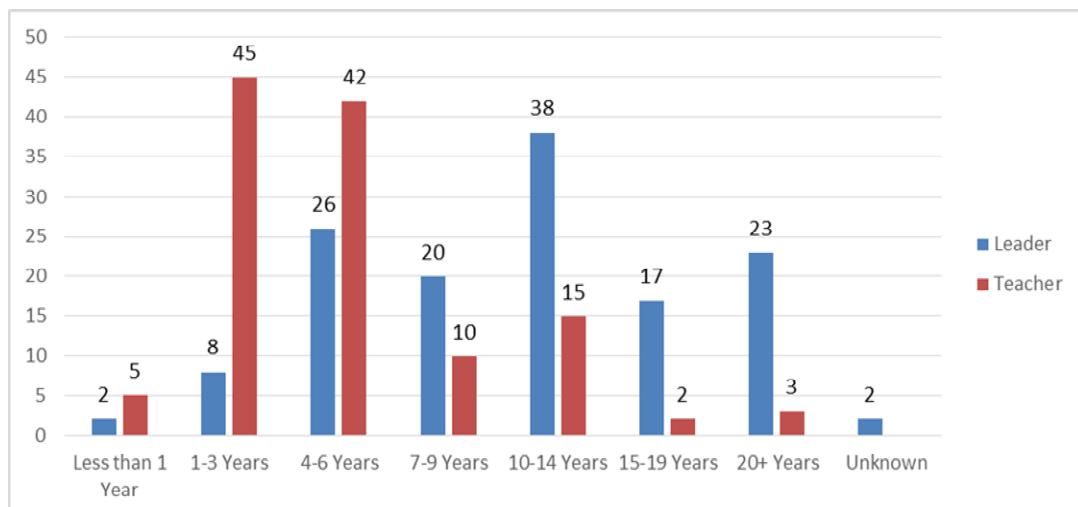
5.5.4 Working experience of respondents

Respondents were asked to state the years of experience they had in the early childhood field. For the leaders, 8 (6%) had less than three years of experience, 26 (19%) had 4 to 6 years, 20 (15%) possessed 7 to 9 years' experience, 38 (28%) had

10 to 14 years, 17 (13%) had 15 to 19 years, and 23 (17%) counted more than 20 years of experience. Two leaders did not complete this question. This would suggest that a sizeable number of leaders were relatively inexperienced, as about 40% of them had moved into leadership roles after being in the industry for less than nine years.

In comparison 45 (37%) teachers had 1 to 3 years of experience, 42 (35%) had 4 to 6 years, 10 (8.2%) had 7 to 9 years, 15 (2.2%) had 10 to 14 years, 2 (1.6%) had 15 to 19 years, and 3 (2.5%) had taught for 20 years or more. The largest group of teacher respondents had less than three years of experience, which implies that most of the teacher respondents were young, and as such, novice teachers as shown in Figure 5.4:

Figure 5.4: Working experience of respondents in the early childhood field



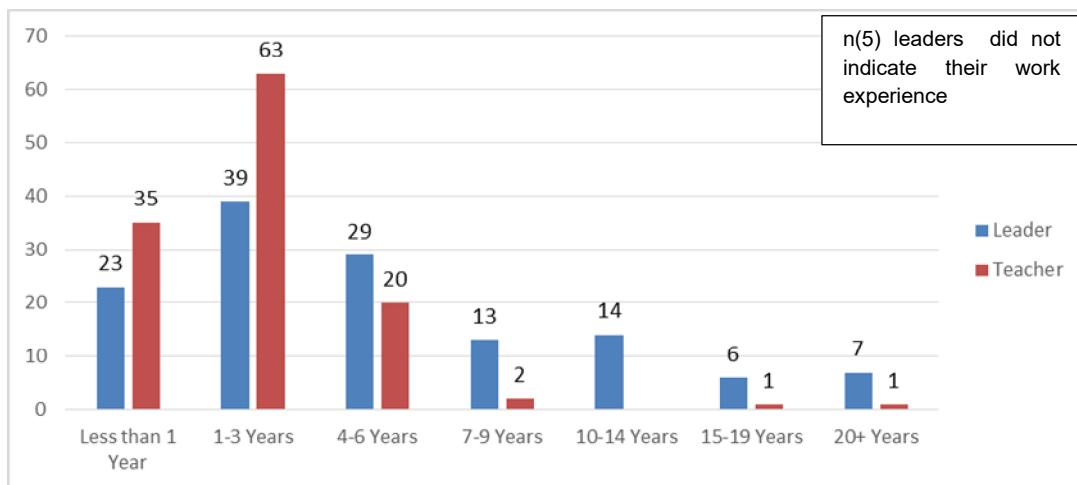
5.5.5 Experience in the current centre

Among the leader respondents, 23 (17%) had worked in the current centre for less than one year, 39 (29%) has worked in the centre between 1 to 3 years, 29 (21%) were employed in the centre for 4 to 6 years, 13 (10%) worked in the same centre for 7 to 9 years, and 27 (20%) had experience in the centre of 10 years or more. Some 5 (4%) failed to indicate their years of experience. The group consisted of a good mix of leaders with varying levels of experiences in their current centre.

Of the teacher respondents, 35 (29%) worked in the centre for less than a year, 63 (52%) had worked for 1 to 3 years, 20 (16%) for 4 to 6 years, 2 (2%) for 7 to 9 years, and 2 (2%) had worked in the centre for more than 10 years. Most of the respondents had been working in their existing centre for six years or less with the largest group

having worked there for less than three years. The results suggest that the respondents may be relatively new to their organisation (see Figure 5.5).

Figure 5.5: Working experience of respondents in the current centre

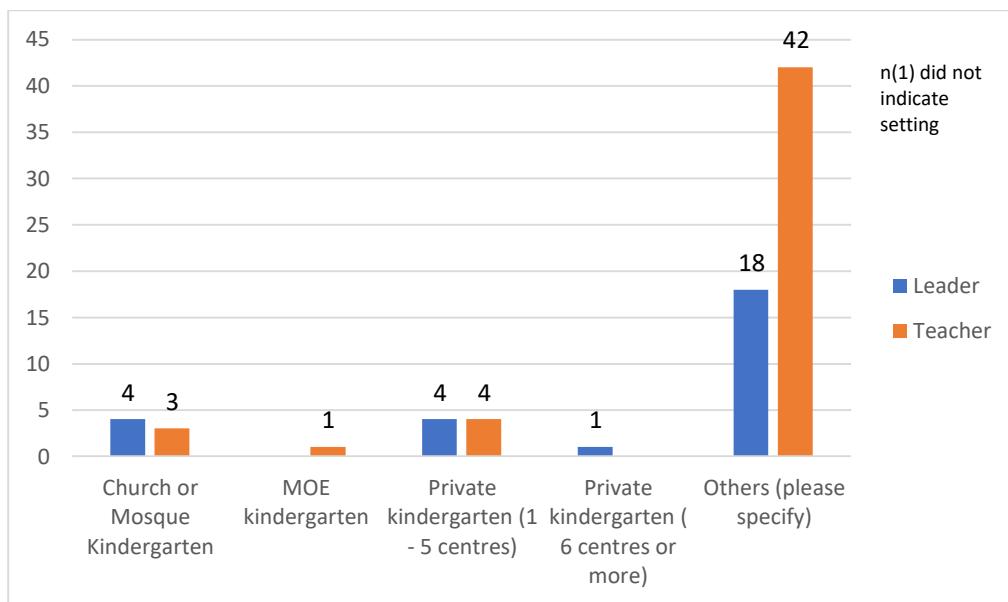


5.5.6 Type of early childhood setting

Some 27 (20%) of the leaders worked in a kindergarten setting, of which 4 (3%) worked in a faith-based setting, 4 (3%) worked in a private kindergarten with 1 to 5 centres, 1 (0.75%) leader worked in an organisation with six or more centres and 18 (13%) worked in other types of kindergarten, mainly AOP settings. One respondent did not identify the setting in which she worked.

In comparison, 3 (2.5%) teachers worked in a faith-based setting, 1 (0.8%) worked in an MOE kindergarten, 4 (3.3%) were employees of a private kindergarten, and 42 (34.5%) worked in AOP kindergartens. This shows that practitioners from a variety of setting types were represented, but that the majority worked in AOP kindergartens as shown in Figure 5.6.

Figure 5.6: Number of respondents from kindergarten settings

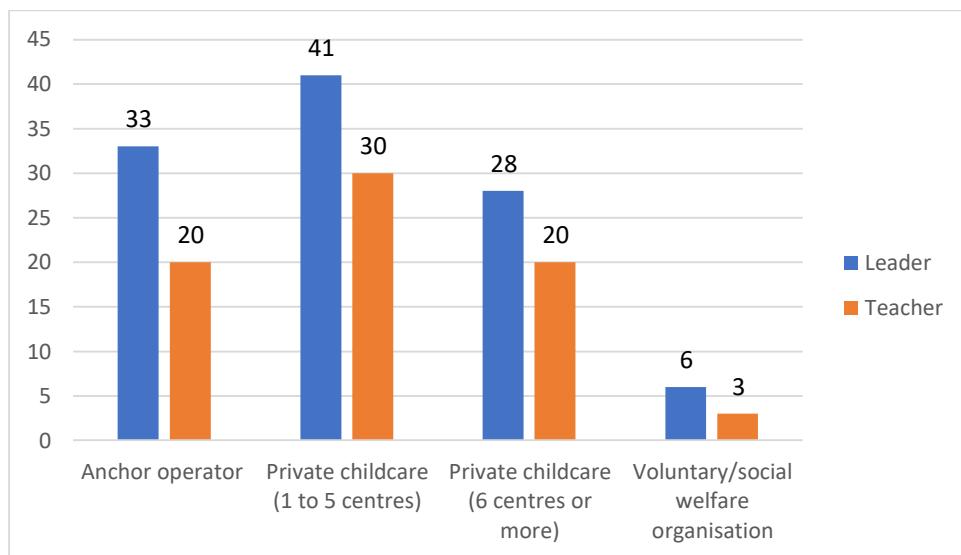


As many as 108 (79%) of the leaders worked in childcare settings, 33 (24%) leaders worked in anchor operator childcare, 41 (30%) were in private childcare with 1 to 5 centres, 28 (26%) worked in private childcare with six or more centres, and 6 (4%) led childcare setups of voluntary welfare organisations.

The teachers who participated consisted of 20 (16%) from Anchor Operator centres, 30 (26%) came from small private childcare settings of 1 to 5 centres, 20 (16%) were teachers who worked in organisations with six or more centres whilst 3 (2.5%) were in voluntary welfare organisations.

Overall, there was a better representation of respondents from different operational settings from the childcare group than from the kindergarten group. In the latter, there was a larger representation of respondents from AOP settings. In comparison, most of the childcare respondents worked in privately run centres as shown in Figure 5.7:

Figure 5.7: Number of respondents from childcare settings.

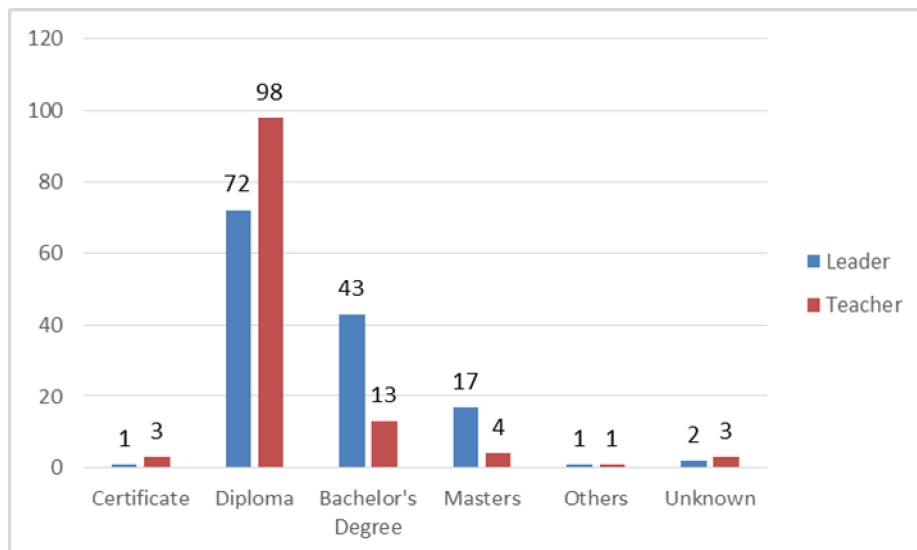


5.5.7 Early childhood qualifications

The respondents possessed a range of professional qualifications in early childhood education (see Figure 5.8). Among the leaders, 72 (53%) had a Diploma qualification, 43 (32%) had a degree qualification and 17 (13%) had a Master degree qualification.

Among the teachers, 98 (80%) had a Diploma, 13 (11%) had a degree, and 4 (3%) had a Master level qualification. The leaders possessed higher post-Diploma qualifications than the teachers.

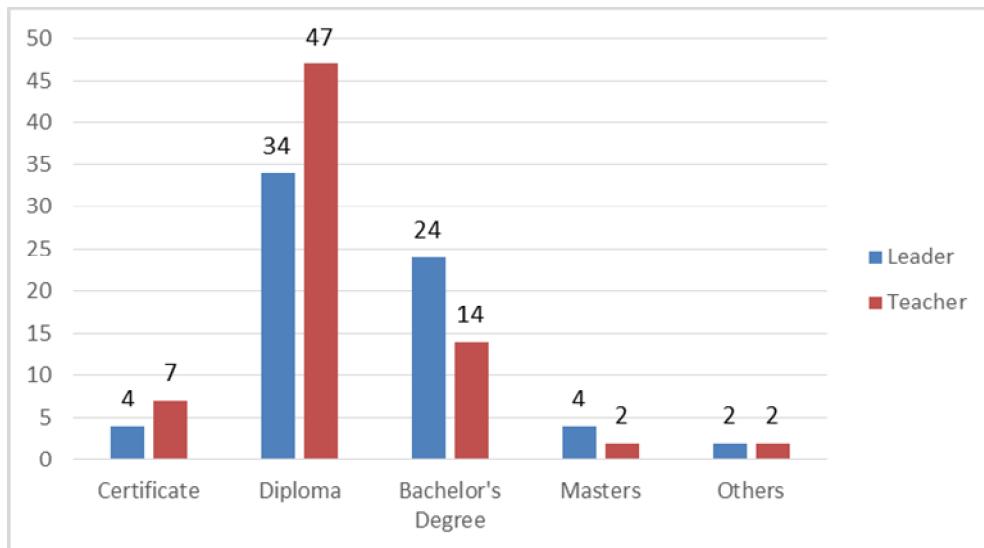
Figure 5.8: Early childhood education qualifications of respondents



Respondents also provided information on their academic qualifications in fields other than early childhood education (see Figure 5.9). The common disciplines included business, marketing, management, information technology, counselling and

engineering. An almost equal 72 (59%) of teachers possessed non-ECCE qualifications as against 68 (50%) who had non-ECCE qualifications, which would seem to imply that some proportion of the respondents may be exposed to work in other non-ECCE sectors before joining the early childhood profession.

Figure 5.9: Non-early childhood education qualifications of respondents



5.6 Leadership characteristics results

5.6.1 Traits of an early childhood leader.

In this section, respondents were asked to name three personal traits of ‘a good early childhood leader’. The open-ended nature of the question meant that a wide range of responses was received. Some of the answers showed confusion between the ‘traits’ and ‘tasks’ of a leader and the responses also ranged from one-word answers to full sentences. This list was narrowed to 136 traits, and a frequency count was conducted for each keyword, as shown in Table 5.3. Keywords with counts of four or less were omitted from the table.

Table 5.3: Overall frequency count for traits of leaders

Count	30 and above	20 to 29	10 to 19	5 to 9
TRAITS	Communicator (34) Listener (33) Understanding (31)	Fair (28) Patient (24) Flexible (23) Knowledgeable (23) Responsible (22) Visionary (21) Passionate (20) Integrity (20)	Role model (18) Positive (17) Open-minded (17) Caring (16) Decisive (16) Empathetic (15) Team player (14) People-oriented (14) Approachable (13) Committed (10) Humble (10) Honest (10) Supportive (10)	Compassionate (9) Trustworthy (8) Resilient (8) Motivator (8) Problem solver (7) Confident (7) Planner (7) Mentor (7) Loving (6) Assertive (6) Multi-tasker (6) Relational (6) Organised (6) Learner (5) Hardworking (5) Dedicated (5) Risk-taker (5)

The frequency count serves as a useful indicator of preferred traits. The results suggest that personal and professional traits were valued in a leader. Higher counts reflect traits that were linked to a leader's ability to connect and relate to others whereas traits with lower counts seem to relate to work effectiveness. The traits were re-organised to explore a comparison between teachers' and leaders' views using the top ten traits identified for each group.

Table 5.4 shows that five common traits emerged between the lists of two groups: 'understanding', 'fair', 'listener', 'communicator' and 'flexible', which suggest a preference by both leaders and teachers to engage in open conversation and dialogue in leadership practice.

At the same time, slight differences were noted in the traits identified by teachers and leaders. Teachers express the need for leaders who are knowledgeable in their work. On the other hand, leaders value the moral and visionary aspects of their work and have higher leadership expectations. These traits may reflect the groups' specific needs and the traits that would perhaps be useful for their own roles.

Table 5.4: Top ten traits of a good leader

Teachers' view			Leaders' view		Combined View	
	Trait	Count	Trait	Count	Trait	Count
1	Knowledgeable	18 (13%)	Communicator	21 (15%)	Communicator	34 (13%)
2	Patient	16 (12%)		18 (13%)	Listener	33 (13%)
3	<u>Understanding</u>	15 (11%)		16 (12%)	Understanding	31 (12%)
4	Fair	15 (11%)		15 (12%)	Fair	28 (11%)
5	Listener	15 (11%)		14 (11%)	Patient	24 (9%)
6	Communicator	13 (10%)		14 (11%)	Flexible	23 (9%)
7	Flexible	12 (9%)		14 (11%)	Knowledgeable	23 (9%)
8	Passionate	12 (9%)		12 (10%)	Responsible	22 (9%)
9	<u>Open-minded</u>	11 (8%)		11 (8%)	Visionary	21 (8%)
10	<u>People-oriented</u>	9 (7%)		10 (8%)	Passionate	20 (8%)

Note: Underlined traits were not in the top 10 of the general list

5.6.2 Roles of an early childhood leader

In this section, the participants were asked to identify the three most important roles of an early childhood leader, which were specified in the question as 'tasks of an early childhood leader' to provide a clear distinction from the previous question on traits. A total of 400 roles were identified from the survey. These were condensed into units of meaning, coded and then grouped into 11 emerging themes related to leadership roles. The list of roles and functions of early childhood leaders (Aubrey, 2010) and the administration, management and leadership typology by Ebbeck and Waniganayake (2003) were used as a guide to categorise the responses. The 11 themes in Table 5.5 show that leadership is associated with a wide range of roles (Moyles, 2006; Rodd, 2013; Aubrey, 2011).

'Performance and achievement role' refers to their ability to attain the centre's strategic and organisational goals, including tasks related to achieving the organisation's vision and mission, attaining quality, and setting a direction for teaching and learning. 'Administrative & Operational role' refers to general tasks related to maintaining the operations and day-to-day running of the centre. 'Curriculum & Learning Role' describes exercising pedagogical leadership in supporting teaching and learning activities. The 'Career Development Role' describes the leader's work in developing their staff's professional skills and growth. These roles can be described

as significant work roles with visible outcomes that may reflect professional competency and effectiveness.

In comparison, the remaining roles refer to the process dimensions of a leader's work, which contribute to the workplace's quality of relationships. 'Communication and Relations Role' refers to tasks related to communicate and maintain relations with stakeholders. This may involve relationship building, networking and providing support. An 'Advocacy Role' requires advocating for the rights of parents, teachers, and children whilst the 'Team Builder Role' describes the ability to create a team identity among the staff and build group dynamics. Leaders are also expected to support, guide and mentor staff in the 'The Facilitative Role'. At a higher level, this can influence staff in a profound manner, in a 'Transformational role' where they are considered role models and inspire others. Participants also included roles that addressed sustainability and value, in their 'Welfare & Wellbeing Role' and 'Moral and Ethical Role'. The list of roles reveals that ECCE practitioners harbour a wide range of effective and affective leadership expectations. The responses also allude to expectations that leaders perform tasks that not only demonstrate visible outcomes but also hold responsibility for their impact on the social and emotional state of the teachers.

Table 5.5: Themes for the roles of an early childhood leader

	Emerging Themes	Code	A sample of condensed units of meaning
1	Performance & Achievement Role	P	<i>Achieve goals, Custodial care, Decision maker, Delegate role, Delegate tasks, Ensure centre quality, Guide and unite staff mission, Monitor practice, Mould children into desirable citizens, Buy into mission, vision and values, Plan SPARK and licensing, Quality maintenance, Strategic leadership, Update on policies and requirements</i>
2	Facilitative Role	F	<i>Acknowledge staff and children's work, Advisor, Appraiser, Coach, Facilitator, Facilitate children, Guide staff and teachers, Help practice, Nurture children, Resist pressure from management, Supervise staff, Support improvement, Taking suggestions for improvement, Trainer, Work with teachers in classroom observations</i>
3	Administrative & Operational Role	O	<i>Administration matter, Liasise with the ministry, Manage changes, Manage duties, Operations manager, Partner with key players, People manager, Plan daily activities, Resource manager, Smooth operations, Strengthen administration, Time manager, Understand work of the school</i>
4	Communication and Relations Role	CY	<i>Able to communicate with the community, Bridge staff and management, Communicate with parents and staff, Manage parents and staff, Mediator, Open communication, Organise parent involvement, Public relations, Relate to people, Work with parents</i>
5	Transformational Role	TF	<i>Be a role model, Changemaker, Influence staff for change, Influence teachers, Inspire, Lead with heart, Leader not a manager, Manage and influence followers, Praise, Role model, A role model</i>
6	Curriculum & Learning Role	C	<i>Advocate learning, Best practice manager, Curriculum guide, Knowledge of DAP, Lead pedagogy, Learning facilitator, Lesson planner, Manage teaching and learning, Monitor children, Pedagogical Leader, Reflect</i>
7	Welfare & Well-being Role	W	<i>Balance teacher needs, Care for children, Care for staff, Care for staff welfare, Caretaker, Listen, Listen and counsel, Listen well, Maintain a happy work environment, Manage staff welfare and development, Manage centre staff well-being, Understand and facilitate staff</i>
8	Moral and Ethical Role	M	<i>Be fair, Be humane, Build children's character, Do the right things, Fair to teachers and children, Firm, Good attitude, Honesty, Integrity, Lead fairly, Passionate, Positive Leader, Reflective, Responsible, Teacher through service, Values</i>
9	Team Builder Role	TB	<i>Analyse team dynamics, Be a good team leader and understand their needs, Be grounded, Build teamwork, Communicate and unite team, Elevate team ability, Involved on the ground, Keep harmony, Lead and unite, Team player, Unite teachers, Unite team, Work together</i>
10	Career Development Role	CD	<i>Assist teachers in career progression, Build staff capabilities, Develop professionalism, Manage CPD, Manage staff professional development, Monitors, Nurture leaders, Provide professional opportunities for teachers, Staff developer, Staff development</i>
11	Advocacy Role	AV	<i>Advocate for staff, parents and children, Advocate children and staff, Advocate for best practice, Advocate for staff and children, Advocate for staff, parents and children, Advocate rights of teacher, Mediator to higher management, Represent the school</i>

The views of the teachers and leaders were then compared for any nascent patterns (see Table 5.6). Interestingly, the top five and the bottom five leadership roles in each of the two groups were similar with slight variations evident only in terms of order.

'Performance and achievement' seemed to be a role that both groups considered highly important. It was also apparent that participants expected leaders to have professional competency and deliver outcomes inferring a pragmatic view of leadership. At the same time, the results showed a preference for a motivational and supportive leadership style with communication, transformation and facilitative roles in the top six.

Table 5.6: Comparison of Teacher and Leader perspectives on the roles of a leader

	Teacher views	%	Leader Views	%
1	Performance & Achievement	18.1%	Performance & Achievement	19.7%
2	Facilitative	14.5%	Facilitative	14.3%
3	Communication & Relations	13.1%	Administrative and Operational	13.3%
4	Administrative and Operational	11%	Transformational	12.5%
5	Transformational	9.8%	Communication & Relations	10.5%
6	Curriculum & Pedagogy	9.5%	Curriculum & Pedagogy	7.4%
7	Welfare & Well-being	8.6%	Welfare & Well Being	6.9%
8	Team Building	5.3%	Moral & Ethical	5.4%
9	Moral & Ethical	4.5%	Team Building	4.3%
10	Advocacy	3.3%	Career Development	3.3%
11	Career Development	2.4%	Advocacy	2.3%

5.6.3 Factors which contribute to effective leadership

In this question, the respondents were asked to rank seven items they considered as effective leadership traits (see Table 5.7). The results revealed 'upper-ranked' and 'lower-ranked' items. The upper-ranked factors, which reflected traits considered more important, showed that 'personal ethics and moral values' and 'attitude and adaptability' were highly regarded in both teacher and leader groups with 'knowledge of early childhood pedagogy' coming in as middle-ranked in both. Lower-ranked factors, which were traits regarded as not important for leaders were 'organisational and management, 'ability to communicate' and 'ability to relate to his/her staff'. For both teacher and leader groups, 'Academic and Professional qualifications' was considered the lowest indicator of effectiveness. The choice of the 'upper ranked' factors suggests that personal attributes and disposition were more highly regarded as indicators of effective leadership.

Table 5.7: Ratings of factors that affect effective leadership

	Leader		Teacher	
	Mean	Median	Mean	Median
1. Personal ethics and moral values	2.57	2	2.38	2
2. Attitude and adaptability	2.56	2	2.79	3
3. Knowledge of early childhood pedagogy	3.01	3	3.04	3
4. Organisational and management skills	3.19	3	3.13	3
5. Ability to communicate with clarity	3.18	3	3.23	3
6. Ability to relate to his/her staff	3.34	4	3.17	3
7. Academic and professional qualifications	3.32	5	3.6	4

5.7 Leadership challenges results

In this question, the participants were asked to identify what they considered to be a leadership work challenge for their current centre (see Table 5.8). Both groups ranked ‘Industry awards and benchmarks’ as the greatest challenge for them. Other factors that were considered to be a challenge included ‘Higher management pressures and directives’, ‘Staff turnover and recruitment’ as well as ‘Standard of teaching practice and curriculum quality’. The teachers ranked ‘Work environment and relationship with staff’ as a higher challenge than the leaders, who felt it was the lowest challenge. ‘Office administration and paperwork’ was considered a low challenge for both. ‘Staff training and professional development’ was a higher challenge for leaders than teachers.

Table 5.8: Ratings of leadership work challenges

	Leader		Teacher	
	Mean	Median	Mean	Median
1. Staff turnover and recruitment	2.42	2	2.53	2
2. Work environment and relationship with staff	3.23	3	2.83	3
3. Standard of teaching practice and curriculum quality	2.76	3	2.68	3
4. Office administration and paperwork	3.07	3	2.97	3
5. Parent partnership and community relations	2.91	3	2.96	3
6. Higher management pressures and directives	2.66	3	2.51	3
7. Centre resources and budget matters	2.87	3	2.7	3
8. Industry awards and benchmarks	2.39	2	2.42	2
9. Staff training and professional development	2.99	3	3	3

5.8 Leadership practice results

Participants were asked to rank the factors they felt leaders should demonstrate (see Table 5.9). Slight variations were observed in the responses between the two groups. In both cases the ability to have ‘visionary’ leadership and knowing how to ‘build a team’ ranked highly, though a little higher for leaders. Although ‘advocacy’ was not considered a priority in the leader’s role, it seems to be valued in practice. Task-driven practices such as ‘research’ support’, ‘administration’, ‘operations’ and ‘career’ support were less desired of leaders.

Table 5.9: Ratings of preferred leadership practices

	Leader		Teacher	
	Mean	Median	Mean	Median
1. Have a vision , is forward-thinking and takes risks	2.2	1	2.63	2
2. Build teamwork and shared values among staff	2.69	2	2.38	2
3. Advocate the rights of children and teachers	2.84	3	2.67	3
4. Bridge research and practice to improve learning and teaching	3.21	3	3.53	4
5. Prioritise efficiency of systems and operations	3.48	4	3.46	4
6. Enable teachers to progress in their career paths	3.58	4	3.48	4
7. Focus on administrative and financial management	4.19	5	4	4

*Key words in bold

5.8.1 Policy and the work of early childhood leaders

This section required participants to indicate their thoughts on the relationship between national policies and the work of early childhood leaders (see Table 5.10). There was little variation in the results as most selected ‘Agree’ as their answer for all the questions. Nevertheless, the open answer section provided insightful information on the respondent’s knowledge of policy.

Participants were asked to give an example of what they regarded as an early childhood education policy in Singapore, but the responses often referred to the subject matter of the policy rather than the policy itself. The common subjects associated with policy as identified by leader and teacher respondents were ‘centre qualifications’, ‘subsidy’ and ‘ratio of children’. Leaders, in particular, cited examples that related to ‘licensing’ while a large proportion of respondents from each group identified SPARK as a policy.

Responses also included inaccurate examples relating to their understanding of compulsory education or the curriculum framework. Participants exhibited a greater knowledge of those public policies that they were likely to be exposed to at work. Five of the leaders gave ‘unsure’ as an answer, and as many as 41 could not identify any example of a policy. In comparison, 10 teachers gave ‘unsure’ as their answer and a comparable 46 submitted a ‘nil’ response. These weak scores may suggest a lack of policy knowledge or a varied understanding of policy among teachers and leaders.

Table 5.10: Ratings of participant perspectives on leadership and policy

	Leader		Teacher	
	Mean	Median	Mean	Median
1. Early childhood leaders need to understand policy as part of their leadership role	1.56	2	1.7	2
2. National economic policies influence the goals and practices of early childhood centres in Singapore	1.9	2	1.86	2
3. Early childhood leaders have the power to influence policy at the centre level	2.28	2	2.2	2
4. Policies require interpretation by early childhood leaders before being implemented	1.85	2	1.93	2
5. Early childhood leaders are well informed of policies that affect their work	2.34	2	2.34	2

5.8.2 Images of leadership

This question required respondents to express what leadership looked like to them. The instruction suggested using quotes, diagrams, drawings, characters or symbols, and encouraged them to 'be creative' with their responses. The results were categorised as 'picture only', 'picture and text' or 'text only' responses (see Table 5.11). Some 21 respondents submitted a 'nil' return. The results of this question are as follows:

Table 5.11: Creative responses to leadership

Item category	Frequency	Description
Picture only	28 (11%)	Drawings only. No text provided.
Picture and text	121 (47%)	Drawings accompanied by text. Some text explaining the drawing, while others function as labels.
Text only	88 (34%)	Mostly quotes, lists or statements about leadership.
Nil returns	21 (8%)	-
Total		258

5.8.3 Content analysis of images

The visuals provide information that is distinct from other data gathered in the survey. As these visuals can be a useful supplementary tool for triangulation, the responses with images will be prioritised over the text to enable a focus on using visual methodology as a research tool for this section. As visual metaphors of leadership, they enable participants to articulate thoughts that would otherwise be a challenge to explain in words (Prosser, 2011). For this purpose, only the visual images will be discussed in detail. The responses of 'picture only' and 'picture and text' items were grouped for ease of reference. The images were coded, and seven themes emerged as seen in Table 5.12:

Table 5.12: Breakdown of visual and text responses

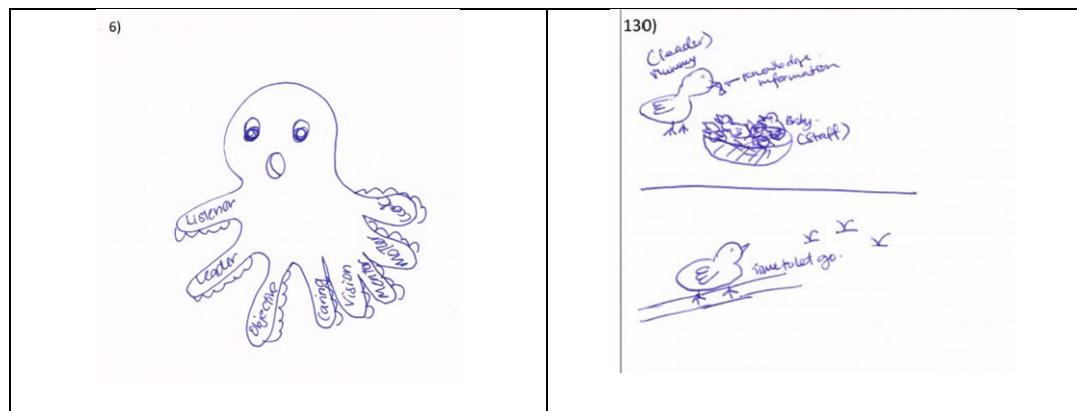
Categories of images	Frequency
Animals	9 (3.5%)
Diagram and figures	18 (7%)
Faces and expressions	6 (2%)
Flora	11 (4%)
Journey	8 (3%)
Objects	52 (20%)
People and relationship	45 (17.5%)
Text Only	88 (34%)

5.8.4 Images of animals

Seven of the animals drawn were of an octopus, and two were of birds (see Figure 5.10). In the octopus image, hats were drawn at the end of the tentacles to illustrate the idea of ‘wearing many hats’. Two other octopi had leadership dispositions labelled on each of the tentacles. The octopus images suggest the multiple roles that a leader has to juggle, and the varied skill sets required of the role.

One of the pictures drawn was of a bird in the form of a visual sequence, depicting a mother bird feeding her babies with ‘knowledge and information’. As a ‘mother bird’, the leader is looked upon as a nurturer whose task is to ‘grow’ those under his or her care before setting them free. The next picture showed the mother bird letting the birds fly away with the text ‘Time to let them go’. In the other bird picture, the leader is represented as the bird leading a flock of geese in flight. Leading the V-shaped formation, this suggests the clear direction and strong leadership of a team.

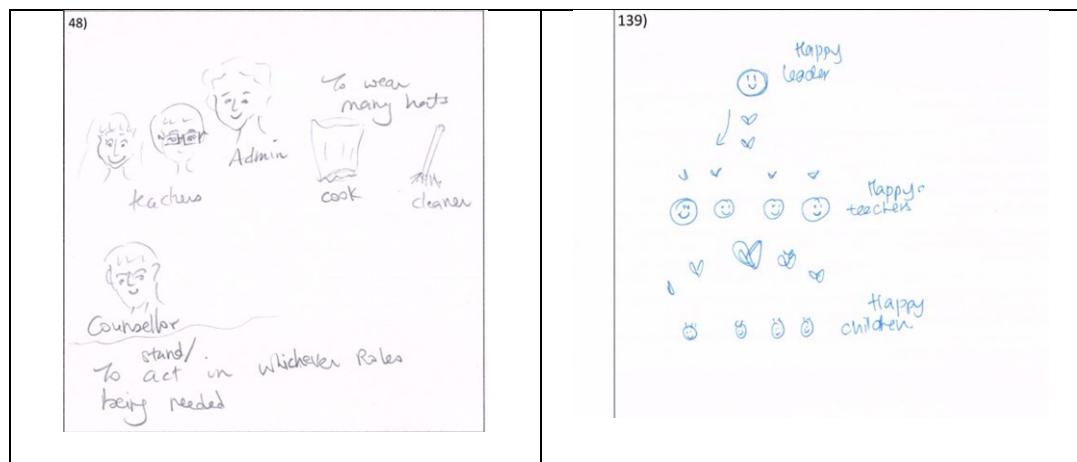
Figure 5.10: Example of animal images associated with leadership



5.8.5 Images of faces and expressions

This category featured drawings of faces and emoticon-like drawings (see Figure 5.11). Among the six images, three showed smiling and happy expressions of different stakeholders in a centre that may suggest the importance of connectivity between happy leaders, teachers and children. Two of the images showed different 'faces' of a person to depict the different roles a leader has to play. One picture suggested a less favourable perception of leadership – that of a face with 'devil' horns.

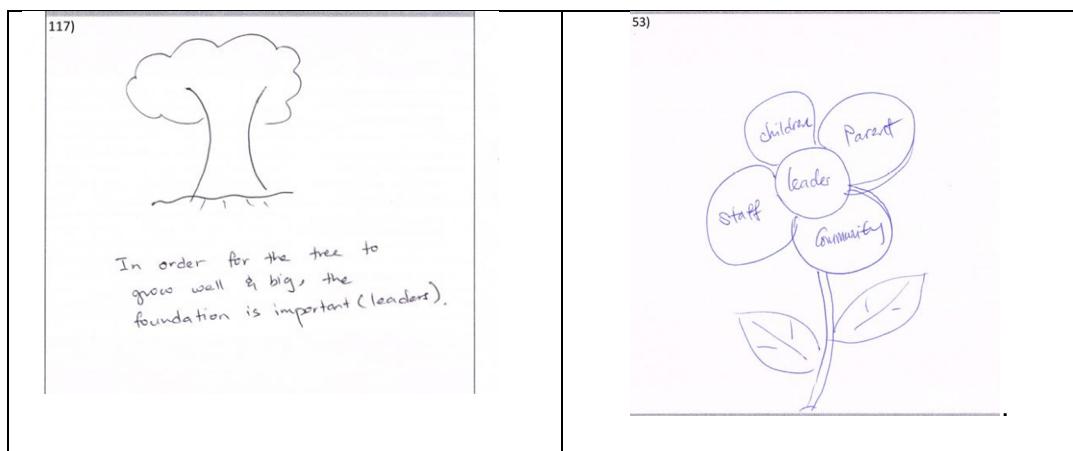
Figure 5.11: Example of faces and expressions associated with leadership



5.8.6 Images of flora

Eleven of the images drawn were flora- and nature-related. Five depicted trees and six were of flowers and plants. Three of the tree images had an accompanying text that emphasised the strength of the trees. In two of the examples, the tree symbolised the early childhood centre and described the leader and management as an essential foundation for it to grow. The flowers were often drawn with the leader positioned in the middle. The petals were labelled with the qualities of the leader in some, whilst others identified the stakeholders or roles of the leader. The images associated leadership with ideas of growth, strength and nurture (see Figure 5.12).

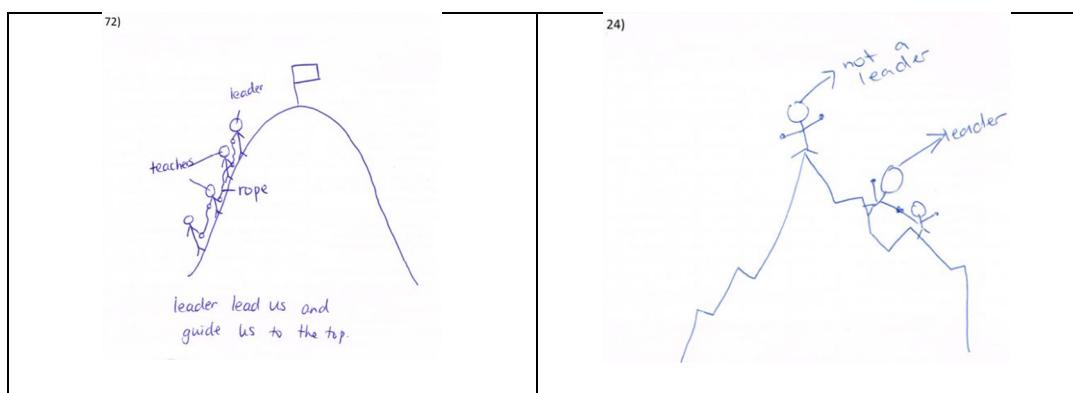
Figure 5.12: Example of images of flora associated with leadership



5.8.7 Images of a journey

Eight of the pictures depicted scenes of a journey (see Figure 5.13). Five drew the image of 'ascending a mountain', two of a 'staircase' and one of a 'path' with obstacles along it. In most of the pictures, the leader is the person leading the group from the front. Two of the images portray the leader at a distance from the group. The text on one states 'the one who summits alone is not a leader'. One of the images identifies the mountain peaks as 'government regulations' with the leader navigating them. The physical obstacles suggest the challenges of leadership work and the idea that a team experiences the journey together. Most importantly, the images seem to suggest that leadership succeeds only when leaders undertake a role together with the team, and not on their own.

Figure 5.13: Example of journey images associated with leadership



5.8.8 People and relations

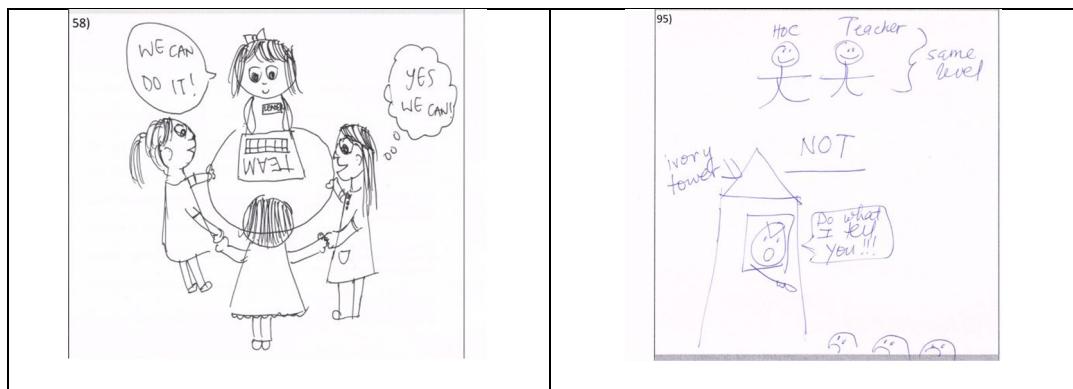
Some 45 (17.5%) of the images were coded as ‘People and Relations’. These were categorised further, and the following dominant themes emerged: ‘Leader as Team player’, ‘Leader as a supportive guide’ and ‘Leadership Tension’.

Twenty-seven of the images were coded as ‘Leader as a Team player’ with all but two showing the leader positioned together with staff, connected by interlocking hands (see Figure 5.14). The leader was often drawn in the middle of the group or leading the group from the front. The image may be interpreted as ‘togetherness’ between leader and staff as they work towards a common goal. Other images portray ‘running a race’ where the leader is the pacesetter and another where a baton is being passed. In all the images, leadership is drawn in close proximity to the other elements, underlining the need for a close relationship.

The images also allude to a ‘pari passu’ relationship between leader and staff. This suggests a show of respect for the leader, and that the leader is regarded as an equal member of the group. Eleven of the images suggest the role of the ‘Leader as a supportive guide’. Eight of the pictures presented the leader as ‘showing the way’, ‘role-modelling’ or ‘helping people grow’. The leaders’ ‘supportive’ ability was also depicted in a leader protecting two figures with an umbrella. Seven of the responses indicated challenges and tensions in leadership practice. Four of these showed a ‘distance’ between leader and teacher. One depicts the separation of a leader in the office, and a teacher in the class whilst another illustrates a leader up in an ivory tower yelling down at a staff member.

The tension between school and management policies was also reflected in a picture of a leader lifting up teachers and children. In contrast ‘management and policies’ were drawn as factors that bring the leader down. A mix of both positive and negative depictions of leadership showed the possibilities and challenges of leadership in practice.

Figure 5.14: Example of people and relation images associated with leadership



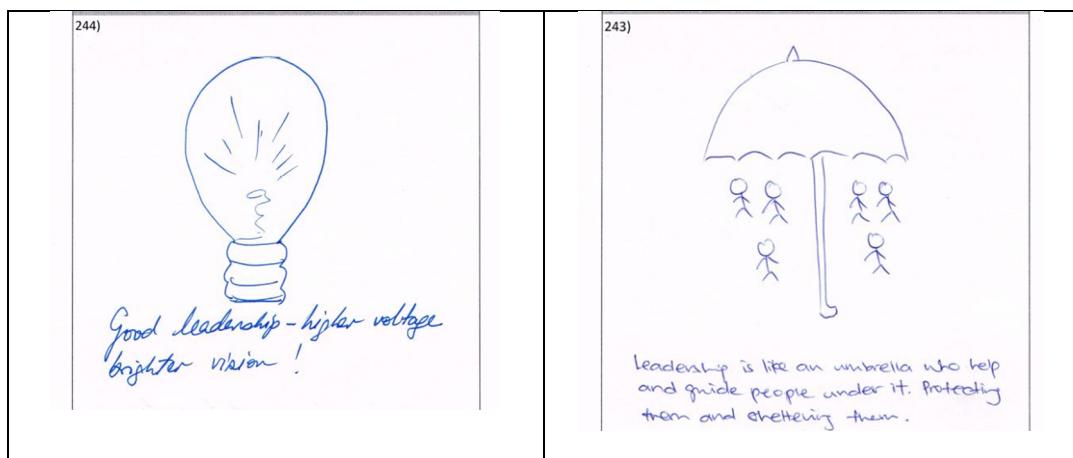
5.8.9 Objects

Fifty-two of the items were classified as 'objects' and were further categorised into classifications of 'Celestial objects', 'Anatomical objects' and 'Functional objects'. Items that appeared only once were identified as 'Related Objects'.

Eleven objects were coded as 'Celestial objects' of which seven were images of the sun and six were of stars. The image of the sun suggests an association with brightness and optimism' while the star is linked to the idea of 'possibility' and 'guiding the way'. 'Anatomical objects' included images such as the heart, arms, eye, brain and lips, all of which suggest a variety of meanings and are used as both metaphors and literal illustrations of the text. For example, the eye symbolised the need to be visionary', while the footprint and lips illustrated the phrase 'walk the talk'. In the category 'Functional objects', three items proved to be popular choices with an image of a light bulb drawn eight times while balancing scales featured five times and the umbrella twice.

The light bulb, a common allegory for ideas, was drawn lighting up a centre's spirit and providing a brighter vision (see Figure 5.15). The scales reflected the need for balance between stakeholders (teachers, parents and children versus company policy), balance between head and heart, and the work-life balance that leaders so typically strive for. The image of an umbrella surfaced twice in each grouping, representing shelter and protection. Other objects were associated with strength (dumbbells, sword, and pyramid) and connection (bridge) while a majority of the images reflected positive views of leadership, reinforcing the importance of the leader as a guide and source of inspiration for others. But at the same time, the images also highlighted conflict and tension, such as that portraying opposing forces drawn on the balancing scales.

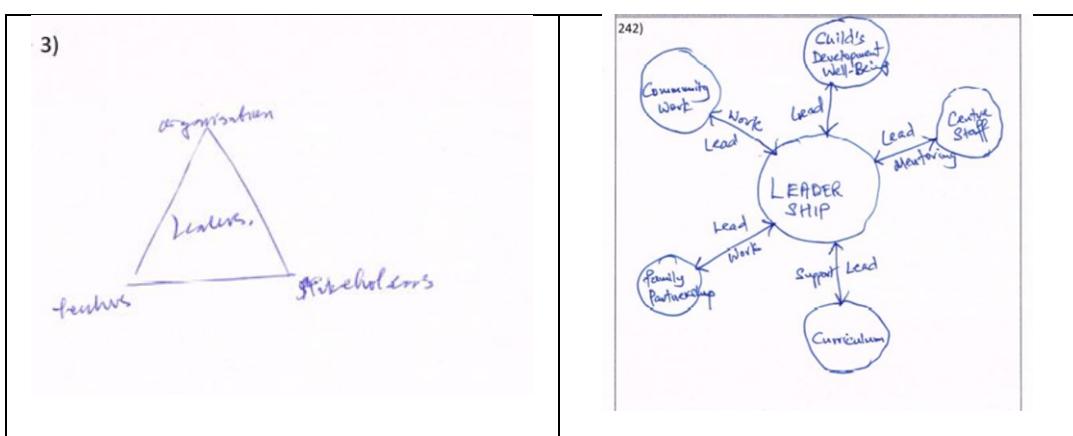
Figure 5.15: Example of objects associated with leadership



5.8.10 Diagrams and figures

Some of the responses took the form of diagrams, expressing views in a visually organised way (see Figure 5.16). Ten of these were simple thinking maps, often with leadership in the centre, branching out to identify traits, responsibilities, tasks and roles. Pyramids were also drawn to depict stakeholder relationships at the three corners. In comparison, Venn diagrams showed leadership at a point of central intersection. Three of the responses included circles with leader in the middle, reflecting connections and relationships between the elements. Unlike the images that were more metaphorical, these were informative and showed the work of the leader as multi-faceted and multi-agency driven.

Figure 5.16: Example of diagrams and figures depicting leadership



5.8.11 Quotes and text responses

Some 87 (34%) of the responses were text-only answers. These were coded further, and the results emerged as 45 leadership quotes, 33 leadership descriptions and 10

leadership analogies. The leadership quotes were varied and focused on the ideals of leadership dispositions. The leadership descriptions consisted of groupings of words and incomplete phrases pertaining to leadership. Most of these were words related to attitudes, skills and dispositions related to leadership. The 10 analogies compared leadership to ‘a flock of flying geese’, ‘a mother’, ‘a waterfall’, ‘a tree with strong roots’ and ‘a scarecrow’, suggesting a variety of perceptions of leadership. The most frequently mentioned was that of the ‘mother’, which appeared three times, symbolising the care and nurturing aspect of leadership.

5.9 Discussion

5.9.1 Context of influence

- Impact of settings on leadership

A majority of the respondents in the survey worked in large organisational settings, which may explain the skew in the recorded responses. In such organisations, pressures from ‘industry awards and benchmarks’ and ‘higher management pressure and directives’ would not be unexpected, due to the key performance indicators set for such centres. Large organisations prize awards as an indicator of the quality of the centre. With corporatisation comes a performance-oriented culture - and in the case of a corporatized early childhood institution, it could feel the heat from its headquarters to produce results. Lim and Lippinen (2018) explain that these may result in leaders feeling conflicted in their work role. Leaders in such positions may feel squeezed by the expectations of their headquarters and meeting the demands of their staff.

Aubrey (2011) explains that the primary task of a leader can be diffused by the complex structures and roles within organisations. Three types of primary tasks were identified: the ‘normative’, which is the task that staff are expected to do, the ‘existential’, which refers to the tasks that staff may believe they are performing, and the ‘phenomenal’, which are the tasks they are actually engaged in. It is when the ‘normative’ task, established by the organisation, aligns with the ‘existential’, that staff find a sense of purpose. A misalignment of tasks, however, could result in resistance and tension (Aubrey, 2011). Hence, the wide range of roles and the risk of misalignment of these roles increase the challenge of leadership tasks.

- Balanced leadership approach

Teachers and leaders share broadly similar views of leadership traits and roles. The survey evidence uncovered a strong preference for leaders who demonstrated a communicative approach, and there seemed a strong need to be understood and listened to. At the same time, the group valued clear direction and strategic effectiveness in their leaders. Rodd (2013) identified four types of leadership styles, namely taskmaster, friend, motivator and casual friend. As leaders need to develop a shared vision and inspire followers, the motivator approach that balances both seems best suited to early childhood leadership. This balanced approach may also be suitable for a workforce that is low on experience but highly educated. The survey also showed that staff felt the need to be involved and for the processes to be articulated clearly. Hence, a top-down, task-based approach that has been described in some Asian settings (Ho, 2013) will be of limited appeal here. The respondents display strong respect for performance yet have an expectation of how it should be achieved.

5.9.2 Context of policy text production

- Policy and leadership

The questions on policy were focused on understanding policy influence, policy awareness, and policy knowledge among leaders. Ebbeck and Waniganayake (2003) state that early childhood professionals have probably been more affected by public policy than any other sector in the field of education. Any policy change is likely to affect the work of leaders and they must possess policy literacy if not awareness. Hence, the almost unanimous choice of 'Agree' in answer to all the policy questions infers an acquiescence response bias. Holbrook (2007) explains that the satisfying theory may be at play when respondents offer a response strategy that requires minimum effort but a satisfactory response. This can happen when the difficulty of the question is great, and the motivation level is meagre. In such cases, an answer that communicates concurrence is the one that would be well expected. This lack of knowledge about policy is also supported by the lack of examples in the open question. Only one respondent explicitly mentioned policy as part of the leader's role. Lamentably, respondents may not perceive their roles to be directly related to policy or have little interest in policy matters.

5.9.3 Context of practice

- Human relations in leadership

One of the most striking results from the group was the importance of the human and affective dimension, which emerged in the responses related to traits, roles, and leadership images. This social, emotional aspect seems to be particularly important to teachers who were particular about how leadership was enacted upon them. The responses suggest that the EC leader's personal attributes are equal in importance with a leader's professional competency and that the identity of the 'leader as a professional' and the 'leader as a person' are intertwined. Moyles (2006) supports this view and explains that leader and management traits are often seen as one and hard to separate. Unlike corporate environments where the professional and the personal can be separated, the EC leader's personal and professional traits can both influence their leadership image. Rodd (2013) emphasises that this reflects a distinctive quality of female leadership which prefers a connective and integrative model (Lipman-Blumen, 1992) which emphasises open communication and understanding as a preferred leadership approach.

- Multiplicity of roles and skills

The responses to the questions on leadership roles and the images of leadership acknowledge the multi-faceted nature of leadership work. Rodd (2001) categorises these skills as 'technical expertise', 'conceptual expertise' and 'interpersonal expertise'. Technical expertise includes administrative, operational, curriculum, and human resource responsibilities, which are explicit, and outcome driven. Conceptual expertise encompasses moral, ethical, advocacy, transformational and well-being roles that contribute to purpose and aspirations. Interpersonal expertise refers to facilitative, teambuilding and communications and relations, which are more implicit tasks that contribute to the quality of the previous two factors. The responses show that 'interpersonal' roles is not merely a skill needed to achieve leadership effectiveness but a personality requirement demanded of any EC leader.

The large number of roles and the high expectations placed on EC leaders may suggest that leaders are expected to be 'the Jack of all trades and Master of all'. High demands are placed on a leader's competency, which creates undue pressure for leaders to perform. At the same time, the leader lacks specialisation in their stretched role creating a tension in their professional identity.

Researchers have discussed the wide range of roles and the complexity these variations pose in early childhood leadership studies (Hujala, 2013; Aubrey et al., 2011; Rodd, 2013). This is also complicated by the varying descriptions of core roles of the leader in literature. Studies from Western countries have singled out pedagogical leadership as a critical leadership task (Aubrey, 2011; Hujala, 2013; Siraj-Blatchford & Manni, 2013). These studies recognise curriculum and pedagogical competency as roles although they are not considered highly important by participants in this study. Lim and Lipponen (2018) explain that Singaporean early childhood principals are challenged to exercise pedagogical leadership due to their administrative workload. Contrary to this, an earlier study of Singapore practitioners (Hujala et al., 2016) claims that leaders spend most of their time on pedagogical leadership. Unlike in Finland or New Zealand, where the leader's role is clearly defined as a pedagogical or educational leader, this discrepancy indicates a lack of clarity on the core role of the early childhood leader in Singapore. It may be possible that the core role could be affected by the nature of the setting. Distributed leadership in large organisational structures for example, create job roles that are more defined than for leadership in small settings.

The results also suggest that current leadership styles may pose tensions in practice. Some of the images, as explained in 5.8.8, reflect expressions of high-power distance and a lack of care in the way that leadership is exercised. Teachers ranked 'work environment and leadership' as a more significant challenge than did leaders, suggesting a gulf in perceptions. Research on practitioners shows that teachers would usually rate principals' leadership practices lower than the principals would themselves (Tosh & Dosh, 2020). Principals, on the other hand, would rate themselves higher on their performance. Heikka (2014) argues that perspectives of leadership can differ between micro-level and macro-level stakeholders.

5.10 Conclusion

This chapter reports the findings from the questionnaire survey that was conducted in Phase 1. The results offer a profile of the teachers and leaders who participated, comprising a significant number of young teachers and novice leaders from large government-supported settings. The responses reflect a strong preference for leaders employing a style of leadership that is delicately balanced between being an effective, directed leader with one who is relational in their approach. The findings do, at the same time, also reveal tensions in perspectives and leadership practice. This provides useful insight to the context of Singapore EC leadership practice and impact that dynamic policy change may have on the work of leaders.

Chapter 6 – Teacher and Leader Interviews

6.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings that emerged from the interviews conducted with teachers and leaders. It also includes an additional set of interviews with senior leaders that was added during the course of the study. The comparison of views offers insight into the similarities and differences between the ‘what’ and ‘how’ of EC leadership, as related from the experiences of the teachers, leaders and senior leaders.

6.2 Research questions

These interviews are aimed at answering the following questions:

1. What is the policy-to-practice context to EC leadership in Singapore?
2. What does policy require EC leaders in Singapore to do in terms of implementation?
3. What are the views, understandings and beliefs about early childhood leadership of a range of stakeholders?
4. What are the reported early childhood practices and experiences of early childhood leaders?
5. Who leads the leaders?

6.3 Methods

6.3.1 Participants

Following the ‘Day in the Life’ observations, the researcher arranged a one-hour follow-up interview with each leader, from the six case sites, on separate day. Prior to this, each leader was asked to suggest the names of six teaching staff with diverse ethnic profiles, levels of education, years of teaching experience and professional qualifications to participate for a one-on-one interview that lasted around thirty minutes.

Table 6.1 provides an overview of the leader and six teachers who were interviewed from the early childhood centre. The number, ‘20s, 30s,40s’ refer to their age group to provide an understanding of the demographic profile. These teachers worked as Assistant Teachers (AT), Teachers (T) and Senior Teachers (ST). In total, there were

three ATs, 26 Ts and six STs interviewed. The participants comprised teachers who were Chinese, Malay, Indian and Filipino, and ranged in age between 20 and 50.

Table 6.1: Profile of Teachers and Leaders

	CS1	CS2	CS3	CS4	CS5	CS6
Centre Type	Private Kindergarten	Private Kindergarten & Childcare	Private Kindergarten & Childcare	Anchor Operator Childcare	Anchor Operator Kindergarten	Partner Operator Childcare
Centre Leader	Chinese 40s	Indian 30s	Chinese 20s	Chinese 40s	Chinese 40s	Malay 30s
Teacher Profile						
1	Chinese, 40s,ST	Chinese 30s,ST	Malay 20s,T	Chinese 30s,T	Chinese 30s,T	Malay 20s,T
2	Chinese 40s,ST	Indian 20s,T	Chinese 40s,ST	Chinese 20s,T	Malay 50s,T	Malay 20s,T
3	Chinese 30s,AT	Chinese 40s,T	Malay 20s,T	Chinese 20s, T	Filipino 20s,T	Filipino 20s,T
4	Chinese 20s,T	Chinese 30s,T	Malay 20s,T	Malay 50s,ST	Filipino 20s,T	Malay 30s,T
5	Chinese 30s,T	Malay 30s,T	Malay 30s,AT	Chinese 30s,T	Malay 30s,ST	Malay 20s,T
6	Chinese 40s,T	Malay 40s,T	Indian 40s,AT	-	Chinese 30s,T	Malay 30s,ST

ST – Senior Teacher, T – Teacher, AT – Assistant Teacher

In a majority of the cases, teachers were interviewed before the CL to accommodate a tight teaching schedule. Further, due to logistical constraints, the interview at Case Site 1 was conducted with three teachers in a group and for Case Site 4, one interview session was conducted with two teachers, while all the rest were organised one-on-one. During the researcher's reflection process following the interviews, the researcher noted that participants specified a level of leadership that had been omitted from the initial interview design, namely Senior Leaders (SL), who exert considerable influence on the decision-making processes of centres. Although they were not based in the centres, the initial interview analysis indicated that they played a significant role in the organisations. The researcher proceeded, therefore, to engage Senior Leaders, with three individuals in this category expressing a willingness to participate in an additional interview. These SLs were not connected to the six case sites. The SLs held a variety of responsibilities within their organisations. Senior Leader 1 (SL1) oversaw nine centres while Senior Leader 2 (SL2) worked with teachers and leaders in over 20 centres with a curriculum specialisation, and Senior Leader 3 (SL3) worked with leaders of five centres as shown in Table 6.2:

Table 6.2: Profile of Senior Leaders

	Gender	Age	Race	Operation Type	Years in position
SL1	F	40s	Malay	Anchor Operator	4 years
SL2	F	50s	Chinese	Large, Private, For-profit	20 years
SL3	F	40s	Chinese	Medium, Private, For-profit	11 years

6.3.2 Materials

A list of questions related to the participant's leadership experience, perceptions of leadership, influences on leadership and policy awareness was compiled (see Appendix 2), which helped provide a guide for the researcher to ensure key areas were captured during the interview.

6.3.3 Procedure

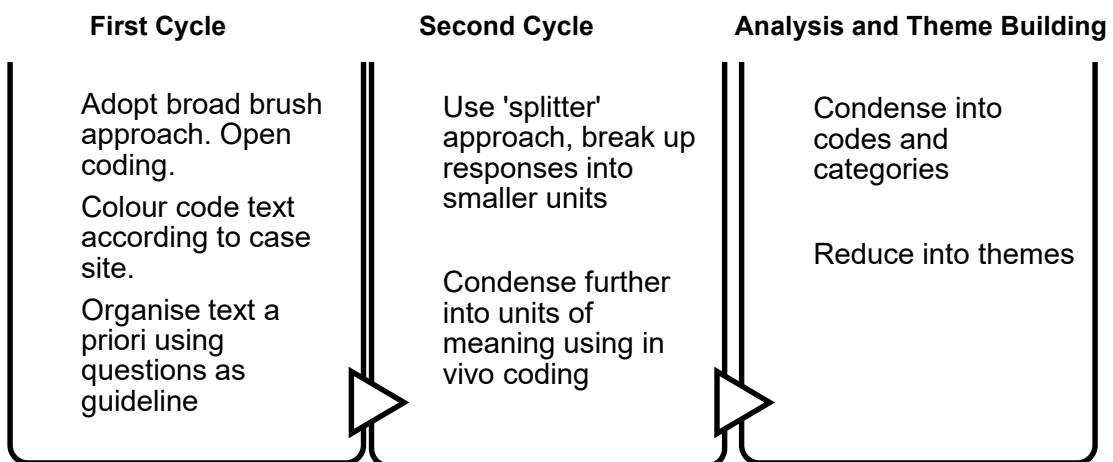
The CLs and SLs were sent an email that explained the research background and questions to be covered during the interview. The questions were modified slightly to meet the interviewee's needs and maximise the richness of the data. The CL was the contact point for the teachers for all the case sites. Most of the teacher interviews were conducted in the afternoon during the children's naptime or during the teacher's break. The CL and SL interviews were, likewise, conducted at a time that was convenient for the leader. The interviews were audio-recorded on multiple devices. As the teachers were selected by the CL, and there was no contact between the researcher and teachers prior to the session, the researcher ensured that a brief overview of the research was provided at the outset. The participation and anonymity procedures were explained as well as the ethical protocols. The researcher also offered the teachers the right for refusal should they be uncomfortable with the session. The consent forms were signed before the interviews proceeded. All the sessions were conducted in a private classroom to minimise distraction.

6.4 Analysis

A large amount of data was generated from the almost thirty hours of interviews that were carried out. All the interviews were transcribed, and several coding trials were conducted to determine an approach that would provide the best fit for the data

analysis process. On the advice of the research supervisors, the method that was chosen involved one round of broad-brush coding to obtain a general understanding of the data. The interviews were then colour-coded according to their sites. Chunks of the data were then reorganised *a priori* using the questions as a guide. The responses from stakeholders to a question were combined into one document after which a 'splitter' method was employed to further segregate chunks of the responses into units of meaning (Saldana, 2016). These units of meaning were reduced into condensed units of meaning via a process that involved using 'in vivo' coding from which a code, category and then theme, were derived. Each interviewee was given a numeric code based on case site number while teachers were labelled as 'T' and leaders as 'L'. A codebook was developed as part of the process, and discrepant themes were noted. A sample of the coding process can be referred to in Appendix 3. An overview of the process is summarised in Figure 6.1.

Figure 6.1: Process of data analysis



6.5 Results

The process produced 10 themes, which are shown in Table 6.3. For ease of reference, the matrix approach recommended by Henwood and Pidgeon (2003) was used to display an overview of the data. This consisted of highlighting a major theme supported by a selected datum the researcher considered most representative of the voice of the stakeholder and the researcher's interpretive summary.

Table 6.3: Findings ‘at a glance’

Themes	Teachers	Leaders	Senior Leaders	Researcher's interpretive summary
Qualities of an EC leader	“You cannot really think from your heart all the time. You cannot be emotional all the time. You'll have to use your mind as well”	“The leaders have to be softer, must be able to mentor, to be there for their people, to listen”	“If a leader is not inspiring, it is hard for me to see her as a leader. A leader cannot just be competent in what she does”	Leaders need to have a balanced, interpersonal leadership approach that projects physical and emotional presence
Perception of Leadership	“A leader is seen not as a hierarchical positional leader but is someone who models and brings the group together”	“Nowadays, we look at a leader as somebody who is as on par with the rest”	“A leader is somebody that walks around a lot, must know everything”	Leaders are respected as equals but are expected to demonstrate a range of abilities
Tasks and responsibilities	“Without the curriculum, there is no school. Nobody will want to come and let their child be trained by me”	“To equip the teachers with the skills, knowledge and competencies to develop a sound curriculum”	“They need to understand what Singapore’s early childhood industry is about”	Leaders need to demonstrate curriculum leadership for their centre whilst enacting policy for the sector
Leadership Structures & Approaches	“Because here we have to work as a team”	“So everybody is comfortable with each other. That is the ideal. But we cannot run away from the fact that people still operate the hierarchical”	“If they know the team leader is not really hands-on with them or something, they will be really griping about why we should do so many jobs”	Leadership needs to be visible, requiring leaders to lead teams by active participation
Leadership Challenges	“What the parents are expecting is very high”	“Because we are always running around the operations, we are always bogged down by the operations”	“As much as we don't want the leaders to be engaged with operational matters, admin matters, they have no choice”	Leaders struggle with operational and service challenges despite other roles
Leadership Support	“She is hardly at the centre, so I have to make an appointment to see her”	“So my problem will be, I'll always say, my patience is my biggest flaw”	“I'm also trying to teach the principals. I cannot be spoon-feeding you at all times. Only through the knocks,- difficulties, it makes you a stronger person”	Leaders need to support their staff, but they are learning to do so from experience
Leadership Readiness	“To be a leader... the principal of the school, really is that what I want? Perhaps not. But I will be there to support”	“The theory part is one thing. But sustainability is something else”	“I don't know whether there was an age difference as well because, at that time when we were heads of the centre we were all more mature, we had lots more experiences”	Leadership requires strong ground experience to weather challenges of the profession

Themes	Teachers	Leaders	Senior Leaders	Researcher's interpretive summary
Leadership Development	"That specialist diploma in leadership does not qualify you. Okay, it's not a guarantee that you can, there's a personality element"	"These people are your gems, now how to make them respect you, is something that this diploma in leadership, DPL, will not teach you!"	"They are not trained to do critical thinking. So I think that is part of the problem of the training of the leadership"	Leadership training may not address the salient skills required for the role
Mentoring	"We are guided by ECDA, we are, from the word get-go, we are trained, we know there are certain things we can do, we should do, what are the things that we mustn't do"	"I wasn't mentored, I was thrown in"	"It's not formalised"	Leadership is not as well supported in its development when compared to teaching
Impact of policy initiatives	"SPARK is a good initiative, but it has given leaders a lot of unnecessary stress because most of them are very sceptical about the documentation required"	"Because once you have AOP, POP, it separates everybody again. We are already fragmented"	"If I do not know something, you cannot give me a warning. If only I know then fine, I broke a rule, I am fine with it, but it's not"	Policy initiatives are creating work and sectoral pressures
Leadership Effectiveness	"If you don't know your priorities or where you want to lead or what to do and you don't know your aim, and you don't clarify that or give the team that assurance, you will not be able to make it as a leader"	"How it impacts efficiency, productivity, the work they do, their personal life, the time they have, personally and professionally at work. It's people. So that comes first"	"No matter what, they have to go back to profit and loss"	The measure of leadership effectiveness is dependent on the stakeholder

6.6 Qualities of an EC leader

6.6.1 Balancing the head and heart

When asked what leadership meant to them, teachers responded by listing the qualities and traits that they associated with leadership. Fifteen teachers mentioned the idea of being a 'role model', 'being exemplary' and 'leading by example'. It was surmised from the data, that being a 'role model' meant 'being respectful', 'being humble' and showing a positive and supportive attitude towards staff. Aside from personal qualities, teachers also named the need for strong work-related behaviours such as being 'confident', having 'clear communication skills' and 'being decisive'. Five teachers mentioned that the scope of work demanded EC leaders be 'multi-

taskers' and that leaders needed to be willing 'to do everything that was demanded'. However, teachers also indicated that a balance of personal and work-related qualities were preferable. In particular, teachers expressed support for leaders who were 'supportive', 'open-minded', 'kind' and showed 'empathy' towards staff. CS.2.T2 summarised the fine balancing act that leaders need to achieve in her statement, "You can't really think from your heart all the time, you can't be emotional all the time, you'll have to use your mind as well".

Leaders, meanwhile, identified qualities that were predominantly work-related rather than personal. CS.4.L1 described a leader as, "Somebody who takes charge of things. Somebody who leads. Somebody who mentors. Somebody who is there to make decisions. Somebody who is basically very responsible". Although supported by three of the leaders, there was a recognition that the ECCE landscape change would also require a different kind of leader. CS.4.L1 explained that "The leaders have to be softer, must be able to mentor, to be there for their people, to listen". CS.5.L1 added that the increase in workload required a leader to be able to empower her staff, as the nature of EC tasks required teamwork. CS.3.L1 added that a leader needed the added ability to inspire a team, "If a leader is not inspiring, it's hard for me to see her as a leader. She cannot just be competent in what she does".

SLs identified qualities that suggested more innate traits. SL1 was reluctant to identify specific qualities but highlighted the importance of operating 'by instinct'. SL2 identified 'maturity' as an essential quality as leaders needed to show the ability to manage issues with teachers and parents tactfully. SL3 highlighted 'communication' as a critical factor because a leader needed to be able to relate to people from all levels of an organisation. These traits seemed to suggest that SLs recognised that a higher level of emotional intelligence was demanded of leaders.

6.6.2 Communicate to connect

Many teachers cited acts of respectful communication when asked to recall personal examples of positive and negative leadership experiences. CS.4.T1 related the experience of a former leader who took the time to listen to her staff and their viewpoints. The leader's effort to achieve a consensus despite the time-consuming process was strongly appreciated by her team. This respectful act of listening was echoed by CS.4.T2 and CS.4.T3. The former described good leaders as those who, "You don't see them flaring up or pointing their fingers directly at the other party, but rather, they sit down, listen, explain and reflect together".

CS.6.T2 concurred, explaining that a leader's willingness to listen was appreciated even if the outcome was unfavourable. Making the effort to listen was appreciated as it enabled teachers to feel valued, "Although they don't give me 100% of what I ask, they give me reassurance. They listen to me. I am a small fry, but they listen to me. I say thank you because of this".

The sociability and communicative ability of the leader was also held in regard as an important quality by teachers. To some extent, teachers seemed to assess the leader based on their actions. However, they did not seem to formulate a separate view of the leader in the capacity of her formal role vis-à-vis the leader in her personal capacity. CS.5.T6 cited the example of the leader's behaviour at lunchtime, observing, "Whenever she eats lunch, she doesn't mingle with the staff. She will sit in the pantry with the teachers, but she doesn't talk to them, and they don't talk to her. It was very awkward".

SL3 emphasised the advantage of having a more communicative personality, "The more introverted tend to be at the losing end. But it's not that she's not doing a good job, some of them just can't articulate". In a similar vein, CS.2.T1 voiced the expectation that leaders needed to extend themselves socially with teachers "Being a leader is about involving yourself", while CS.6.T4 explained that a close relationship would be advantageous to a leader, explaining, "Some leaders only talk about work. So they don't regard you as a friend. When you are in a lower position, we are scared of you. But when you regard us as friends, and when you listen, we feel comfortable working with you". Teachers perceived social interaction and communication as favourable qualities in a leader.

Although a respectful and personal approach was identified as a desired leadership quality, one of the leaders, CS.4.L1, explained that it conflicted with her personal belief of leadership as she recalled being told of her harsh mannerisms, "Sometimes, when I see their face I realise, okay I think I am too harsh. Sometimes, my senior teacher will come to me and say, I think you should not say that. Then I say, okay. But I thought the message went through". CS.4.L1 believed in a strict work relationship with her teachers which she learnt from her previous career experience as a manager, "Somehow they still can take it. I mean, that's how I managed them. I don't get personal with them. I think because of my corporate blood, I tend to be a bit harsher". This illustrates that despite knowing such an approach was less favoured, a leader might still prioritise task efficiency over a relational approach.

6.7 Perception of leadership

6.7.1 A general specialist

The study elicited a mixed response when the interviewees were asked to compare their leadership perspectives of EC settings with those of non-EC settings. A majority of teachers surveyed described the work of the EC leader as different from that of a corporate leader. There was a general perception that corporate environments were more ‘task-focused’ and prioritised the ‘business of profit and loss’ whereas in an early childhood environment, people-oriented leadership was deemed most appropriate. CS.5.T5 compared the nature of early childhood work with that of other industries, saying, “We all do work with people. You have customers or suppliers in a normal industry like construction or consumer electronics. But over here we deal more with teachers, students, parents. Over here, it’s more personal. Because we are dealing with children. Over there, it’s more monetary”. Three teachers attributed this to the fact that the work in early childhood was all about human development with CS.1.T1 explaining, “It has to do with lives, so everything we do is always for the children first, it’s between the teacher and the children. It’s about life to life”.

However, some teachers considered the early childhood leader’s role as not dissimilar to that of a corporate leader as both entailed managing people and systems. CS.5.T6 described the work of the early childhood leader as more difficult than that of a bank manager because the early childhood sector faced system challenges, noting, “We are still getting the processes right. We don’t even know what it is...But we are struggling with how we can get it done alongside all the other responsibilities that we have”. CS.1.L1 expanded on this struggle in the work structure in early childhood environments, adding, “We do everything. Because of the lack of funding, we do everything. We don’t only do curriculum, we have to do strategy, we have to do admin, in a place like this we also have to do property”. This suggests that role specialisation for leaders is challenging in reality.

The operations role emerged as a prominent theme in the responses from the leader group that used scope and type of work tasks to compare their leadership work. CS.1.L1 recalled a session with a high achieving CEO who gave them insights into leadership, “It’s not like we don’t know that, but when we hear from him, we say ‘Yes, let us do it’, but then we think again. Why is it that we can’t? Because we are always running around the operations, we are always bogged down by the operations”. Unlike corporate environments where leaders are able to focus on improvement issues, the EC leaders’ work requires them to prioritise the centre’s immediate

operational needs. Managing day-to-day operations represented a significant part of a leader's workday. The need to oversee both people and systems meant leaders were frequently switching between handling people and systems issues in their centres, which was draining – both physically and mentally.

6.7.2 Different yet equal

Four teachers supported the idea that EC leadership should avoid projecting itself as a position within a hierarchy . CS.3.T5 stated the following, “A leader is seen not as a hierarchical positional leader but is someone who models and brings the group together. It’s not about the leader up there and the subordinates that are down there”. CS.3.T1 added her perspective of a leader stating, “I don’t see my principal as someone higher than me. I see her as an equal”. CS.6.T1 echoed the need for a low power distance between leader and teacher, opining, “I feel a leader should be humble. She shouldn’t be too high up there. Leaders need to be seen as one of us and be able to do the work that teachers do” to which CS.6.T3 added, “She must come down and help us in whatever events that we have. Whatever projects we are in. She must participate and know what the processes are and how we really go through that”. To be respected by staff, EC leaders were expected to position themselves and teachers as equals although at the same time EC leaders were fully expected to demonstrate abilities superior to their staff. CS.4.L1 identified a key distinguishing feature that EC leaders should have, saying, “Nowadays we look at leadership as somebody who is on par with the rest. But basically, why you stand out is because you want to help people. You want to help the team”.

CS.1.T1 mentioned that EC leaders may well suffer stress but felt that the stress in their case was less than experienced by corporate leaders. CS.1.T3 attributed this to the nature of the teaching profession in which leadership was seen as a progression in an educator’s career. She believed that the system supported the work of leaders, noting, “We are guided by ECDA, we are trained, we know there are certain things we can do, we should do, what are the things that we mustn’t do. So we are guided”. With such support, CS.1.T3 believed that the leader’s work should be manageable.

Three other leaders expressed the belief that the qualifications and experience were important for competency. CS.1.T4 remarked, “Qualification does help. It does count if you want to win the respect of your peers and your subordinates. It has definitely got to go hand in hand. The position should be equal to your experience plus your qualification. It’s got to be, there’s no other way”. The assumption that a background in the early childhood sector was essential, also extended to policy leaders. CS.1.T3

explained “You can’t be getting someone from the corporate world to lead ECDA. This person must know more or less something in early childhood” reflecting a general perception that ECCE experience in the field was critical to engage in any early childhood leadership work. Staff seemed to have greater respect for a leader who had walked in their shoes and could identify, personally, with their experience.

6.8 Tasks and responsibilities

6.8.1 Varied perception of primary tasks

The teachers surveyed alluded to ‘pedagogical’ and ‘people development’ as two critical aspects of a leader’s work. Five teachers highlighted the need for curriculum expertise as part of pedagogical leadership. CS.5.T3 expected leaders to, “Support, with regards to the materials needed in the class. Give enough creativity needed for the teachers. Even though everything is structured in the curriculum, give enough space for teachers to inject their own creativity”. CS.1.T3 added that the leader’s main task was, “The curriculum. Without the curriculum, there’s no school”. Teachers seemed to look toward leaders to support their efforts in interpreting, developing and upholding curriculum quality.

In contrast, the leaders gave varying responses to the tasks of leadership. CS.1.L1 was specific in the belief of her role which was, “To equip the teachers with the skills, knowledge and competencies to develop a sound curriculum” with CS.3.L1 sharing a similar idea, that her primary task curriculum leadership and that she was determined to build the capability of her teachers. CS.4.L1, meanwhile, mentioned the need to develop her team for leadership with CS.2.L1 viewing her role as providing strategic leadership but doing so in a way that involved the team. CS.5.L1 stated that her main objective was to ensure that her centre passed the second round of SPARK certification whilst CS.6.L1 was occupied with stabilising her centre’s operations. Overall, leaders were somewhat vague in the way that they responded to this question and had to be nudged further to provide specifics. As pointed out by CS.1.T3, the difference between a teacher and a leader was, “As a teacher you just focus on your class, and that’s it, but as a leader, you have to see it as a whole”.

6.9 Leadership structures and approaches

6.9.1 Settings and approaches

Teachers observed leaders exercising a variety of leadership styles. CS.4.T5 described her experience working with leaders in private childcare, “In the private childcare I worked at, there was a difference between what the leader would say to the boss and the teacher. Certain things, she would just decide and not tell us”. In a similar vein, CS.3.T1 took umbrage at the top-down approach of her Director, stating, “We had six centres, and each centre has a principal. So she disseminates her information to the principal to carry out to the people. In short, the principals have no say”. In contrast, CS.4.T5 insisted that there was always a consultative approach in her current centre, saying, “Here, we always have a meeting to discuss things” with CS.2.T4 suggesting that the approach in her centre was even more open, noting, “We don’t need to wait for meetings, really. We talk all the time”. A collaborative working relationship was also considered necessary, especially in the case of emergencies. CS.4.L1 explained, “Here we have to work as a team because children are the product. In fact, we are dealing with a ‘life’ product. The absence of one teacher affects parents, this affects the children, and it affects the team. When three or four teachers are absent in one day, I say that’s when you see the teamwork come in”.

Leaders such as CS.1.L1 lamented that the ideal of a collegiate relationship between teachers and leaders was, essentially, utopian and that a hierarchical structure was the cold, hard reality, saying, “Collegial...that’s the ideal. But we cannot run away from the fact that people still operate in the ‘hierarchical’. This clarity helps. If you have an issue, go to the leader”. Having a hierarchy can also support the leaders, as SL1 explained, “For teachers, the first layer will be their direct centre principal. For leaders, they are never left alone, there is always somebody above. This person is someone she can turn to for queries and clarification”.

Nevertheless, SLs mentioned that issues related to accountability and communication could occur within the hierarchy. SL2 described the discrepancies within her organisation’s reporting lines, “Structurally the leaders don’t report to me at all. They report directly to their cluster head. And their cluster head reports directly to the General Manager. However, in their appraisals, I am given a say in their performance”. SL2 reiterated that lines of accountability might not work smoothly in reality, “I observe a phenomenon in our organisation – typically the principals, I don’t know why they don’t like to go to their head to clarify issues or ask. They like to talk among themselves. For some of them, it’s because of fear. They are very fearful that

the leaders will think that they are not as competent". SL3 explained that the styles of the SL affected the way leaders responded. SL1 expressed frustration that leaders would often wait for directions from the higher authority. Given her more collaborative style, this created conflicts with the leadership approach of another senior leader in her organisation and initially caused confusion among the leaders, "My style is, you do, you try. If you want to discuss, I can discuss it with you, but I want to hear from you first. Only then will I give you my perspective. She (another Senior leader) is somebody who if they go to her, everything is fed to them. So there is this conflict between our styles, and that affected them(leaders) a little bit".

6.10 Leadership challenges

6.10.1 Protecting harmony

When teachers were asked about the challenges that leaders faced, the responses were empathetic, underlining their awareness of the inherent difficulty of the role. Leaders needed to perform a balancing act to achieve their objectives whilst at the same time, protecting their teachers. In some cases, leaders would incur a risk by undertaking decisions in a certain way. CS.5.T3 gave an account of how her leader managed a problematic issue, saying, "She fought for it. She went against it, but carefully, she went against 'the high ones'. She made it very clear to us that we had to work extra hard to prove ourselves. That way this other party would not touch us". CS.5.T5, however, cautioned that no matter how much leaders fought for their staff, in reality, there were limitations to what they could accomplish, explaining, "She speaks up, and she speaks from the heart she did her best. But she cannot control everything". The teachers also showed insight about leaders' intentions even though it would incur some pain for the teachers. CS.6.4 stated, "It was important for her to give us that push, to spark off the process". Teachers understood that leaders cared for them and that at times this meant making unpopular decisions for the greater good.

When leaders were asked about their challenges, a majority offered accounts of how they needed to exercise discretion in their communication and work hard to maintain a harmonious working environment. CS.1.L1, for example, was conscious of not being seen as a 'bully' and described how her teachers previously feared her when she visited them in their classrooms. She explained that in an effort to appear less threatening, she scheduled class observations on the pretext of supporting children's engagement. In doing so, she used the opportunity to model how teachers could praise children positively in class. These scheduled classroom observations proved

successful as the teachers grew accustomed to her presence. This indirect approach also meant that she was able to observe her teachers in class without them feeling intimidated. She had been so conscious of the impact of her presence on her teachers that even though SPARK required her to write down notes during observations, she refrained from doing so, lest that exerted undue stress on her teachers.

CS.2.L1 echoed this need to protect the staff, remarking that despite having an open approach with staff, she would refrain from telling them exactly how she felt, “Some of the things, I will tell the staff know. But sometimes, it is good not to inform them, because it will affect their morale”. As a leader, she felt a strong obligation to preserve their wellbeing. The desire to be open with staff could potentially backfire on the leader too. CS.5.L1 gave the example of how the group utilised a WhatsApp group chat to build understanding and good communication among staff. However, she recounted an incident where three staff reported sick one particular day and this was informed to everyone on the thread. This information prompted one teacher not to turn up for work as she was reluctant to help with the relief duties. This was discovered by the leader who thereafter discontinued using this open communication channel. These examples illustrate the extent to which leaders needed to navigate around staff and work roles to maintain a good work environment.

6.10.2 Parental expectations

Leaders explained that a substantial amount of their time was spent addressing parental concerns. CS.5.L1 provided an account of a parent who raised a complaint to ECDA, which then necessitated the implementation of a survey assuage the parent. Challenging encounters such as this often turned into time- and labour-intensive exercises, as it was incumbent upon the leader to provide answers to demanding parents. CS.1.L1 explained, “It’s not just enabling teachers. You enable parents as well, and by talking to parents, they appreciate that someone actually understands the problems they are facing”. Leaders also mentioned that they played an important role as a ‘buffer’ between parent and teacher in difficult situations, essentially playing the role of a mediator to resolve issues and diffuse tensions. One teacher, CS.4.T4, mentioned, “It’s really very disheartening when parents do not want to hear the side of our story”. Although leaders would prefer teachers resolve their issues themselves, parents may still insist on escalating the matter to an individual that they deem as a higher authority. Leaders then have the delicate task of addressing the issue by mollifying parents whilst also maintaining support for her teachers.

Still, CS.4.L1 mentioned that parents could also be a good support for the leader when issues arose with senior management, and in particular, parents who have a good relationship with the leader can be an asset to the leader. CS.4.L1 recalled that the strong relationship she had with parents influenced her decision to stay within the organisation, “Because the principals come and go, the parents were a bit upset. As I was the person that they saw most of the time, I told my boss, I think for the sake of the parents, I should stay on”. Teachers, on the other hand, had a less favourable view of the impact that parents might have on leaders. CS.2.T5 termed parents, “*A threat to the sanity of leadership*”, as parents now have the means of getting what they demand while CS.4.T2 insisted that leaders should take a firm stand with parents as they would otherwise, “Be abused for their goodness”.

6.10.3 Balancing workload and well-being

CS.3.T2 identified the range of work tasks demanded as, “A leader’s job is not easy because it’s not just about making sure that your teachers manage your classroom. There is also the administrative side of things, there’s a lot of juggling”. Senior leaders were equally empathetic of the leaders’ heavy workload. SL1 drew attention to the lack of administrative support leaders faced, “Even big centres have a part-time clerk. But there’s just so much that they support the principal. At the end of the day, as much as we don’t want the leaders to be engaged with operational matters or admin matters, they really have no choice”. SL1 stated that the workload had increased to such a level that completing it would come at the expense of personal wellbeing, explaining, “I salute leaders because we are not here because of the pay, it’s our passion. I was supporting other centres and this principal, she’s young, about 30 plus, she came to me and said ‘I’ve been with this organisation for so many years and I forgot about myself. Because every day I will go back at 8 o’clock. On Saturday and Sunday I go back, and in the end I have no boyfriend. I think this affects them”.

The job requirements placed the leaders in a position where they felt forced to adopt a leadership style that they were unaccustomed to. SL3 explained that her leaders were stretched and found themselves doing hands-on work with the staff even though they were not proficient in the task, “If they know that the team leader is not really hands-on with them or something, they (teachers) will be griping about why they should do so much”. Leaders found themselves having to ‘work in the trenches’ along with the teachers, and at times the need to show that they were going over and above the call of duty resulted in burnout.

6.10.4 Sectoral challenges

The leaders highlighted sectoral challenges that contributed to additional work pressures. One of the biggest challenges they faced was a high staff attrition rate and a shortage of manpower in the industry. CS.4.L1 explained that this had become so chronic that she had by now developed a work belief to help her manage the disappointment of losing staff as she lamented, “Tomorrow we may lose somebody, so we work as though tomorrow you will lose somebody”. Similarly, CS.6.L1 revised her perceptions and expectations too, confiding, “Getting manpower is one. Retention of manpower is another. Looking at the trends, it has shifted so much. We used to have staff with long service, now that long service will probably be two years”. The corporatised nature of the organisations also meant that outcomes were prioritised over people with CS.2.L1 remarking, “Yah, there is less empathy and also we are not so ‘hard up’ with teachers. My boss always says, ‘nobody is indispensable’. So I have to work in such a way that tomorrow I may lose a teacher”.

Leaders added that the varying nature of centre settings also created challenges for them when they transitioned into new roles with adaptation needed even when moving to work at a different centre of the same organisation. CS.6.T4 suggested, “Even when you move from centre to centre, there’s bound to be changes like culture, different people, different style, different management”. Senior Leaders such as SL1 specified the creation of ‘megacentres’ and their impact on leadership roles, pondering, “With more megacentres coming up, I wonder how leaders are going to do the job”, while SL3 cautioned that the transferable nature of leadership work should not be underestimated as each centre has its philosophy, vision and mission, adding, “Different centres work quite differently. So when you want to align something, you still need to see it on a case by case basis”. This suggests that leaders need to be sufficiently nimble-footed so as to be able to respond to contextual factors with alacrity. Leaders were also less likely to obtain support as CS.6.T4 observed, “I felt that a lot of new leaders don’t have the adequate support when they are in a new role”.

Furthermore, the privatised and competitive nature of the industry meant that centres competed with one another for enrolment. Competition of this kind would be entirely expected across competing brands, but leaders admitted that there could be competition among centres within the same organisation. CS.5.L1 said it was, “Difficult to trust each other because we are still a private company”.

6.10.5 Policy communication

Questions about policy were asked to gain an understanding of how organisations managed communication processes. Teachers revealed that they would typically, and of their own initiative, obtain information and updates from websites and other news sources while at the centre level, leaders in large organisations reported relying on information via email from their corporate headquarters. Leaders mentioned the usefulness of ECDA Townhall sessions, which clarified the new regulations and initiatives.

Nonetheless, issues around policy communication emerged at the senior leadership level. SL1 commented that she would be informed of policy matters during monthly company meetings. SL2 explained that, in her organisation, official information from ECDA would be sent directly to the CLs as the childcare system only recognises registered CLs as the official contact point. Despite having overarching authority over several centres, SLs do not occupy an official position within the system. Consequently, they would receive such information as, "Second or even third-hand information, if we are lucky". SL2 recounted how this lapse resulted in an unfortunate incident, "We went to investigate, we found that the centre received the information. The principal didn't think she had the time, so she didn't think much of it and just shoved it aside". SL3 confirmed this process gap existed in her organisation too, admitting "Information is obtained through the centres. If there are updates and changes, it will be through the centres. When this happens, the centre will usually forward it to me".

6.10.6 Loneliness and isolation

A personal challenge that a leader was found to face was isolation of the work role. CS.4.L1 expounded her difficulty in confiding with others about her job, which resulted in her feeling lonely and isolated as she was unable to get anything done, "I did not have many people to talk to, except for the longest-serving staff, my cleaner. Ya, it was very lonely. It was worse because that was a difficult year with a difficult team. Plus I had just moved internally within the company". The sensitivity of the work and the need to draw professional boundaries with teaching staff created a degree of isolation for leaders operating within a flat organisational structure.

6.11 Leadership development

6.11.1 Leadership training

Leaders commented on the impact of leadership training programmes on their practice. CS.1.L1 explained that the Diploma in Leadership provides training for leaders but that it had limitations, “The Diploma in Leadership gives us the knowledge that we need, a bit of that budgeting, a bit about managing the time, a bit about managing meetings”. But at the same time she revealed that soft-skills building, so critical in her view, was an area not covered in these courses, “Your people are your gems. How to make them respect you, now that is something that this diploma in leadership will not teach you”. SL3 agreed with this point, stating, “The training doesn’t address that. In terms of communication and interaction, like the soft skills, the buy-in of how you need to convince your team to move along with you, all this has never really been addressed in training”.

Leaders highlighted the importance of continual learning as a leader rather than using qualification to reflect readiness. This was considered important for their sustainability and growth as a leader as CS.1.L1 explained ,“Because it has to start from the leader as an enabler and to learn to enable herself before she can lead”. In a similar vein CS.4.L1 described how learning from these courses, and discussions with her General Manager provided ‘learning bites’, which contributed to her leadership skills while CS.1.T2 explained that it was important for leaders to update their learning to ensure they were kept abreast of changes, saying, “It was important to see if there were new tasks and new things to be implemented, the leader needs to respond to change”.

6.11.2 Leadership Support

Among the six leaders, only CS.5.L1 attended a leadership preparation programme conducted by her organisation while the rest of the leaders explained that relied on informal mentorship or learnt on their own through trial and error. Senior leaders admitted there was no formal induction programme into the role and that at best, it was informal in nature and that the process consisted of a walk through by a cluster head or senior principal. Senior leaders reported that as part of the induction process, someone would be assigned as the leader’s ‘buddy’ for a limited period.

Leadership support was more pronounced when a critical stakeholder was involved. This was evident among the leaders from the three large organisations when their

centres underwent the SPARK accreditation process. SL1 admitted that she received much support from the management, akin to hand-holding. It ranged from interpreting key documents to interview preparation, “So we have to form a SPARK committee from HQ, put a few key personnel together. So this key group of personnel will go down to the centre to work with the principal, to check whether their documentation is in place”. In another example, SL2 explained how senior management would support leaders in meetings with external stakeholders. In such cases, senior management would be mobilised to support the leader during the meetings with the Head of Curriculum answering questions about the centralised curriculum and the Finance Head supporting questions related to budgeting.

In large organisations, ‘clustering’ was used to manage a large number of centres. This decentralised approach enabled centres to support one another and has become since common practice. CS.4.L1 explained that this connection was valuable to leaders irrespective of their level of experience, “She (cluster principal) always assumes that we all okay, because the three centres are quite strong and independent. And because we help one another so she always assumes we can be on our own. I mean it’s good and bad. Sometimes just a little bit of the mental support helps to show concern”. Despite how well leaders may function, they appreciated the show of a kind human touch and emotional support from their SLs.

Within the centre, leadership support can emerge in the form of a capable senior teacher. CS.4.L1 mentioned that her workplace chemistry with the senior teacher was critical in enabling her to do her job well, “When I had excellent senior teachers, we worked very well. She would do one part of it, and I’ll do one part of it. So we clicked very well. We complement. She always says that I’m the driver and she’s the co-driver”. This suggests that leadership support need not come from the top but can also emerge from the community that works with the leader.

6.11.3 Leadership Influence

Leaders concluded that their leadership styles were influenced by their personal experiences with the people they encountered in their lives. CS.1.L1 saw her father as a vital leadership influence. She grew up watching him managing grassroots organisations and as a military leader. It was from her father that she learnt values such as precision and order, but also the importance of minutiae. Most of the leaders surveyed also related some of their most memorable career experiences. They recounted learning good positive habits and recalled negative experiences that they wished not to emulate. CS.5.L1 cited influences from her school days where she built

her confidence as a leader, “In secondary school, I was a prefect. I tell people what to do. So maybe this is me. I like to work on projects, tell people what to do”. Leadership influences emerged from a variety of sources, both within and beyond the work environment.

6.12 Leadership readiness

6.12.1 Ground experience and leadership

Building credibility was a challenge that many of the leaders interviewed professed to. A path to leadership for CS.6.L1 began when she was assigned to fill in a principal's role, which subsequently led to promotion. Her metamorphosis from teacher to leader in the same centre proved more challenging than anticipated. She explained that it incited negative responses among her colleagues, “My team, at that time, were very young teachers, and they questioned my credibility. So why are you the centre head now? You were teaching, you know. You have not even finished or started your DPL. How sure are you that you can pull us all together as a team?” This example serves as a warning that respect does not come automatically with title. Qualifications are an essential part of building credibility but at the end of the day, leaders are required to prove their ability.

In contrast, other teachers interviewed remarked that there was more to being a principal than qualifications on paper. CS.1.T6 stated, “They have the diploma, they have the qualification, but they don't have the personal qualities to be a leader”. CS.2.T1 and CS.2.T5 added that having a diploma in leadership does not instantly qualify anyone to be a leader as they also emphasised the importance of personality as a critical factor in being able to perform the role. On the other hand, SL2 mentioned that although she has extensive leadership experience, her lack of a diploma in leadership, which did not exist when she undertook the role, disqualified her from receiving her choice of training or be recognised as a formal leader within the system. CS.1.T4 concurred, “I have seen principals outside, and I thought, ‘Wow! Excellent paper qualifications!', but they cannot, they just cannot do the job. We also have people who do not have any qualifications but has this leadership quality. However, they are not eligible”.

6.12.2 Accelerated leadership

Senior leaders associated leadership competency with exposure and experience. SL3 provided an example of an inexperienced leader in her organisation, stating,

“She didn’t quite know what she had to do even though things were being explained to her, so she had the teachers do more things than what they should be doing”. SL3 attributed this to the teachers’ lack of experience and maturity, “I don’t know whether it was a case of the age difference, because, at the time when we were heads of centres, we were all more mature, we had lots more experience”. SL2 explained the workforce dilemma that would occur if the young teachers were not promoted, “After 2-3 years, you need to move them up to a leadership position, or they will feel dissatisfied. They will think of job-hopping. They will do so to get a better position. Being a leader comes with monetary returns”.

By way of contrast, CS.1.T3 cautioned that teachers were well aware of the challenges of being a leader. However, they were more inclined to support the leader rather than become one, suggesting, “You can empathise with your leader and know the things that are demanded, but to be the principal of the school, is that what I want? Perhaps not, but I will be there to support”. This creates a dilemma as the sector’s workforce needs outweighs its leaders’ readiness to assume roles. SL2 noticed a trend of novice leaders who were unable to hold their position for even one year, observing, “For those leaders, I don’t see how the centre can grow, the best they can do is to maintain the centre. They cannot make any changes as they are not around long enough to see things through”.

Both teachers and leaders addressed the need for a leader to have sufficient knowledge to perform that role, as CS.1.T4 explained, “I guess, for early childhood leaders, you need to know your stuff well. You need to have substance before you can take on the leadership role”. There was, formerly, an assumption that a leader’s prior teaching experience should sufficiently equip them to undertake the role. CS.1.T3 maintained, “You have the experience, you know what’s happening. You are here as a leader as you should know what’s happening”. Teachers assume that leaders should be well aware of the challenges teachers face with their prior experience of being teachers. Senior leaders such as SL1 felt that although leaders possessed pedagogical knowledge, this may be more theory-based. SL1 added, “What I feel is that they are equipped with knowledge but not enough skills. It’s about the application of knowledge and skills. And at the same time, you must also have a very good attitude and interpersonal skills”. As a young leader, CS.1.T3 described the importance of supporting them with practical know-how such as managing internal politics, suggesting, “Train us to know things in detail, in case we have teachers who are senior, who will challenge us”.

6.12.3 Leading learning and critical thinking

SL3 felt that leadership learning was a strong component of being a good leader, “Initiative is very important, because if you have no initiative and you don’t want to keep learning, you will never improve. And that’s what I see of some of the leaders, and their problem is because they do not want to learn, and they do not take the initiative to solve problems or go further by finding out what is the root of the problem”. CS.2.T2 expressed the view that leaders could be better trained in counselling and coaching teachers to manage their work. One of the criticisms of leadership related to the leader’s capacity to think. SL3 felt this was a weakness of the training programmes, opining, “They are not trained to think critically. So I think that is part of the problem of leadership training”. SL3 also felt that real leadership required leaders to think outside the box and take up cross-business and inter-disciplinary learning. SL3 attributed this lack of critical thinking to the education system, “I personally feel our education system does not give us that much opportunity to have that critical thinking space. For me, I feel that where I got my critical thinking space opportunities is when I was overseas”. SL3 felt the leaders she oversaw were not speaking their mind even though they were in a safe space, lamenting, “They can be talking outside (the room), but they will not be direct with us”.

6.13 Mentoring

Leaders shared stories of mentors who possessed attributes that enabled them to ‘grow’. CS.4.L1 recounted her experience with two mentors, of which one was assigned to her at work and another as her personal mentor. She described how she could connect better with the latter as that mentor listened and empowered her, while the work mentor focused on providing her with solutions. CS.3.L1 also recounted her relationship with her mentor, who enabled her to think more deeply and critically, thus inspiring her to deploy the same strategies at work. Similarly, CS.5.L1 described her mentor as focused on encouragement, which pushed her to further her learning and continually upgrade her skills in the field. She was motivated enough to pursue her degree even though she did not feel that she was good enough. These strong relationships demonstrate a leader’s qualities to motivate and challenge early childhood professionals toward career progression and development. On the other hand, poor mentoring could, equally, hurt perceptions of leadership. CS.4.L1 further explained how her learning was affected by her mentor who was physically absent most of the time, “I didn’t enjoy my stint there because she didn’t mentor me, she was overseeing only, so she was hardly at the centre, so I learnt from the teachers”.

6.14 Impact of policy initiatives

6.14.1 Restructuring of landscape and practice

Leaders described how the restructuring of the ECCE landscape, through the creation of government-supported organisations, had affected their work. CS.1.L1 explained that the creation of the AOP and POP had led to a fragmentation of the ground, “When you have AOP, POP, it separates everybody again. We are already fragmented”. She explained that the pursuit of awards has fostered a competitive spirit within and between organisations, “It becomes competition so ‘I’m not gonna tell you what I’m up to,’ which has simultaneously damaged the collaborative spirit among ECCE practitioners on the ground. The dynamic changes have also compelled leaders and teachers to ensure that they keep themselves updated with the latest information. CS.5.T4 mentioned, for example, that she made it a point to read the ECDA website often, as she had new teachers coming in and needed to keep abreast of developments.

SL2 explained the impact of the large centre development on her work, stating, “The government has started many AOP centres and megacentres. That means that for every single megacentre, you will need many teachers to fulfil the number for the student-teacher ratio. There is a need to find qualified personnel to be registered which resulted in more movement. Because of this, our in-house training becomes endless. Instead of moving our people to the next level of promotion, we always end up to training and retraining”. The changes in the sector have impacted employee movement and the need for organisations to cope and manage operations to a stable level. The result of this is the creation of standardised processes and procedure, “We find it very exhausting, so our countermeasure is to come up with as many manuals as possible because otherwise, the trainer will be very tired because you are training the same thing over and over again”.

6.14.2 SPARK

SPARK was a particular source of stress for leaders and teachers. Firstly, the interpretation of the document by stakeholders created tension due to variations in philosophies. SL3 felt that after experiencing SPARK, professionals would approach her staff in a condescending manner, saying ,“The trainers for SPARK were from secondary school principals, they treated us like we don’t know how to plan a lesson plan, and I was insulted because they treated us like children. We are adults, and we are early childhood educators. Even though we are not from MOE, that does not mean

we are not professionals". Further, CS.5.L1 echoed differences in the way assessors interpreted information, "There is a problem with the assessors. They come in with multiple standards, and their expectations are all different". In addition, the processes entail hefty workloads, "I think SPARK is a good initiative, but it has given leaders much unnecessary stress because most of them are very sceptical about the documentation required. So they find themselves spending a lot of time on paperwork, trying to put information together. You would be surprised that most of them cannot really write well. So to put together information and documentation rather than just filling in forms, it can be a real challenge".

These initiatives have led to changes in work priorities for teachers and leaders alike. Teachers commented about the changes that they have noticed in the behaviour of leaders that have resulted from these policy initiatives. CS.2.T1 noted, "If there are new tasks and things to be implemented, the leader also needs to get used to the changes. For example, if rules change, she needs time to understand it all". CS.3.T5 commented that leaders are spending long hours sitting in front of the computer adding that it was ironic that although the initiatives were designed to improve quality, they also prevented teachers from achieving real quality, "So there is a lot of paperwork. It is just very time-consuming. And it ties the teachers down to doing paperwork. Rather than focus on the teaching, they need to remember to take photos and documentation. They spend more time on this (documentation) now rather than teaching, which I feel a bit sad". CS.4.T2, likewise, questioned the need for a mountain of paperwork, adding, "It affects the way you do your work as teachers. Is it meant to protect the parents, the children or the teachers?". She also felt that practitioners might lose sight of the purpose of the requirements. SL3 noted that despite the grievances, government agencies were open to feedback and acting upon it, "Someone from SPARK came down and talked to my head of the centre. She was very thankful as we had a very honest exchange. Subsequently, when the other assessors came for the follow-up two years after, they were much better, they did not judge us as the way they did before".

6.15 Leadership effectiveness

6.15.1 Competency measures

Leaders felt that leadership effectiveness was subjective and depended on the stakeholder's point of view. CS.1.L1 explained that her performance indicators were made very clear to her from the beginning. Her leadership would be assessed by the management committee in an interview, a separate interview with two teachers, and

a report on the profit and loss performance of the school. SL1 stated that financial performance was the primary factor that reflected the success of her work. Leaders in other centres described the need to report on finances and awards as this was an important focus in the school's internal audit process. Yet SL1 also said that as long as the centre was operationally strong and there was no negative feedback, the centre was considered to be doing well. Nonetheless, as a leader, she used curriculum delivery as her yardstick for effectiveness, "At the end of the day you must always question yourself, how do the children benefit from all these things".

SL2 added that leaders were judged on their work plan and monitored via their key performance indicators. These represented strategic work plans that the leader drew up in conjunction with the management, "It is so detailed that you cannot believe the extent of it! It is something that I do not think any normal human being can accomplish". SL2 added that her management judged performance on quantitative rather than qualitative data, "Because figures cannot lie". Some of the figures considered to be particularly important include enrolment, the number of awards, and teacher turnover. In her case, there was a lower focus on qualitative factors such as how staff are treated and managed, "They do not care how many teachers cry, at the end of the year they just look at your report card". The emphasis on explicit, largely quantitative indicators, may reflect a narrowed view of leadership effectiveness.

According to SL2, the intensity of policy change has created a situation where retention is a real issue due to a competitive labour market. Given the shortage of leaders, schools are hard-pressed to find individuals with the desired qualities and qualifications, "People are too busy moving around. There are too many opportunities out there available for leadership. Because the policy requires certain certification, those people have the advantage. They (leaders) have very strong bargaining power. It is not about whether you want them, it is whether they want to work for you".

New initiatives within organisations have brought about additional challenges. SL1 pointed a finger at the 'people developer programme' in her company, requiring teachers to undergo job rotation every two years with the aim of developing competencies. Although the idea has merit, teachers are loathe to teach lower age groups as these programmes are associated with routine care, "In early childhood, sometimes being a K2 teacher is probably seen 'to have arrived'. Now, how do you tell them that they have to teach N1?". The translation of the policy into practice may create more issues in some settings than others.

6.15.2 Managing effectiveness

Leaders mentioned that they are torn between performance and development. CS.3.L1 stated that, “letting their staff fail” as a way to learn was important, but this could, however, be seen as a weakness in leadership. CS.1.L1 added that the patience she exercises with her staff was frowned upon by the management. SL1 remarked that they often felt sandwiched by obligation, adding that senior leaders were expected to portray themselves in a positive light, “At our end, no matter whether it works or it doesn’t work, we try to make it work”. This involves having to convince principals to undertake tasks that may otherwise seem undesirable, “So I will try to talk to the principal and get them to look at this angle or the other angle. I think it is challenging”. SLs and CLs are ‘obligated’ to represent the management’s voice, which at times places them in a position of conflict with their staff.

6.16 Discussion

6.16.1 Context of influence

The interviews reveal the interplay of influences emerging from a variety of sources. Adopting the ecological system model by Bronfenbrenner (2009), the factors that affect leadership from the microsystem to macrosystem will be discussed.

The operational mission and the school environment can influence the work focus and leadership task of leaders. Managing and balancing operating costs is an issue for all early childhood centres, but leaders in profit-based kindergartens are under more pressure to achieve profits than most. Leaders operating such centres need to consistently weigh decisions based on cost and expenditure, all of which demand a business acumen and a commercial approach which has led to a focus on market competitiveness and the need to consumer choice (Lloyd, 2012). In comparison, leaders in government-supported organisations are challenged to meet performance indicators guided by national policy objectives. In both cases, leaders are tasked with meeting organisational expectations beyond meeting the educational needs of children.

In Singapore, the creation of large megacentres has forced leaders to adopt a systems-thinking mindset. Although each early childhood centre operates as a unit that promotes care and connection ethics, leaders are expected to exercise their corporate skills within their organisational environment. Recent collaborations such as ‘The Early Years Centre’ model (ECDA, 2018) in partnership with MOE and the

integration of early intervention services within the preschool setting (MSF, 2019) have expanded the multi-agency model of work for leaders. Furthermore, the Refreshed Skills Framework for Early Childhood (see Appendix 5) shows this skill to be even more critical as the ECCE system integrates the fields of learning support and early intervention. These require leaders to exhibit operational competencies as the role has expanded to include internal and external collaboration work.

At the mesosystem level, the marketisation and corporatisation of early childhood education have created a client-service centred relationship between parent and school (Lim & Lippinen, 2019). Tan (2018) describes the rise of parentocracy as a Singapore phenomenon that has given parents a strong voice in matters related to schooling. The competitive nature of the industry has elevated parents to a position of influence in the centre and compelled leaders to establish a good rapport with them. As a marketised sector operating within a highly competitive education system, the ability to address parental concerns continues to exert a strong influence in daily operations. Maintaining this relationship is critical to ensuring stable enrolment and brand image but the teachers' inability to deal with parental concerns implies that leaders are left to undertake this task.

With increased governance of the sector, leaders have to cope with the intensity and speed of policy changes. Beset by a shortage of manpower, leaders in the industry are challenged in their change management efforts, which has led to a 'survival mentality' as leaders prioritise the needs of their staff to ensure operational stability. An underlying cultural influence is the weak voice of leaders in the sector. There seems to be a desire for leaders to have a stronger voice in advocating for teachers and children but a lack of confidence and the inability to critically think through issues is impeding the leaders' ability to maximise the potential of their roles.

6.16.2 Context of policy text production

The interviews described the process of how information was disseminated within organisations. In large organisations such as AOP and POP centres, policies would be interpreted by senior management and leaders would be informed via email or briefings. There would be support in the interpretation of policy texts and the leaders would be informed of the actions to be taken by the organisation in turn. In small organisations, on the other hand, the interpretation of policy texts was made the responsibility of the CL, who in some cases, would confer with the owner of the organisation. Information flow and leader participation in policy interpretation varies

greatly with organisational workflows. The technical process of policy text production varies too and depends on the availability of support within organisations.

Senior Leaders reported that policy information would sometimes reach the CLs directly as the CL's name would be the point of contact in the database. Ironically, senior leaders within organisations may not be recognised as an authority figure although they may have decision-making powers within the organisation. The processes of policy dissemination and interpretation seem to function better within the operating mechanisms of larger organisations.

6.16.3 Context of practice

Leadership effectiveness is measured by management in terms of operational efficiency. Leaders are pressured to perform and meet requirements incumbent on them, even if it means that the interests of the teacher or the child might be jeopardised. For smaller centres, profitability is a significant concern, especially for those that operate without government funding. Centre management and corporate culture can influence the goals of early childhood practice in an organisation. This paradox of practice can enlarge the challenge of leadership and risks creating conflict among leaders, particularly when personal and organisational goals fail to align (Lim & Lipponen, 2019).

The interviews reflect a preference for interactions to be more personalised in approach and there was an expressed need for stronger engagement between teachers and leaders. Despite this preference, teachers and leaders have acclimated to structured work approaches though this is more apparent in large organisations where operations and communication processes reinforce such hierarchies. Although leadership structures can influence leadership style, leadership approaches are dependent on the individual leader's personal philosophy. When variations of styles manifest themselves in an organisation or within a leadership team, tension and anxiety among staff can result.

There are mixed perceptions of the leader's primary role though it appears well accepted that a leader might juggle multiple roles. Teachers seek support from principals as pedagogical leaders, yet leaders view themselves more as strategic leaders. This curriculum and pedagogical leadership role seem particularly challenging as operational and administrative work are considered a priority. A report by the OECD (2019) identifies a primary source of leaders' work-related stress as having too much administrative work associated with their job. Though leaders do

their best to cycle through their tasks, leaders have difficulty meeting expectations, especially when the needs of management and teachers are at loggerheads.

Furthermore, this extensive skill competency requires a high level of leadership capability, acquired through extensive ground experience. The recent OECD (2019) study showed that most leaders within their study had 10 years of experience or more in the field and were also more senior in age. By way of contrast, the emergence of younger leaders in the Singapore context contributes to a lack of leadership readiness compounded by the absence of a clear job scope for leadership positions and weak leadership support (Ebbeck, 2014).

6.17 Conclusion

This chapter identifies the perspectives of leadership held by teachers, leaders and senior leaders. The interview responses show that views on leadership can be mixed as leadership may be affected by the role, the personal beliefs, experiences and organisational settings of early childhood education professionals. In addition, the interviews provided insight into the variability of on-the-ground practices as well as tensions that emerged in the process of leadership enactment. The impact of organisational structures, in particular, emerged as a strong factor in influencing the work of leaders. The next chapter will provide insight into the work of leaders through documentation gathered from the 'Day in the life' data collection phase.

Chapter 7 – A ‘Day in the Life’

7.1 Introduction

This chapter will present findings of a regular ‘Day in the Life’ of an early childhood leader from six different preschool settings in Singapore. This section will describe a leader’s typical activities over the course of a day in the early childhood centre with observations of leadership behaviours. This aims to provide an insight into Singapore early childhood leaders’ practices across a variety of settings.

7.2 Research questions

The focus of this chapter will seek to address the following question:

1. What is the policy-to-practice context to EC leadership in Singapore?
2. How is early childhood leadership enacted in a range of Singaporean settings?

7.3 Methods

7.3.1 Participants

Prior to this phase, a pilot session was conducted with a for-profit early childhood centre in Singapore to test out the feasibility of the field recording procedures. Once the researcher had established the process, a list of 15 potential sites was drawn up based on setting type. This was an important criterion to ensure diversity among the ECCE programmes, organisational structure and physical settings of preschools in Singapore. After narrowing this down to six potential sites, with a backup for each, the centre leaders on the first-choice list were approached via email. Once confirmed, arrangements were made via email and the researcher made herself available to accommodate the principal’s schedule for the shadowing exercise. A day before the exercise, a phone call was made to clarify details of the day, a note of any special school events and an explanation of video recording procedures. To ensure the leaders felt comfortable during the session, the researcher explained the shadowing procedures to ensure an understanding and to help clarify any concerns.

7.4 Materials and procedure

7.4.1 Video

The shadowing exercise involved the researcher video-recording the leader's experiences from 8 am to 5 pm. Using an easy-to-access sling bag and pouch, the researcher shadowed the leader with four fully-charged pocket video cameras, a small notebook and an audio recorder. The researcher video-recorded 5 to 15 minute-long vignettes of the leader's activities and transitions as she went about her day. When the observed experiences were considered 'sensitive', the researcher would suspend the video recording, switching to field notes or an audio recorder to describe the event. Care was taken to avoid capturing images of children during the session. Throughout the day, the researcher kept a log of the timings and activities of the leader.

7.4.2 Leader and researcher log sheet

Each leader was given a simple template (refer to Appendix 6) which they could use to record the day's activities. Most wrote on a separate piece of paper or on their mobile device before transcribing the information onto the log sheet at the end of the workday. These notes represented events and tasks of the day that they considered most important to them. The researcher retyped the notes for legibility. Of the six leaders, one principal failed to submit her sheet as she went on extended urgent leave after the interview though the researcher was able to use her researcher notes and log sheet in place of that.

7.4.3 School profile sheet

Each leader was given a school profile form to fill in basic information about school organisational structure and programme details (see Appendix 7). This data enabled an understanding of the scope of the leader's responsibilities and specific contextual information that would otherwise be missed in the process of data collection. The information also enabled the researcher to construct detailed case study profiles of the leader and the centre.

7.4.4 Observation

The researcher took notes on the activities and observations of interactions throughout the day. An audio recording was also made when leader and researcher were in transition across the centre. When clarity was needed, questions would be

asked as the leader and researcher moved from one space to another. The researcher's reflections would be made during lunchtime and at the end of the workday, to ensure that the observations were captured in sufficient detail. In the analysis, these notes were organised into specific themes.

7.5 Ethical considerations

Printed consent forms (refer to Appendix 8) were emailed, posted or hand-delivered to the leaders of the case sites before the commencement of the observations. In some of these cases, the researcher visited the site ahead of time to understand the centre set-up better and establish rapport with the leader before the actual recording day. The leader would inform the staff of the researcher's presence of the activity to ensure the latter's presence did not disturb the centre's regular activities.

7.6 Analysis

7.6.1 Video

The vignettes were numbered for easy reference and retrieval. The recording yielded between 28 to 52 vignettes with variations in duration. An excel sheet with a criteria list was created that listed the following a priori codes: leadership engagement, behaviour, location and leadership tasks. During the video review, a frequency count and short descriptive notes of each criterion were recorded on the list. These were then coded into themes.

7.6.2 Leader and researcher log sheet

Both the leader and researcher log sheets were analysed for types of event and then classified into themes. The leader's identification of tasks was coded to reflect what was significant to them. In addition, the planned activities were highlighted, and the additional activities that emerged were included in an additional row within the table. This was followed by any additional tasks that were noted by the researcher but which may have been omitted by the leader. The leaders' choice of verbs was also checked to confirm the intention of the activity.

7.6.3 School profile sheet

The data provided in the school profile sheet was reorganised into case site profiles to provide a clear description of the settings as well as their similarities and differences. These profiles provided information that would illustrate the preschool type, the environment, teachers, children, school programme, organisation structure

and promotion process. It also included a profile overview of the leader's educational background, promotion process and leadership influences. A selection of the data was extracted and presented in Table 7.1. The detailed case site profiles are presented in Appendix 3, since the amount of information may be excessive for this chapter.

7.6.4 Observation

The field notes provided background understanding of the school, challenges gathered from the researcher's observations, as well as conversations during transitions. These were invaluable in providing a rich source of information about the workings of the centre and the leader's perspectives, which would not be addressed in the recorded interview session. Some of these observations appear in the video and log sheet results where applicable.

7.7 Results

7.7.1 Participants

Table 7.1: Profile of leaders and centres

	Sex	Age	Race	Years as principal	Programme	Operation Type	Enrolment of children	Staff size
CS.1.L1	F	Mid 40s	Chinese	5 years (1 st)	Two session Kindergarten	Not for profit	650	28
CS.2.L1	F	Early 30s	Indian	4 years (1 st)	Flexi-care with half-day and full-day programmes	Profit	110	20
CS.3.L1	F	Late 20s	Chinese	2.5 years (1 st)	Half-day and full-day programmes	Not for profit	130	16
CS.4.L1	F	Late 40s	Chinese	4 years (1 st)	Childcare and infant care programme	For-profit Anchor operator	84	16
CS.5.L1	F	Mid 40s	Chinese	10 years (2 nd)	Two session Kindergarten only	Non-profit Anchor operator	213	16
CS.6.L1	F	Early 30s	Malay	4 years (1 st)	Childcare only	Non-profit Voluntary welfare organisation	62	6

The leaders were mainly first-time, female principals with less than five years of leadership experience. The only exception was CS.5.L1, who was on her second posting as a centre leader with 10 years' experience in the role. CS.5.L1 worked also as a Lead Principal, which required her to lead five other centres within the area. Unlike the others, her core work responsibilities extended beyond her immediate centre. Overall, the leaders in this study could be considered experienced principals, as most had led the centre for more than two years.

The leaders represented a cross section of race and age profiles. Male representation was not featured in this study due to the lack of male centre leaders. The centres featured various childcare and kindergarten programme offerings that catered to families from different socio-economic backgrounds. Based on their enrolment, these case sites ranged from small, medium and large-sized preschool centres. These centres had different organisational set-ups ranging from government-supported AOP centres to for-profit centres.

7.7.2 Video analysis

- Nature of leader interactions in a centre

The video analysis provided data to illustrate the interactions between leaders and stakeholders throughout the day. These stakeholders have been identified as children, parents, teachers and non-teaching staff. The external stakeholders refer to contractors, programme vendors and bus drivers as shown in Table 7.2:

Table 7.2: Frequency of leader interactions with different stakeholders

Stakeholders	Leader					
	CS1	CS2	CS3	CS4	CS5	CS6
Children	15	7	20	10	6	9
Parents	4	4	5	14	3	10
Teachers	10	16	14	11	5	9
Staff*	5	8	8	4	3	4
External	2	4	3	2	1	3

*Note : Refers to non-teaching staff

The interactions showed a mixed pattern of interactions across the six centres. This was influenced by the activities of the leader. CS.1.L1 and CS.3.L1 scored high in their number of interactions with children, as they spent a significant part of their day in the classroom, either teaching or supporting the teacher. CS.3.L1's role, in particular, required her to teach in the kindergarten classroom in the first part of the

morning. There was a high count for parent interactions for CS.4.L1 and CS.6.L1. One possible explanation was that CS.4.L1 and CS.6.L1 worked at open concept centres where the office was located next to the main entrance of the school. The interior of the office was visible to visitors due to the glass panels used. Hence, when parents arrived, the leader would be obliged to greet parents and help with the morning temperature health check. This was repeated for parent greets and departure procedures in the afternoon. The immediate events in the school required their attention and affected their daily routines. There was a noticeable difference in the case of CS.5.L1, whose office was located near the entrance although the positioning of her desk and the concrete walls of the office allowed her to work without being distracted by the arrival of parents and children.

All leaders spent a significant part of their workday communicating with teaching and non-teaching staff. The counts seemed to be higher in cases where the leader had scheduled meetings. These counts reflected face-to-face interactions and did not take into account email and phone calls with parents, organisational stakeholders and external vendors. In the case of CS.5.L1, a large part of the day was spent in the office preparing for meetings which account for the low frequency of interaction.

Interactions between leaders and teachers would take place when the leader conducted her ‘walkabout’ (see Table 7.3). CS.2.L1’s centre was the most accessible as it occupied one floor and all the corridors were linked. CS.1.L1, on the other hand, had to traipse along two separate buildings with the main school spread across two levels. CS.3.L1’s school was in an enclosed compound, spread over six houses, and connected by a walkway. CS.4.L1, CS.5.L1 and CS.6.L1 all had similar setups in that they were all located on the void deck of Housing Development Board flats, with classrooms spread across two to three separate school bays. It was observed that teachers would wait to speak to the leader as they expected her on her daily ‘walkabout’. In the case of CS.3.L1 and CS.1.L1, the office block and school block were separated at a considerable distance from each other. In these settings, the researcher observed the administration staff making a concerted effort to physically locate the leader when an urgent matter arose.

- Location of interactions

Table 7.3: Frequency of leader interactions in different locations of school

Locations in Centre	CS1	CS2	CS3	CS4	CS5	CS6
Assembly area	2	2	NA	NA	0	NA
Corridor	5	4	6	4	0	8
Classroom	7	4	8	7	2	8
Office	2	4	2	5	6	5
Playground	3	0	4	NA	0	0
Pantry/ Kitchen	2	0	0	0	1	0
Reception	0	1	0	2	0	NA
Staff Room	0	NA	2	NA	1	0

NA indicates that the centre does not have such a space.

Leaders were observed to interact with teachers and staff outside the office space. This seemed to be influenced by the leader's routines, work tasks for the day, and the centre's design. Planned individual interactions would usually take place in the office or in an empty classroom. The staff room and classroom would also be used for individual and large, planned group meetings. If a leader needed to clarify an issue, it was more common for the leader to walk over and approach the teacher in the classroom than for the teacher to come to the office. Generally, the leaders would be moving about the centre as part of their workday. The exception was CS.5.L1 whose teachers made visits to see her in the office where she stationed herself most of the day. Work interactions often occurred in the classrooms as teachers were less mobile during teaching hours. It was also noted that leaders conducted their chats in 'between' spaces such as corridors, arising from incidental meetings during the leader's walkabout.

- Leader and Researcher Log Sheet

Table 7.4: Leader and researcher log sheet

	CS1	CS2	CS3	CS4	CS5	CS6
Tasks planned for the day	Mentoring Child observation Meeting supervision	Teacher Observation Mentoring	Classroom teaching Teacher observation	Teacher support Interview Class Observation	Administration	Pedagogical support Administration Quality planning
Other tasks included in the log	Administration Teacher Observation Site Maintenance	#	Play Leading Teacher Support	Site Maintenance	Teacher Support Operations Curriculum Planning	Site Maintenance Operational Support Parent Support Teacher Support Child Support
Additional tasks noted by the researcher	Pedagogical Support Relationship Building Leadership Building Pedagogical Parent Support Mediator Child Support Financial	Site Maintenance Administrative Documenting Course Tutor Writing Tutor Pedagogical Support Special Needs Support Parent Support Child Support Class Preparation Cleaning	Logistic Planner Administrative Documenting Course Tutor Writing Tutor Pedagogical Support Special Needs Support Parent Support Child Support Class Preparation Cleaning	Administration Operational Support Curriculum Support Child Support	Site Maintenance Orientation Parent Support	Observation
Approximate number of task changes	37 task changes	50 task changes	59 task changes	29 task changes	35 task changes	42 task changes
Verbs used and actions noted by leader	Worship Address Reflect Assure Observe Check Follow up Solve Feedback Mentor Discuss	##	Plan Think Converse Support Engage Observe Listen	Comfort Communicate Receive Introduce Observe Check Interview	Converse Settle Prepare Write Check Clear	Ensure Check Assist Welcome Monitor Walk Share Prepare Attend

Note: ##Missing Data

- Planned and unplanned leadership tasks

Table 7.4 presents a summary of tasks observed from the videos, the leaders and researcher's log. At the start of the 'Day in the Life' session, the researcher noted the key tasks that the leaders had planned for the day. This would encompass two to three key tasks including scheduled meetings, observations and interviews. Their log sheet would include other 'emergent' leadership tasks that were inserted between these time slots. One of the everyday unplanned tasks was site maintenance, which included fixing leaky taps, improving cleanliness, and managing the centre. In addition, parent and child support were also everyday unplanned tasks that leaders engaged in. Overall, the researcher noted more tasks undertaken by the leader than the leader had documented in the log.

It was also noted that the leaders identified tasks that involved interaction in their log. Administrative tasks were part of the leaders' daily work, but these were slotted in or addressed later with the sole exception being CS.5.L1, who scheduled administrative tasks as her priority as she had to leave in the afternoon for an external meeting. All the leaders kept a calendar and a 'to-do' checklist but CS.5.L1 was an exception, as she was the only leader who claimed that she was able to check off all the tasks that she had planned for the day.

- Activity Flows in the Day

There were distinct 'high' and 'low' activity periods within the centre. The 'high' periods would coincide with an intensity of 'movement' within the centre such as arrival, transition time, mealtime and departure time whereas periods of 'low' activity would usually be during curriculum teaching hours. The leader was observed to be making herself available to help teachers during the 'high' activity times and positioned herself to be visible and accessible to parents and teachers. A faster pace of activity was generally evident in the kindergartens, due to the strict time schedules they had to adhere to. The childcare centres would have a slower pace of activity in the afternoon, particularly from 12 pm to 3 pm when the children would nap, although meetings would take place in the classroom itself, as teachers still needed to keep a watchful eye on the children as they slept. The childcare leaders would try to do most of their discussions with their teachers during these 'low' hours and activities would pick up again between 3 pm through to 6.30 pm when the afternoon curriculum sessions would resume followed by departure routines, beginning around 5.30 pm. In the kindergarten settings, all the children would leave by around 3.30 pm, after which time the leaders would then be able to schedule staff meetings.

- Perspectives on leadership tasks

The leader log sheet recorded events that were considered significant to the leader and in the form of ‘activity chunks’ with some as short as 15 minutes while the most extended entry stretched over 5 hours. This depended on the leader’s diligence in terms of their record-keeping and how they interpreted significant events. For example, in the case of CS.5.L1, a large chunk between 10.30 am and 6 pm was recorded as a three-line entry while CS.3.L1 neglected to record the morning teaching activity in any detail. As the researcher had taken detailed notes of the events, a comparison was made during the analysis. It was observed that these big chunks consisted of a large number of small specific tasks that were still important to the leader’s work although, these seemed to constitute ‘everyday operational’ work that did not seem to be a significant task in the mind of the leader.

The leaders also moved quickly from one task to another, as noted by the frequency of task changes. These ‘task shifts’ were particularly evident when the teacher moved around the school. CS.2.L1 and CS.3.L1 moved about very quickly throughout the day and seemed to work in ‘bursts of energy’. CS.2.1 and CS.3.1 reflected higher counts as they were ‘quick on their feet’ whereas they were usually engaged in more deliberate, focused work when they were sitting down. However, their open-door policy gave rise to frequent disruptions even when they were at their desks. CS.4.L1, on the other hand, had the least disruptive day with the pace slowing significantly in the afternoon when she spent time in the office and special activity room.

The log sheet featured a variety of record keeping styles. CS.1.L1 emphasised the location of events and her achievements. CS.3.L1 recorded a personal reflection of the activities. CS.4.L1 focused on interactions with people. CS.5.L1 organised it in one to one-and-a-half hour intervals and concentrated on visible tasks. CS.6.L1 organised her record in regular blocks but added a combination of tasks and included intentions. Each leader employed a different lens to review the events that they considered important, highlighting explicit and implicit elements of their work. From the verbs chosen in their logs, the leaders in this study adopted a supportive and consultative leadership style. Interestingly, the submitted log sheets were laden with action-oriented items, except that of CS.3.L1, who focused more on documenting her reflections on teacher observations.

7.7.3 School profile sheet

The information from the school profile sheets was used to build case site profiles of the centres as summarised in Table 7.5:

Table 7.5: School profile

Site Name	CS1	CS2	CS3	CS4	CS5	CS6
Environment	An old two storey building in large compound	One floor of commercial building	Old pre-war residence with large compound	Void deck of an old residential estate	Void deck in a new residential estate	Void deck in mature residential estate
Governance	Management Committee	Manager Head of Ops Head of Curriculum Cluster Mgr.	Board of Directors Director	Centre Quality manager	NA	NA
Teacher	1 Principal 1 VP 1 Mentor T 4 Senior T 8 T 6 AT	1 Principal 3 Senior T 15 T 2 AT	1 Principal 1 Senior T 2 Specialist T 8 T 8 AT	1 Principal 2 Senior T 10 T 4 Infant T	1 Principal 1 Senior T 8 T 2 AT	1 Principal 1 Senior T 5 T 5 AT
Admin staff	1 Admin Mgr.	1 Customer Officer 1 Office Admin	2 Admin Staff	Nil	1 Admin Exec	1 Admin Exec
Socio-economic Status of families	Low :10% Middle : 70% High :20%	Low :5% Middle : 55% High :40%	Low : 0% Middle : 3% High : 97%	Low : 26% Middle: 26% High : 48%	Low : 30% Middle: 60% High : 10%	Low : 10% Middle: 80% High : 10%

Note: Reference to sites will adopt the convention 'CS2' while reference to leaders will adopt the format 'CS.2.L1'

- Preschool environment and Leadership

The preschools were housed in a variety of building types, which were as small as 1,000 sqm to approximately 4,500 sqm in size. CS1 and CS3 were located in a large compound, which required leaders to traverse via linkways. CS4, CS5 and CS6 occupied the void deck area of government housing flats. The classrooms were located in two separate 'bays' located some distance from each other. Leaders needed to move out of one bay to get to another. CS2 was the most contained site and was fully air-conditioned. Due to the layout of the schools, teachers were confined to their classrooms most of the day. Consequently, leaders were observed to walk

over to classrooms to engage with them when needed. Although an intercom system was available, the leaders preferred to have face-to-face communication with their staff.

CS4, CS5 and CS6 were located within a public housing estate which required the school to use shared public spaces such as the playground, corridors and open areas for school activities. As the Town Council manages these spaces, leaders have the additional task of monitoring public spaces for safety and engaging with the town council representatives as part of their role. Although CS1 and CS3 were located in private settings, site maintenance was still a concern as their buildings were old and required regular upkeep.

The “micro-climate” within these early childhood environments varied significantly too. CS1 resembled more of a primary school setting with self-contained, comfortably air-conditioned classrooms and special facilities. One had to move from indoor to outdoor spaces to get around across the two levels of the huge block. CS2 was fully air-conditioned, did not have an outdoor space, and was situated in a three-storey building. CS3 was made up of separate building structures and was the site most exposed to the outdoor elements. CS5 was a void deck centre where some of the classrooms were not air-conditioned and relied on ceiling fans to cool the environment. CS4 and CS6 had a similar setup as classrooms here featured an open concept with low shelves. The classrooms were not air-conditioned although CS4 had one special activity room that was air-conditioned. Still, the researcher noted that heat and humidity seemed to pose issues for sites CS4 and CS6. The centres were warm even though the fans were switched on. Environmental noise was also a factor as the classrooms faced the car park, playground and common walking corridors of residents who lived in the flats above. As their offices were next to the classrooms, at one point both CS.4.L1 and CS.6.L1 had to step out of the centre to take a phone call as the noise from the classrooms was too loud. These reflect the real work environments of the leaders.

- Distributed and pedagogical leadership practice

The organisational structures reported by the centres threw up some similarities. All centres offered classes for the age groups two to five years, and there would usually be at least one class for each age group led by two teachers to meet the child-teacher ratio required. In the case of CS1, there were multiple classes for each age group which required the leader to develop an extra layer of leadership in the form of Zone Co-ordinators for each level. All the centres had an administrative assistant to help

the principal except CS4, where the leader also undertook administrative roles such as budgeting, enrolment and fee collection. Client service was deemed particularly important by CS2, which placed a Customer Service Officer outside to address queries and parent issues. CS2 had another administration executive to deal with organisational paperwork and a further two tasked with specialised areas of work although it is worth noting that having an administration executive did not exempt the leaders of their operational and administrative duties. However, it did help reduce the workload, particularly for routine administrative tasks such as food orders, petty cash claims, and general filing.

It was noted that an interesting variation existed in the reporting structure of the leaders. CS.1.L1 reported to a Management Committee that was made up of non-early childhood trained individuals who were volunteers. As a sizeable profit-oriented company, CS.2.L1, meanwhile, had to report to several Heads of Department and two leadership levels above her position. CS.3.L1 worked closely with her Director in everyday matters, who in turn reported to a Board of Directors, although neither the Director nor the Board members were early childhood trained. CS.4.L1 reported to a Cluster Quality Manager who, the researcher understands, reported to a General Manager, based at the headquarters. CS.5.L1 reported to an Executive Principal based at the headquarters, and CS.6.L1 reported to an Education Manager at the company headquarters. Only CS.2.L1, CS.4.L1 and CS.5.L1, who operate within large organisations, have a reporting officer with an early childhood background. Upon reviewing the structures, it can be said that for centres that operate as single centre preschools, leaders like CS.1.L1 and CS.3.L1 assume the responsibility of being the most qualified pedagogical leader within their respective organisations.

The leaders in this study reflected a distributed leadership model within their organisation. Every centre had at least one senior teacher who was tasked with teaching duties. These senior teachers usually assumed a pedagogical leadership role while the leader undertook both an operational and pedagogical role. Due to its large setup, CS1 was able to have four senior teachers who had teaching duties. These teachers had role specialisations and would lead meetings and curriculum plans. In addition, CS1 was the only centre to have a Vice Principal and a Mentor Teacher who did not have a teaching role. This enabled the leader to focus less on daily routines and more on developing team leadership of her staff.

- Multiple roles of a leader

During the interviews, the leaders mentioned that they undertook responsibilities beyond their immediate centre. CS.5.L1 explained that this was part of her core job scope, two of the leaders said that this was part of their organisational remit, while the rest did so for self-development. CS.5.L1 was a Lead Principal, which meant she managed five other CLs.

In the larger centre setups, leaders also assumed additional portfolios within their organisation. For example, CS.2.L1 was made an Internal SPARK assessor to prepare other centres for the accreditation process. Leaders also served in organisational committees for year-end concerts and sports events. One leader assumed the role of curriculum specialist within her organisation because of her previous work background. Leaders had to balance these roles even though these were supplementary to their core work.

Leaders also undertook projects and collaborative efforts with external organisations. One leader collaborated with secondary schools and institutes of higher learning for the Community-in-Partnership programme while also mentoring practicum students with early childhood training agencies and led collaborations with community partners for school tours and environmental outreach programmes. Another leader hosted visits to her preschool as a contribution to the professional learning community. Leaders also needed to ‘sell’ income-generating enrichment programmes to parents. These were optional programmes provided by an external vendor in the afternoons which would enable the school to earn a small percentage from the fees. These responsibilities added value to the curriculum programme and the centre’s services but entailed an additional work task for the leader.

- Leadership Development and Approach

The leaders offered different accounts of their journeys to becoming the centre leader. CS.1.L1 was hired by the previous principal who groomed her in person to take over the position but CS.2.L1 was sourced from a recruitment company and CS.3.L1, in contrast, came via a personal referral. CS.4.L1 started out at the centre as a trainee principal and, after the centre underwent several changes of principal, was finally considered for the role, and promoted to lead the centre. CS.5.L1 and CS.6.L1 underwent a regular interview process to become the centre leader.

Although the centres in this study were established preschools, the newest being just six years old, and the oldest being thirty-five, it was noted that none reported a robust

formal mentoring or leadership programme. CS.1.L1 described her mentoring process as one that was done informally “through interviews and chat sessions” while CS.2.L1 stated she was not mentored at all. In fact, she revealed that she was asked to come into the school to learn the role from a principal who was due to leave the school in just a few days’ time. CS.2.L1 added that she learnt most of the tasks on the job, which was the same for CS.4.L1. CS.3.L1 stated that her leadership mentoring was conducted as “casual conversations and feedback” while CS.5.L1 had no mentor and CS.6.L1 mentioned that she shadowed a teacher for a mere three half-days as part of her mentoring programme. Overall, this group of primarily first-time principals honed their craft largely through trial and error.

7.7.4 Key centre challenges

One of the challenges leaders faced was managing staff from a variety of cultural backgrounds. Aside from Singaporeans, teaching staff comprised Filipino, Taiwanese, Malaysian and Chinese nationals. It was observed that each leader used two languages during the course of their work. English was the dominant language, with the other being their Mother Tongue, usually Chinese or Malay. CS.2.L1, who was Indian, demonstrated proficiency in spoken Chinese, which she used to communicate with her Mandarin teachers. Although this did not emerge as an issue for this group of leaders, non-Chinese leaders such as CS.2.L1, had to engage one of their staff to help translate information for the Chinese teachers.

Table 7.6: Key challenges for Centre Leader

	Operational Budget	Staff Turnover	Parent Support	Management Support	Environment Limitations	Demographic Changes
CS1	Medium	Medium	Low	Low	Low	Low
CS2	Medium	High	High	High	Low	Medium
CS3	Low	High	Low	Low	Low	High
CS4	Medium	Medium	Medium	Low	High	Medium
CS5	High	High	High	Medium	High	Medium
CS6	Medium	Medium	Low	High	Medium	Low

Table 7.6 shows the challenges faced by leaders in the course of their duties. The most critical concern appeared to be staff turnover, though this comes as no big surprise as retention and attrition are well-known problems in the industry. The challenge of managing the ‘Operational Budget’ was identified as the next pressing issue for centres. Unlike the rest of the centres, CS.3.L1 rated it as a ‘Low’ challenge

because she is in the unique position of being at a non-profit centre that caters to high-income families. As a result, her centre was not driven to achieve profit motives.

Similarly, CS.5.L1, who led a kindergarten, identified operational costs as a ‘High’ challenge as it faced stiff competition from childcare centres. Parents were likely to be attracted to enrol their children in childcare given the availability of subsidies for such programmes. The social mission of the organisation also meant that the centre catered to a large percentage of low-income families, for whom low fees were important. Parent support’ was rated a ‘High’ challenge for both CS.2.L1 and CS.5.L1. Coincidentally, these two centres had the highest percentage of vacancies among the centres in this study. It can be surmised then that the services of these centres may not be meeting parental demands. CS.2.L1 and CS.6.L1 listed Management Support’ as a ‘High’ challenge for their centres. In the interview, CS.6.L1 mentioned that she wanted to undertake a number of changes in the centre, but her requests had not been approved, which may have led to her giving ‘Management Support’ such a score. Similarly, CS.2.L1 wanted more management support, particularly in relation to teacher issues. Their inability to harness support from the management at their headquarters had proven to be a source of frustration for both of them.

With regard to Environment Limitations’, CS.1.L1, CS.2.L1 and CS.3.L1 listed it as a ‘Low’ challenge, which is understandable as these centres have the biggest and most envied environments of any of the centres in this study. On the other hand, the leaders of the three void deck centres seem to find the general lack of space in their settings as a limitation. Interestingly, CS.3.L1 indicated Demographic Changes as a ‘High’ challenge for their centre despite their relatively high enrolment. Despite having a high vacancy rate, CS.2.L1 and CS.5.L1 rate demographic factors as a ‘Medium’ concern.

7.8 Discussion

The shadowing exercise showed the wide range of tasks and the frenetic pace that work leaders in Singapore early childhood centres have to contend with. Some of these work tasks were intentionally visible for leaders to be seen ‘doing’, which included activities such as centre walkabouts, health checks and meetings. Rodd (2015) described ‘leadership presence’, defined as being confident, grounded and authentic, as an important quality for a leader to be perceived as having by others. Leaders were expected to ‘walk the talk’ and possess the ability to collaborate and participate actively. Rodd (2015) distinguishes tasks related to management and leadership differentiating leadership as people concerned with vision, inspiration and

motivation. Management, on the other hand, according to Rodd (2015), is the process of establishing order and consistency. The leaders in this study, with their emphasis on operational work, seem to be focused more on management-related tasks in their daily activities.

There were also less visible' parts of the leader's work that emerged in the observation although these were essential to the running of the school, such as building maintenance and having daily face-to-face contact with staff. Meanwhile, informal communication opportunities allowed teachers to engage with the leader in a less intimidating setting than that of a meeting (p. 103). Borhaug (2013) emphasised, however, that this consultative style of leaders was often time-consuming and cautioned that it could be affected by the organisation's size. The 'less visible' consultations would often be held between key activities of the day and at 'in-between' spaces such as corridors and classroom entrances. These tasks seemed to be enshrined into the daily roster of duties tasks that have become so standard that the leaders even neglected to mention these as acts of any significance. Nevertheless, these tasks can create quite a challenge for the leaders, swamping their time and sapping their energy.

This 'lack of time' was echoed by the ECCE leaders in a Berlin study by Strehmel (2016). Leaders faced similar pressures to complete tasks related to quality management, organisational development, networking and self-management. Singapore leaders also highlighted this in a previous study and stated that more time was needed for pedagogical leadership, human resource management and daily managerial tasks (Hujala et al., 2016). A Norwegian leaders' study (Moen & Granrusten, 2013) also showed that staff and administrative leadership demanded a great deal of work time. The spread of the centres and the lack of flow from one area to the next represented an environmental challenge that the Singapore leaders failed to identify as one that could apply to their own work. Mobility was another important feature of leadership work tasks as leaders had to move around to engage their staff. It was observed that the design of the centres posed a barrier to easy interaction. The teachers' busy schedule meant that interaction time was limited to specific hours in a day. The Finnish study concurred that the physical separation of teachers across different classrooms made it more time-consuming for the leaders to engage the staff. The writer also emphasised the influence of the task environment, administration, units, and individuals, as factors that should not be overlooked in contributing to leadership work challenges (Haltunnen, 2013).

These observations show how unplanned tasks might affect the efficiency of a leader's work. The leaders had to address issues, which in most cases needed immediate attention, as they invariably involved children or parents. This could, consequently, affect a leader's ability to control her workday, particularly when multiple stakeholders are involved. The observations also showed that the leader had to manage her work to coincide with the 'High' and 'Low' activity times in the centre. The leaders' work seemed to oscillate between different types of work tasks, which required their strong adaptive ability to alternate and apply different skills.

Hujala and Eskelinan (2013) explain that the nature of a preschool leader's work is often fragmented and that leadership tasks are often unclear. This was evident in the way that the Singapore leaders would switch between tasks such as helping out with classroom routines at one moment, to performing office work at another. The leader was expected to be adept at all these tasks and lead the teachers through role modelling too. One aspect of the work that surfaced in these observations is the physicality of the work role in the case of Singapore. Aside from the need to move from one space to another to perform her work tasks, the leader also needed to engage in work that involved physical labour such as carrying children, bathing them and cleaning, although, the environmental setup, particularly of void deck centres, may mean further challenges for the leader. Despite these circumstances, the Singapore ECCE leader is expected to be adept in teaching and routine care tasks whilst simultaneously proving her skills as a high-functioning professional manager.

7.9 Conclusion

The analysis of the 'Day in the Life' study has revealed factors that influence leaders' work in various settings. McCrea (2015) suggests that leadership is about bringing about improvement through influencing 'people', 'places' and 'practices' while Waniganayake et al., (2012) suggested an examination of leadership through three basic elements, namely 'the person', 'the place' and 'the position'. Both writers highlighted the importance of 'place' as a dimension of leadership, although this is not well explored in current ECCE leadership literature. The variation in settings and leadership management of these centres has given greater cause to examine the importance of the physical settings and operational setup in influencing leaders' daily practices in their centres.

Chapter 8 – Elite interviews

8.1 Introduction

The elite interviews were conducted with nine individuals who are recognised to have had either direct involvement in the early childhood policymaking process in Singapore, or at least have some influence in the sphere. This would provide a deeper level of understanding of the undercurrents, decision making and thought processes which influence policymaking.

8.2 Research question

The findings from this chapter address the following research question:

1. What is the policy-to-practice context to EC leadership in Singapore?
2. Who leads the leaders?

8.3 Method

8.3.1 Participants

Table 8.1 provides a brief description of the elite interview participants. A policy role has been identified by the researcher in each case to describe their role in relation to policy. The organisation types provide some background of their work areas.

Table 8.1: The policy elite participants

Code Name	Policy Role	Organisation	Description
E1	Policy Influencer	Non-Profit Foundation	An elite who works in an organisation which supports social and education projects. This elite has been involved in projects that have pushed the early childhood agenda to the forefront of politics in the country.
E2	Policy Academic	Research Agency	An influential academic involved in policy and education research. This elite has written extensively on leadership in the public school system.
E3	Policy Influencer	Small Education Business	A private education business owner and researcher. This elite has participated in policy discussions and is known to have a strong independent voice.
E4	Policy Influencer	Training Organisation	A member of the management in an early childhood training agency. This elite has extensive experience in the early childhood industry and has participated extensively in national-level discussions related to its development.
E5	Policymaker	Government Agency	A high-ranking civil servant involved in early childhood policymaking. These elite influences two government ministries associated with social development. This elite also submitted a written response in addition to the interview.
E6	Policymaker	Government Agency	A researcher and civil servant with extensive experience in the education ministry. This elite works with education leaders and policymaking agencies in early childhood education.
E7	Policy Influencer	Early Childhood Association	A member of the management in an organisation supporting the development of early childhood professionals. This elite has worked alongside local and regional institutions, and government ministries.
E8	Policy Influencer	Large Business Organisation	A CEO from a profit-driven early childhood organisation. This elite has developed a thriving practice within the industry, locally and internationally.
E9	Policy Influencer	Training and Research Agency	An established academic in the field of early childhood who has conducted extensive studies in the field. The elite's articles have been widely cited in local research.

The elites were selected based on the researcher's industry knowledge and recommendations from other elites. To attain an understanding of how policy is enacted and interpreted at different levels of early childhood governance, care was taken to include participants at the forefront of policymaking. This provided a wealth of data to investigate on the thought process behind policy creation and its subsequent impact on practice.

8.3.2 Procedure

A pilot interview was conducted with two elites who were regarded as industry veterans. The information from the pilot interview does not form part of the data presented here as the intention was to trial the questions and build the researcher's confidence. From this experience, the researcher noted that as the elite's work was specific, a constructive set of questions had to be created that would leverage the participant's background. Following this, the nine elites were identified, and an email was sent to inform them of the research and the relevance of their participation. As elites often had busy schedules, the sessions were kept to between 45 and 60 minutes. The questions were sent ahead of time to help them prepare for the interview. All elites agreed to the audio recording except one. In this instance, the researcher requested a friend to transcribe the interview to allow the researcher to fully concentrate on the interview per se. The interviews were conducted face-to-face, and elites were assured that their identities would remain confidential. The timing and locations were chosen by the elites themselves to ensure that they felt comfortable with the arrangements.

8.4 Analysis

Using a priori categories that guided the interview, the transcripts were colour coded and the responses were then grouped, based on the 10 key questions for easier reference (see Appendix 9). Following this, each response was further sub-divided, condensing it as a meaning unit from which a code, category and theme were derived. Subsequently, using the policy trajectory model on which this study is based, the data was further analysed, applying the Bowe et al. (1992) framework in the second phase of analysis. To facilitate this, a few guiding questions relating to the context of influence, the context of policy text production and context of practice model were used to organise the information following the coding process as shown in Table 8.2.

Table 8.2: Elite Interview Questions

Elite interview (second phase of analysis)	
Context of influence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In what ways did elites describe their understandings of early childhood leadership? • Who and what factors have contributed to such an understanding of leadership? • How have these discourses influenced the nature, content and purpose of leadership policy?
Context of policy text production	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In what ways do the documents related to early childhood describe the role of leaders? • How and what is the process involved in the interpretation of these documents?
Context of practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How did the elites describe the current practice of early childhood leaders? • What factors contributed to currently observed leadership practice? • What struggles and tensions were identified?

8.5 Results

- Leadership roles and tasks

The elite interviews produced a strong but wide range of views about the roles of early childhood leaders. There was also a broad understanding of whom the elites regarded as leaders. The perspectives of who EC leaders ranged from the philosophical to standard definitions of leadership as outlined in official documents. Elites from government-related agencies were more consistent in identifying leadership by role and task as outlined by policy documents. In this case, E2, E5, E6 and E7 identified the leaders as the people regarded as leaders within their field. It was also recognised that the role of these leaders was a largely operational one, which included curriculum leadership along with administrative and mentoring responsibilities.

The elites who worked in more independent and private settings such as E1, E3, E4, E8 and E9, conveyed a broader understanding of early childhood leadership. E1 and E3 viewed leadership as encompassing a strong advocacy role. E1 mentioned that leaders need to provide, “the kind of leadership to inspire or to rally everybody to inspire them to greater things and to act as a group” whilst E3 stipulated that leaders should, “carve out a road forward and even if that road is going to take you down a path that is different, it is a good road”. Thus, E1 and E3 lamented the current lack of real leadership within the sector. E8 identified two distinct roles expected of an early

childhood leader, namely that of a business leader and that of a content leader. According to E8, a leader would be expected to calibrate decisions between the two roles to achieve sustainability for the company.

E4 and E1 described leadership less in terms of the role, and more in terms of traits. Their belief was that leadership went above and beyond a predefined scope of duties and that anyone demonstrating self-leadership qualities, whether a teacher, curriculum person or assistant, could be considered a leader within the field. Despite concurring with this view, E7 added that it was critical that a leader should take responsibility for change, opining, “every teacher is a leader, you don’t have to be a centre principal, but if want to make change, I think we focus on the leader”.

E5, the most politically influential elite in the group, explained how the leadership role would become even more important in the future. E5 explained that better leaders would be needed in the future as the improvements made in the industry would mean that there would be more qualified educators, stating, “the people who are now in the polytechnics, people doing the upgrading like this will be a different breed”. Interestingly, E5 also spoke about leadership from the perspective of market dominance, saying, “where it (MOE kindergarten) is situated, it will have an impact on the landscape and leadership” and added “If you want to have an influence, you must work hard to be leaders in the market”.

- Leadership and policy

Although there was a mixed response on ideas about leadership, the elites were in agreement that early childhood leadership duties currently exclude a role in policymaking. E5 drew a clear distinction here, insisting that policymaking was not part of the preschool leaders’ work. E2 echoed this and cited the example of the operational and non-policy related role of current public school principals, which E2 explained is seen by the authorities as the norm of principalship, saying ,“So if you are a member of the general public, your children go to school, you know school leaders equals school principal. So that basically would be their most intense view of school leadership”. E2 added that at a governance level, perceptions of the role of school principals in the public school system might also influence perceptions of the role of early childhood principals, despite the fact that EC principals operate in a largely privatised industry. E3 and E9 expressed the view that without being able to influence policy, CLs could not be considered true leaders with E9 further explaining, “leadership is limited here. The principals, they are not leaders. They are in centres but are not influencing policy. As such we have to refer to the policymakers”. E2 said

that the non-policy role needed to be understood from the nature of Singapore education context, stating, “What does a principal do? Looks after the school. But they wouldn’t think he may be making policy. So they would separate policy into the Singapore sort of realm, so that deficiency is, maybe, unique to Singapore”.

- Leadership competencies

There was also consensus among the elites on the weak state of leadership competencies. One of the issues raised by all the elites was the leader’s inability to challenge and advocate for early childhood issues. E3 lamented, “leadership is lacking because they parrot the main narrative” and reflected by the general lack of desire to challenge and contest. E1 emphasised, “the profession as a whole must go forward, the profession does not speak up”. E3 attributed this to leaders’ lack of courage, rooted in “a desire not to rock the boat”. E2 attributed this fear to the absence of a structural setup that protects teachers, such as teachers’ unions.

The elites also shared their views on challenges related to the quality of leaders within the industry. E3 described this in relation to the leaders’ competency within the workforce, “I think many early childhood educators in Singapore don’t actually have the competency to be able to dissect an issue”, while E4 portrayed early childhood leaders as being very well trained in terms of pedagogy but bereft of strong leadership ability. E4 remarked, “they (leaders) are just socially and emotionally not quite up to par”.

There was also agreement among the elites about the importance of the early childhood leadership role in terms of quality. E7 highlighted this, “centre leadership is so critical to the quality of services”. The link between leadership and curriculum was seen as particularly critical by E6, who felt pedagogical influence was the core of the leadership work, stating, “centre heads are themselves also trained teachers. First I would like them to be able to play that role of a curriculum leader”. E4 agreed, remarking, “our leaders are very well-trained where early childhood is concerned”. Nevertheless, E4 felt that they should be equally “well trained in the field of management and framework” to be an effective leader.

- Leadership and power

The elites commented about the limitations in the exercise of power by principals in practice. E7 described how the executive principal controlled power, rendering centre principals the lack of ability to make critical decisions, “I would like to do this, but my executive principal won’t allow. Executive principal has a lot of power”. E7 highlighted

that this led to the disempowerment of leadership due to decisions taken by higher management. E1 also drew a line between the role of the ‘boss’ and the ‘leader’. It was observed that in most small centres which are profit driven, the owner or boss undertook the ‘premier’ leadership role despite there being a principal leading the centre. In addition, E1 noted that large organisations’ bureaucratic structures could impact the leader’s ability to exercise power, “principals are disempowered because there is always another layer of executive principals or cluster principals”. This variation in the distribution of power seemed to be dependent upon the organisational structure of the centres.

The elites shared their experiences of struggles with leadership and power. Four of the elites (E3, E6, E8 and E9) admitted that they faced challenges exercising their leadership within the industry, while another four elites described how their positions of influence also became a source of conflict. As a business owner, E3 said that her motives for advocacy came into question as her arguments were perceived to benefit her business. E6 performed the role as a policy regulator within a government ministry but conceded that this, at times, challenged her position as an early childhood researcher. E8 was a successful business owner who felt her work enabled her to contribute to society missed out on business opportunities because the company was majority foreign-owned. The respondents also made mention of the fear of the personal consequences of professional work. E9, for example, mentioned that although the aim was to influence the sector through objective research, there was careful consideration of the way her work was done to avoid it impacting her residence status in the country. It was also noted that E5 held a role in two different government ministries, which would often mean decisions required a weigh-in of different agendas within each ministry.

- Policy influence

In the interviews, the following documents were mentioned or discussed by the elites (see Table 8.3) of which the policy text most mentioned was SPARK.

Table 8.3: Elite Responses

	Document	Year	Description
1	Singapore Preschool Accreditation Framework (SPARK)	2011 (revised in 2015 and 2019)	A quality assurance framework which features the use of a Quality Rating Scale (QRS), a quality assessment tool for early childhood centres. It includes one criterion which assesses strategic and curriculum leadership.
2	Nurturing Early Learners (NEL) Framework	2013	A curriculum framework for preschools in Singapore. It does not explicitly refer to leadership but may be used by leaders for curriculum development.
3	Continuing Professional Development (CPD) Toolkit	2013	A toolkit to plan career training pathways for early childhood professionals. It features a section on management, administration and leadership.
4	Early Childhood Manpower Plan	2016	Developed in 2016, the manpower plan supported strategies to address the supply and quality of manpower in the sector.
5	SkillsFuture Framework for Early Childhood Care and Education	2016	This framework outlines the scope of roles and tasks of various levels of leadership within the sector.
6	Early Childhood Development Centres Regulatory Act	2018	A bill that was passed in 2017 which subsequently became an Act in 2018.

- Leadership qualifications

One of the key points of emphasis in the policy text documents was the definition of the job scope of leaders. E4 suggested, “the senior teacher is a leader. The vice-principal is a leader. And of course, the principal herself is a leader. But each one has their own scope and sphere of influence. So then it really depends on what is the scope of duties”. Despite the specific requirements outlined in documents, the elites were also mindful that leadership abilities should not be defined by content knowledge and paper qualifications. E5 mentioned, “You are also looking at those with the interest, with the heart to look after children... government is really pragmatic not very rigid in the sense that you are only asked for your papers”. E6 highlighted the importance of leadership for learning as a key component of a leader’s work, “I think it is the ongoing support we need to give to the teachers and it is not about attending courses, it is about the Principals and the Centre leader’s ability to coach and mentor their teachers at the centres that will be most important and of course creating the culture for learning is most critical”.

- Communication of policy

E2 and E8 both highlighted the political nature of education policymaking in Singapore and described the process as largely closed and a strictly internal process. As a small country with systems that are interlinked, E8 alluded to the fact that the culture of practices in public school systems can influence educational practices. Drawing on the experience of public schools, E8 divulged that the communication of policy would often be in the form of circulars, which would be disseminated to the schools to inform principals of changes, “A lot of policy would be government speeches, like the ministers’ speeches during budget, or when they open the Workplan seminar, those sorts of things. But communication to the principals – and don’t forget there are 30,000 teachers and about 350 schools – so communication there is circulars, largely. So it’s not so much public communication”. E8 added that even as a prominent early childhood advocate, she was not included in the policymaking process, nor would she receive information about policies. It was only leaders of centres as identified by the system that would be informed. E6 mentioned that the priority for messaging was „to target the masses first. When it comes to the ECCE every year, the early childhood conference, everybody is included”. In recent times, National Day Rally speeches have also become a platform for communicating improvements in the sector.

- Policy messaging and context of setting

The mixed private and public nature of the early childhood industry also required communication that was strategic in approach. E5 highlighted this dilemma, “because of the complexity, of the sector, it makes it a challenge to drive down policy, to drive down messaging”. Nevertheless, E4 explained that the large number of policy initiatives raised the need for a better understanding of the material and communication process, “First it was SPARK. Then you have the iTeach, then CPD toolkit that nobody understands. Then now you have the competency framework. Then even if competency framework tied to the CPD, still not many people understood what’s going on”. E8 explained that much of the communication rested on the centre principal making sense of the policy and its interpretation. However, this could pose challenges should guidance be inadequate because, “if they don’t understand, they don’t understand. If they don’t read, they don’t read. It’s not about giving them a book”. E6 highlighted the critical need for this particularly in an industry that was largely commercial, “we need to implement a policy, get feedback, tweak it, improve on it and

run again. So we have to tap on this in order for us to be ahead of others. This is about competitiveness”.

- Leadership participation and policymaking

The Early Childhood Manpower Plan, for example, was the brainchild of a Sectoral Tripartite Committee, which comprised operators, unions, training agencies and government agencies, including ECDA. E6 also mentioned that in drawing up a skills map, leaders were involved in many focus group discussions. E2 mentioned, “they (policymakers) would involve the principals, but my view would be they would involve the principals far more in operational terms than ‘should we do this as a matter of principle”. The focus on operational aspects of policy was echoed by E6, “They call everybody together, they don’t even call us because we don’t run a childcare centre”.

E1 stressed the need to address the implementation challenges in effective policymaking, “Even you put in place the policy, it’s also a function in terms of how well you implement the whole thing. Also it’s a function of the skills, of the people on the ground, the kind of timeline you give to them”. For example, in regard to SPARK, E4 described how policies may not address the readiness and resources needed for its initiatives to be successful, “I’ve spoken to some of the operators and to do SPARK, actually they need a lot of injection of funds, and frankly in the first place they need to have enough staff. It’s not about decorating your environment”. Nevertheless, E6 felt that awareness of policy has evolved over time and, “that the leaders are more attuned today. I think our leaders are also more aware of the need to pay attention to policies”.

- Leadership is a challenging practice

There was a general understanding that the role of early childhood leaders is a challenging one because of its multi-faceted nature. E4 lamented that leaders were, “firefighting every day. They are being swept by many changes externally and internally” while E5 described this as a “whole transformation process that is happening in the early childhood sector”. E4 listed some of these issues, including “shortage of staff, attrition of staff, parents who make demands, children who more and more are having social and behavioural problems”. E6 explained the emphasis on administrative duties, “I think at the centre level, there is a lot for the centre level to cope with. There is a lot of admin work”. According to E6, curriculum leadership was the leader’s main responsibility, opining “policies are there to support, but at the centre level what is most critical is that the leadership in the learning of the teachers”.

- Leadership support

With these changes, E6 asserted that leadership support was vital because, "Once they (leaders) get swamped, in the centre they get absorbed by all these immediate, important, ad hoc things that come forward and unless they have support from the larger group and people reminding them, they may just allow themselves to be absorbed by admin work". E4 also highlighted the impact of settings on the ability of leaders to do their work, "if you are a standalone childcare centre, if you're a VWO with very little resources, you'll find that all these things, for example SPARK, you want to do, CPD toolkit, you want to send. But everyday you're always short of staff, your staff are not even qualified to attend some of the CPD courses". E7 added that in some settings, leaders might be unaware of policies, as they were more focused on the day-to-day operations in large centre setups, "Because HQ sets up the centre, makes sure the number of toilets, the space and everything, the principal just does the running. But would the principal know the policies or not?".

- Leadership learning

E7 argued that one of the challenges stemmed from the fact that although leaders are tasked with planning teacher development, when it came to self-development, they were left to their own devices. E7 specified the need for a framework that allowed leaders to take charge of their own learning and which provided depth and breadth of learning. A number of elites highlighted the need for a deeper development of leadership competencies with E6 adding that professional competencies also meant leaders needed "to have insights about self and awareness". E4 reiterated this while also highlighting the need for leaders to demonstrate personal mastery and have a 'growth mindset'. E1, E4, E6, E7 and E8 also mentioned the importance for leaders to develop a "sense of ownership". E1 described ownership as the concept of regulators being held accountable for policy outcomes while E4, E6 and E7 distilled the concept from the perspective of leaders taking ownership of their learning. E8, meanwhile, asserted the need for leaders to develop a general culture of ownership in their schools.

- Hurried leadership

There was general agreement that the sector was experiencing rapid change, which would impact stakeholders. E1 expressed concern about a pace of change that some felt was alarming, "I mean there's many changes, people are hyperventilating just to keep up". In a similar vein, E1 related "a hurried sector, hurried principals, hurried teachers, hurried parents, everyone caught, don't know how to press the pause

button". The inability to keep pace, E1 cautioned, would lead to a degradation of the profession and skills while E4 spoke in more general terms of the changes leading to challenging work for the leaders. Time was mentioned as a common challenge with E6 insisting that leaders be offered time to develop their competencies, "I think it is time. They need time to practice whatever has been taught to them. They need time to be better at what they are doing". Likewise, E5 felt that leaders need more time given the nature of the Singapore preschool landscape, "Improving leadership and raising quality is a journey and will take time. This is especially for a sector which has a diverse range of preschools, most of which are privately run". E1 echoed the common view that policies needed time after being implemented, "There's a time frame, as in anything. Even you put in place the policy, it's also a function in terms of how well you implement the whole thing, but all this quality will take time". Nevertheless, there was also found to be a level of general agreement that despite the criticisms and difficulties brought about by these changes, the policies were regarded as a positive development for the industry with E1 explaining, "people will suffer, but in the long run, it's a good thing".

- Governance and Governmentality

All the elites raised the issue of governmentality in early childhood leadership practice. Expressing the perspective of a public authority, E5 described the approach taken by the government to improve the sector as, "really pragmatic not very rigid". E1, on the other hand, recounted an unsettling experience when he was questioned by regulators about his organisation's efforts to lead and improve the sector. E3 referenced a culture of compliance among managers and leaders, "They're not going to shake the boat, they're not going to put their necks out there. And I think culturally, being Asian, conservative, we've always been very careful". E3 further explained that even higher management within large organisations may be reluctant to challenge and risk the government's position because, "when you're in that position, frankly because of a lot of connections and I think also the fact that they may be part of the grassroots, they are somehow linked already, biased towards a political position. And so if the government wants to do this, therefore we do it. I'm not going to upset my grassroots position or my standing". E2 said that there is a trust and faith in the government and in their ability to build quality in the early childhood sector, "Quality will improve. Because the Singapore government, to be fair to them, doesn't get into anything that it cannot defend quality". E2 also seemed to feel that the lack of policy challenge stems from, "government transactional citizenship" which develops where citizens are abiding and compliant as they would expect, in return, that "government

will be obliged to ensure that the minimum standards that it set out will be there". E9 added, "I feel there are many leaders with great contributions in Singapore who work very hard but they do not have the power to make the decisions. They have to follow the rule". E2 too, described the nature of how political decisions are managed, "our ministry is organised both in terms of the admin branch, where the PS is top, and the professional branch, where the DGE is top. And the DGE quite clearly answers to the PS, and the PS answers to the minister, who's a political appointee, who's a professional. So in that sense, I think, sure, they will consult principals and all the rest of it, but I suspect – and you can confirm this with some principals if you like – it's in the roll-out that they will say, we've decided on this".

E4 also outlined how the underlying approach taken to implement improvements in the sector can have the potential of compromising leadership within the sector, explaining, "the government right now is saying that, well, if you don't do it, ok, I'll get the anchor partners to do it. And then you will feel pressured. I'm not sure if this is the best way of empowerment. You empower a few groups of people and the rest have to look up to them and feel that they themselves are further and further away from what is in the clique". This defenestration of leaders has also echoed by E1, "I think there's quite a lot of disempowerment of leaders because of the HQ direction. And in between too, you have executive principals or whatever. I see that we're going more and more towards anchor operators, survival of the fittest".

8.6 Discussion

8.6.1 Context of influence

The elites agreed on the important role early childhood leaders played in ensuring the quality of early childhood services. This role was seen to be even more critical in managing rapid change in the sector. The elites shared a common view of leadership that centred on 'change' and 'influence'. Nevertheless, the interviews revealed that the elites held layered definitions of leadership which were influenced by their professional backgrounds. E4 and E8, who were in management positions, described leadership with a stronger organisational, business and management perspective whereas E2, E5 and E6, who worked in government organisations, framed early childhood leadership with frequent reference to official definitions of educational leaders in Singapore. E1, E3, E7 and E9 whose work roles were more autonomous in comparison, described leadership with a greater emphasis on advocacy while at the same time also being more critical of the issues, as E7 clearly remarked, "I just speak my mind, I don't have a job to lose". Hence, there was a varied emphasis on

the central role of early childhood leadership with more of the elites guided by personal working definitions rather than industry defined ones.

Another interesting aspect of leadership was the extent of a leader's role in policymaking. There was clarity from elites involved in government institutions that policymaking was not part of the early childhood leader's role. E5 confidently stated the non-policy role of EC leaders whereas E2 drew this understanding from the work roles of public school principals.

Despite offering mixed definitions of leadership, the elites were unequivocal in the view that leaders needed to develop better leadership abilities. The competencies listed varied greatly in terms of personal skills such as social dispositions, and cognitive competencies such as critical thinking ability. The inconclusive requirements expected of a leader reflect the demanding and multifaceted nature of their work role.

Lastly, the elite interviews underscored the complexity of the enactment of power in early childhood centres and that it should be understood in relation to the context of the establishment. Principals who are officially recognised as CLs possess varied levels of power depending on the organisational structure of the companies they work for. It cannot be easily assumed that the person registered as the leader of a centre would be the one holding the position of greatest power. These interviews have also uncovered a "leader of leaders" that existed in the form of a cluster or executive principals or owners of schools who have greater influence in critical decision matters. Overall, the elites described leadership in early childhood with less lucidity and consistency but concurred that leadership is problematic.

8.6.2 Context of policy text production

The SkillsFuture framework, SPARK, CPD toolkit and the Early Childhood Manpower plan all make clear reference to leadership within the document. Only E4 and E6 were able to explain specifically how SPARK or the CPD courses impacted the leader's development as these were key concerns in the course of their professional work. For the rest of the elites, reference to these documents were made in passing. Nevertheless, there was an implicit understanding that implementation of all the initiatives would have an indirect yet still significant impact on the work of leaders. For example, E7, despite being an advocate for early childhood, was excluded from the system as she was not an operator, "so we have no idea what is happening in the centres. Because we're not running centres, we're not in the system, so whatever

they tell the centres, we don't get to know". E6 surmised that Singapore could capitalise on its small size and population as well as its favourable geographical location to develop a more holistic approach to policymaking, noting, "Policies in countries have to be developed holistically, cannot be developed in isolation. So I would say that that is a very unique thing in Singapore, that we should take advantage of". The policy communication process at present may fail to engage a significant but invisible "leader of leaders" not formally recognised within the early childhood education system.

All the elites made reference to the massive changes in the sector as a major factor of concern for leaders. Although early childhood leadership was the main focus of the interviews, there was an implicit recognition that the government, by virtue of strong policy control, was the real leader within the sector. E9 highlighted Singapore's unique political context, "The context in Singapore is different. It is a controlled society. However, leaders need to have autonomy to develop programmes. As long as they do not have it (autonomy) there will be barriers to leadership in Singapore. The difference between Singapore and other countries is the level of autonomy people have". E2 illustrated this same point, pointing to the manner in which policies were managed, "From time to time they take soundings, 'eh, really a lot of people are upset over this', then it gets filtered upward. But you don't get a big debate happening in the papers over policy. If it's politics with an opposition, yes. But not policy debates". E3 felt that this lack of engagement has resulted in a situation where, "leadership has not been able to emerge because of these forces, these factors, and the government knows that".

Two elites also described the Singapore's unique policy implementation strategy. E2 noted, "ECDA is a classic example of a government regulator as they're part of ministry but not fully ministry", describing this as a strategy of the "government taking a leadership role in early childhood without taking it over" while E5 explained the advantage of how the complex setting requires ground expertise, "there is one body that looks at this. And ECDA will have the opportunity to look from while on the ground, but they have a better helicopter view of what's happening in the early childhood sector. So this helps to reduce that complexity, reduce the gaps and somehow help us narrate better to the society". Despite the complexity of the setting, E2 observed that the strategies adopted for the public schools were applied for the early childhood sector, "I think the government will exercise the type of leadership that they are now exercising over policy and practice in the schools, and that will be spread out over – and they will tighten requirements for childcare and EC centres to

be set". This assessment suggests that the formulation of policy for early childhood draws on successful models of policy management. Nevertheless, E2 highlighted that the management of policy needs to be aware of the challenges facing society in a strong state, "what might have worked in the LKY era will not work as well now. Partly because you have a well-educated population, which basically has seen other contexts, so people are not ignorant anymore". Consequently, a strategy of policy communication would be a critical feature of the policy text process.

8.6.3 Context of practice

The interview with the elites highlighted several dimensions that influence leadership yet emerge as paradoxical in practice. Firstly, there are a number of documents that have succinctly outlined the work roles and expectations of different levels of early childhood leaders. Nevertheless, these definitions are only applicable to organisations that are larger and bigger in number such as government preschools operated by the AOP, POP and MKs. In reality, small and private preschools do not have the capacity for such defined work roles . Hence, in practice, scoping the work of early childhood leaders remains problematic.

Another paradox of practice relates to the management of change within the industry. In its effort to increase quality, early childhood leaders had to manage a number of policy initiatives which has created an increased workload for leaders, and with it the notion of the 'hurried leader'. With the breadth of work tasks and an increased workload, attaining the desired level of quality will be an increasingly challenging. In trying to advance the sector, the push for quality has also reduced the capability of the sector to lead by disenfranchising the stakeholders, in the way that it approaches improvement measures by favouring those who are compliant, while shunning those who are disinclined to support its policies. Amid the efforts to improve the sector, the rush to showcase evidence of progress by pressuring leaders to deliver quick results may threaten its very objectives in the long run.

The context of practice has changed as E1 describes since now, "early childhood is a political issue. So you need to balance that". With the number of policy initiatives unleashed on the sector, the scope and workload of EC leaders has exploded. The greatest paradox would be that this rush to develop the early childhood sector stems from the fact that it was excluded as a key education sector in the past. According to E2, the management of early childhood education in Singapore, "is a policy failure as far as I'm concerned, a failure of leadership".

8.7 Conclusion

This chapter uncovers a wide range of views on early childhood leadership emerging from policy elites from a variety of backgrounds. Aside from the pedagogical and operational leadership roles, childhood leadership, it is held, plays a political role too. The importance of leadership is well recognised, but the policy elites identify the demonstration of leadership as deficient. There is an adherence to accepted modes of behaviour and an unwillingness to challenge practices that challenge beliefs. The findings suggest that the country's political culture seems to influence the way EC leadership may be interpreted.

Chapter 9 – Document Analysis of Policy Texts

9.1 Introduction

This chapter examines policy texts and documents related to early childhood leadership in Singapore. An analysis of each document will be presented and will be followed by a discussion of key themes that have emerged. A comparison of these documents will offer insight into the interpretations of EC leadership from a policy perspective.

9.2 Research question

This chapter aims to explore the following research question:

1. What is the policy-to-practice context to EC leadership in Singapore?
2. What does policy require early childhood leaders in Singapore to do in terms of implementation?

9.3 Method

A selection of training documents, reports and publications were considered for the document analysis exercise. Using the eight-step process by O’Leary (2014), these were organised for relevance. Eventually, four documents were chosen as they represent formal national policy material that reference early childhood leadership directly within their content. Bowen (2009) suggests that in the choice of texts, the quality of the document is more important than the quantity. Table 9.1 below provides a summary of the documents selected and the data analysed.

Table 9.1: Policy documents used for analysis

Item	Year	Documents selected	Agencies involved in policy creation	Document type	Data analysed
1	2012	Continuing Professional Development Framework (CPDFw)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ministry of Social and Family Development (Child Care Division) now under Early Childhood Development Agency 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> CPD Framework Booklet 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Leadership Training Content Leadership Learning
2	2016 and 2021*	Skills Framework for Early Childhood Care and Education (SFw) and Skill Standards for Leaders (SFw-SSL)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Early Childhood Development Agency Workforce Singapore SkillsFuture Singapore 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Guide for Occupations and Skills Skill Standards Document 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Performance competencies for Lead Teacher, Centre Leader, Senior Lead Teacher, Senior Centre Leader and Pinnacle Leader Definitions of leadership Roles of an EC leader
3	2018	Early Childhood Development Centre Regulations Act (ECDC Act)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Early Childhood Development Agency Parliament of Singapore 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regulatory Act 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Definitions of leadership Roles of an EC leader
4	2019	The SPARK Quality Rating Scale (QRS)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pre-school Education Branch, Ministry of Education Early Childhood Development Agency 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Quality Accreditation Booklet 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Definition of Curriculum and Strategic Leadership Leadership Assessment Criterion

NB

*The Refreshed Skills Framework was launched in Oct 2021. An analysis was not possible in time for submission, but the general framework has been included for currency.

Items 1, 2 and 3 were accessed online via links in the ECDA website. The researcher obtained item 4 through a friend whose centre had undergone the SPARK accreditation exercise. With the exception of item 3 which stands as a legal document, the other items represent material that are used by ECCE organisations to guide their practice. As official and current policy documents, all four documents hold some influence on the job scope and work tasks of EC leaders. In this chapter, the analysis and results of each policy document will be discussed within each

respective document section. The discussion section will then present an integrated discussion of the four items.

9.4 Continuing Professional Development Framework (CPDFw)

9.4.1 Analysis

The CPD framework is documented as a 112-page booklet which provides a structured pathway for ECCE practitioners to develop, update and specialise their knowledge and skills (MSF, 2012). Using a hard copy of the document, a scan was done on the document and sections which were connected with leadership was identified. A content analysis followed, where the information was extracted and organised in an excel sheet and thematic codes were generated. This process identified core learning areas for leadership.

9.4.2 Results

- **Leadership Learning**

The CPD framework outlines core competencies, a toolkit and resources to facilitate a continued improvement in their early childhood practice. It highlights four key knowledge domains, of which Domain 4 focuses on professional competencies in ‘Management, Administration and Leadership’. The framework, which is organised around three levels of proficiency, identifies the following key areas of learning: ‘Personal and Professional Interactions’, ‘Human Resource Management’, ‘Organisational Management and Continuous Programme Improvement’, ‘Financial and Facilities Management’, “Regulations, Policies and Quality Standards” and ‘Leadership, Team Building and Professional Development’. Some of the leadership-related activities suggested in the framework include inducting and mentoring, supervising teachers, research, conducting training and taking part in exchanges with other leaders. Although leaders are able to partake in courses from the other domains, the focus on leadership skill building emphasises learning the management, operational and administrative aspects of the role.

9.5 Skills Framework for Early Childhood Care and Education

(Guide on Occupations and Skills) and Skill Standards for Leaders (SFw-SSL)

9.5.1 Analysis

Two documents produced by SkillsFuture were examined. The first being the general ‘Guide on Occupations and Skills’ which provided an overview of the framework and

second the analysis was of the SFw-SSL, a structured document which details the ‘Technical Skills and Competencies’ information of the Lead Teacher, Centre Leader, Senior Lead Teacher and Senior Centre Leader.

A keyword search was conducted on these text-heavy documents to highlight relevant sections. The sections were examined, and notes were taken. For the examination of the SFw-SSL, a matrix was created to identify the number of skills that were identified within each skill and sub-skill category, followed by a count of the skills was made. Thereafter, the SFw-SSL was re-examined for relationships across leadership occupations.

9.5.2 Results

- Focus on teacher leadership and centre leadership

This framework posits the Leader Track as one of three tracks within the EC Career Progression Pathway. This Leader Track recognises five types of leadership occupations, namely Lead Teacher, CL, Senior Lead Teacher, Senior Centre Leader and Pinnacle Leader. With the exception of the Pinnacle Leader, which is a predominantly sectoral role, the other four leadership occupations involve tasks that deal with on-the-ground practice at the centres. Early childhood leadership is primarily focused on effecting change to practices directly within settings. The SFw-SSL also recognises the distinction between teacher leadership role through the Lead Teacher and centre leadership role through the CL. The SFw Guide describes teacher leadership as follows:

The EC educator is a pedagogical change agent, building teaching and learning capacity through bringing to the fore effective teaching and learning practices. He/she is proficient in facilitating learning, doing so through various means such as professional/networked learning communities. (SFw Guide on Occupations and Skills, p.12)

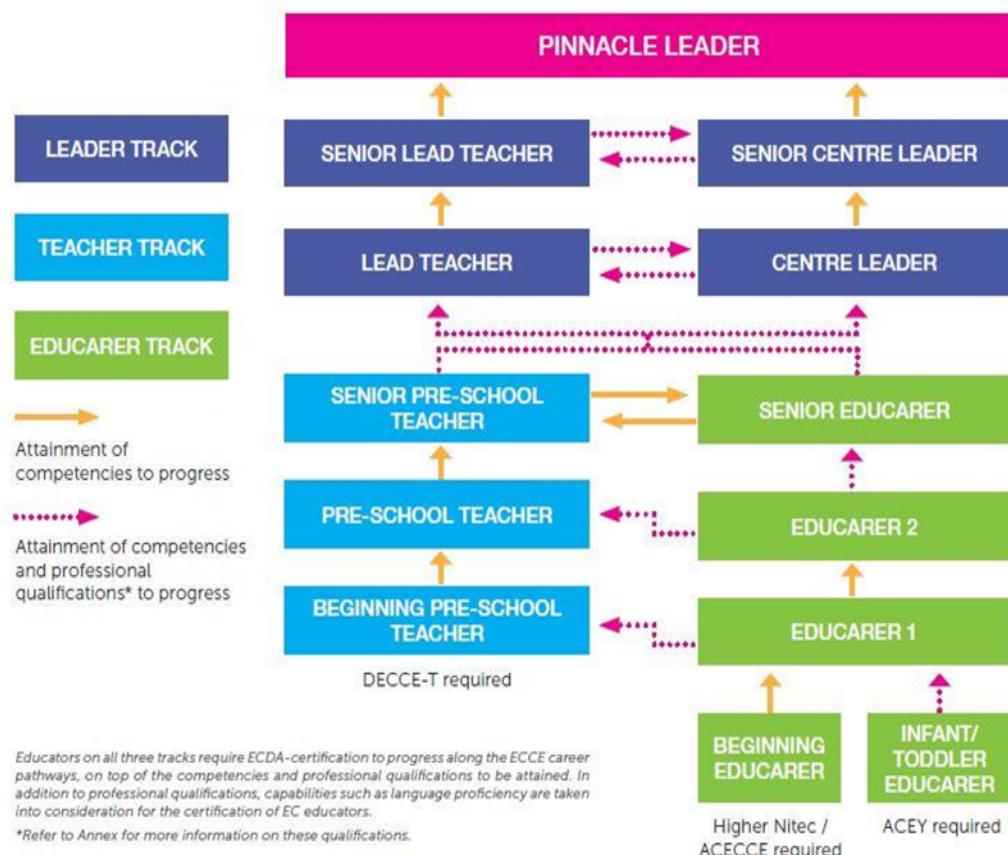
The centre leadership role in comparison refers to:

An EC educator who takes on centre leadership fosters a shared vision among staff and nurtures professionalism and a culture of care, respect and collaboration within the centre. He/she sets the tone for learning in the centre, to ensure the holistic development of children. The CL develops structures and processes to facilitate sustained collaborative partnerships with

stakeholders and is also responsible for managing centre operations. (SFw Guide on Occupations and Skills Guide, p.12)

The distinction is apparent in the occupation descriptions which seem to suggest a delineation of leadership roles based on a sphere of influence and role specialisation. The work of the Senior Leadership occupations involves multiple centres across the organisation in comparison to the work of the Lead Teacher and CL whose focus lies with one centre. The Lead Teacher and Senior Lead Teacher roles also focus on pedagogical leadership, whereas CL and Senior Centre Leader denote a wider range of roles that may encompass curriculum, pedagogical, strategic, organisational and operational leadership work.

Figure 9.1: Career Pathways



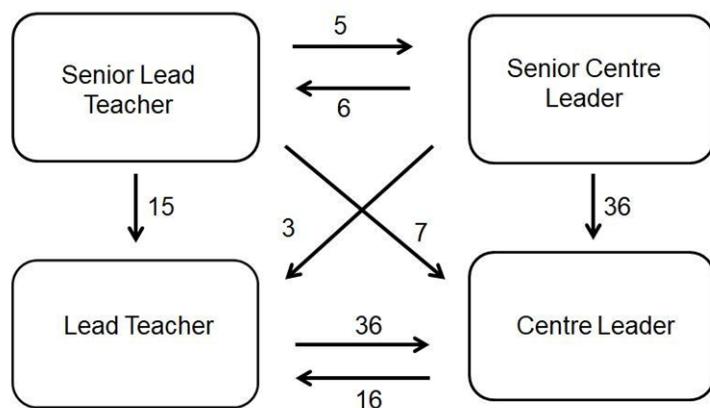
Skills Framework For Early Childhood Care and Education. A Guide on Occupation and Skills (2016, p.6)

- Collaborative work roles

Figure 9.1 shows the progression pathways of leadership occupations which may imply some connection across leader occupations. A deeper reading of the leadership occupation descriptions indicate that collaborative leadership is to be practised across the ECCE leadership occupations.

Figure 9.2 reveals the frequency in which such collaborations are mentioned in the Skill Standard document for the respective leadership occupation. The Pinnacle Leader role was intentionally omitted as there was minimal interaction involving this category of leader vis-a-vis other leader occupations. Suffice to say, the documents clearly show an expectation of collaborative work particularly for the CL. There were 36 mentions of the Senior CL's work with the CL and 36 mentions of the Lead Teacher working with the CL. Interestingly, this shows the CL as a 'leadership nucleus' across EC leader roles as the work tasks of other leaders seem to be heavily intertwined with the CL's. Bowen (2009) explained that documents can sometimes provide data that may be incomplete or inaccurate. It is worth noting that a frequency count, in this case, may be simplistic. Nevertheless Bowen (2009) adds that even though it may be interpretive, it is useful for painting an overall picture. In particular, the data will be useful for the triangulation phase of this study.

Figure 9.2: Frequency of mentions to indicate collaborative work expectations



- Range of skill competencies in leadership work

The SFw-SSL provides clear descriptions of the Skill Standards and performance competencies that is matched to each role. In the document, the leadership occupations are categorised into four skill categories : 'Developing the child holistically', 'Collaborating with families and the community', 'Building professional capacity' and 'Building organisational capacity'. A summary table (see Table 9.2) was created to provide an overview of the range of skills identified for each leadership position.

Table 9.2: Summary of Leadership Skills from Skills Standards – Leader Track (2016)

Item No	Skill Category	Sub-skill Category	Lead Teacher	Centre Leader	Senior Lead Teacher	Senior Centre Leader	Pinnacle Leader
1	Developing the child holistically	Curriculum and Pedagogy	XXX	XXX	XXX	XXX	XX
		Learning Environment	X	X	X	X	
		Interactions and Relationships	X	X	X	X	X
		Health, Safety and Nutrition	XX	XX			
2	Collaborating with Families & Community	Family & Community Partnerships	XX	XX	X	X	XX
3	Building Professional Capacity	Professional Mastery	XXX (X)	XX (XXX)	XXXX	XXX	XX
		Professional Values & Ethics	X	X	X	XX	
4	Building Organisational capacity	Teamwork & Collaboration	X(X)	X (XX)	X	X	
		Visioning & Planning	X	XXX (XXXX)		XXXXX	
5	Leadership & People Development	–	X	XX	X		
6	Problem Solving & Innovation	–		XXX			
7	Interpersonal	–	X	X			X
8	Business Communication	–				X	
9	Personal Effectiveness	–		X	(X)	(X)	(X)
10	Change Management	–				(X)	(X)
11	Planning & Implementation	–		XX		XX	
12	People & Relationship Management	–				(X)	(X)
13	Develop People	–			(X)	(X)	(X)
14	Building Sectoral Capacity	–					XX
	Total skill count		19	34	15	23	14

Notes

- X refers to a performance competency identified for a skill area. The number of X's reflect the number of performance competencies indicated for that skill.
- (X) refers to a skill that is drawn from the SkillsFuture Framework of *other* industries. These are regarded common 'shared' skills that would be applicable in leadership occupational roles across different sectors.
- The grey box indicates that no performance competency has been identified for that skill.

- Professional Executive and Management skills

The skill distribution for the different levels of leadership in the SF-SSL is tabulated above. Each 'X' represents a performance competency that has been identified under each skill category, while the table as a whole represents a frequency count of the skills featured in the framework. This analysis acknowledges that a frequency count may not accurately reflect the intensity or scope of the qualitative work in practice but it does provide a useful indicator of skills expected of leaders.

The table provides a visual map of the complete range of skills and the distribution of competencies covered in the SFw-SSL. Beyond the four major skill areas specified, skill competencies which reflect expectations for personal mastery as well as people and organisational development have been included. A number of skill competencies marked as "(x)" represent skills that have originated from other SkillsFuture frameworks. These are mainly 'Executive and Management' skills that are applicable across industries.

The inclusion of these skills reinforces the notion that aside from the ECCE skill set, CLs are also expected to have professional, executive and management competencies. A general skill count also reveals that it is the CL that has the highest number of competencies demanded with 34 skill items over the broadest range of 14 skill categories. The role of the CL can be described as one where a wide range of competencies and depth of expertise is expected.

- Lead Teacher and Centre Leader roles

The role of the Lead Teacher and CL have emerged as key leadership positions in most centres. An analysis of the Skill Standards reveal that the CL and Lead Teacher share 11 competencies across two categories – 'Developing the child holistically' and 'Collaborating with Families and Community' as indicated by the italicised statements. The overlap of roles suggests that these two roles are likely to have a close working relationship and with overlapping role expectations.

Table 9.3: Comparison of roles between Lead Teacher and Centre Leader

	Lead Teacher	Centre Leader
	Professional Mastery	
Building Professional Capacity	<i>Establish a culture of continuous learning</i>	<i>Establish a culture of continuous learning</i>
	<i>Develop Team Leaders through capability development and coaching (LPM)</i>	<i>Develop Team Leaders through capability development and coaching (LPM)</i>
	Develop professional expertise of self and centre staff	Contribute towards a learning organisation
	Develop Senior Preschool Teachers and mentors to help teachers in their Professional Learning and Development	Foster initiative and enterprise in teams Establish strategic processes and structures to engender a culture of mentoring
	Professional Values and Ethics	
	<i>Establish a culture of professionalism</i>	<i>Establish a culture of professionalism</i>
Building organisational Capacity	Teamwork and Collaboration	
	<i>Establish a culture of collaboration within the centre</i>	<i>Establish a culture of collaboration within the centre</i>
	<i>Lead workplace communication and engagement (ES)</i>	<i>Lead workplace communication and engagement (ES)</i>
		Solve problems and make decisions at Managerial Level (ES)
	Visioning and Planning	
	<i>Ensure the alignment of the curriculum and Teaching and learning approaches with centre's Mission and vision</i>	Establish buy-in and uphold the vision, mission and values in the centre
		Drive centre's initiatives, systems and processes and look into the coherence of plans
		Manage and review systems and processes (BM)
		Manage resource planning (BM)
		Display critical thinking and analytical skills (BM)
		Build capacity of colleagues through effective human resource management and development
		Lead team leaders to develop business strategies and governance management (LPM)

LPM : Leadership and People Management Competencies

ES :Employability Skills Competencies

BM : Business Management Competencies

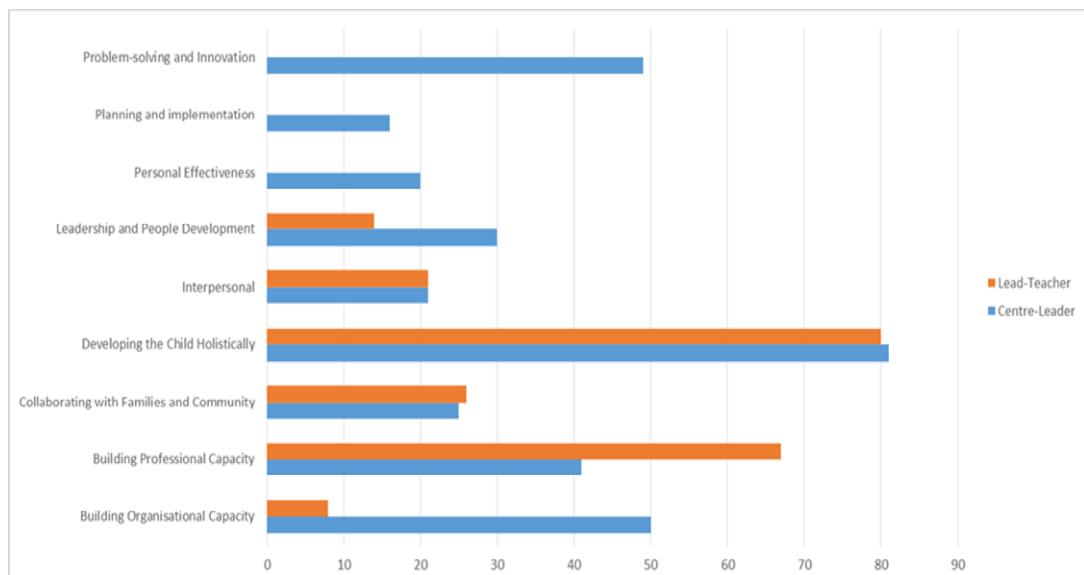
The Lead Teacher and CL also share common competencies in two other core skill categories shown in Table 9.3. Nevertheless, the table also shows a difference in their work focus. The CL's work emphasises organisational development, decision making, systems and process management and the CL is expected to have a number

of Business Management-related competencies akin to that of managerial occupational roles of other industries.

- Skill focus for leadership

The total number of skill items for Lead Teacher and CL were tabulated to obtain a perspective of role priorities. Figure 9.3 shows the skill focus for Lead Teacher and the CL.

Figure 9.3: Frequency count of skills identified for each skill category



'Developing the child holistically' emerged as the area with the highest skill counts for both Lead Teacher and CL. There is consensus that leadership work should focus on tasks which contribute to the child's holistic development. This requires both leaders to ensure the quality of learning, support children's learning, develop respectful relationships with children and advocate for them. 'Building Professional Capacity' is the second most important concern in their work for the Lead Teacher, who is seen as a pedagogical agent of change in the centre. In comparison, the CL's work demands a greater focus on 'Building Organisational Capacity', which involves establishing the vision and mission of the centre and managing its people and systems. This suggests that both leaders have a similar skill level expected of them in pedagogical leadership, though the CL skillset is far more expansive.

The SFw-SSL defines the range of performance competencies identified for each skill. Skill items are categorised into five distinct areas as seen in Table 9.4 :

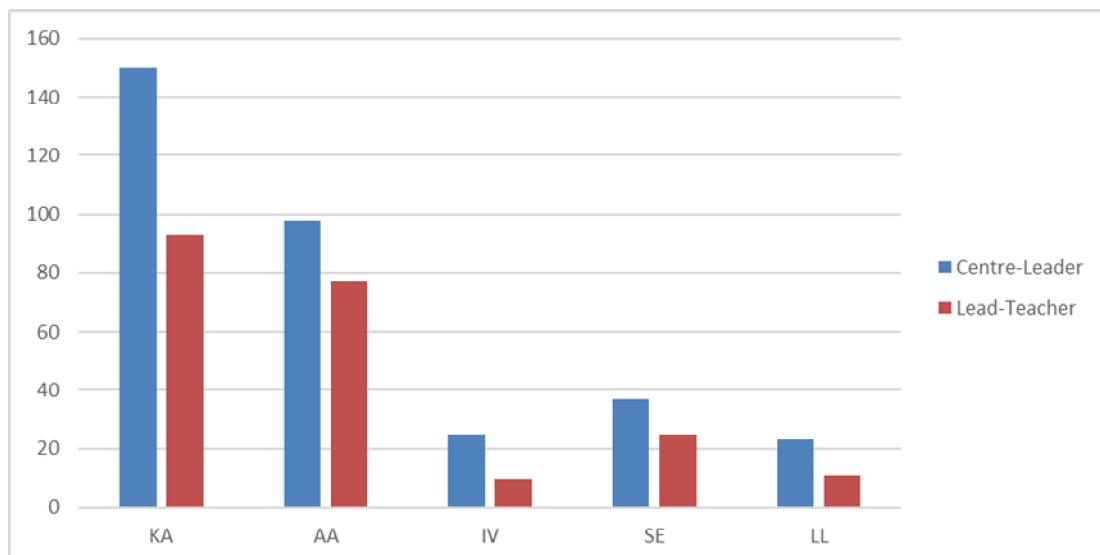
Table 9.4: Description of skill categories

	Skill	Code	Description
1	Knowledge and analysis	KA	It refers to gathering, cognitive processing, integration and inspection of facts and information required to perform the work tasks and activities.
2	Application and adaptation	AA	It refers to the ability to perform the work tasks and activities required of the occupation, and the ability to react to and manage the changes at work.
3	Innovation and value creation	IV	It refers to the ability to generate purposive ideas to improve work performance and/or enhance business values that are aligned to organisational goals.
4	Social Intelligence and ethics	SE	It refers to the ability to use affective factors in leadership, relationship and diversity management guided by professional codes of ethics.
5	Learning to learn	LL	It refers to the ability to develop and improve one's self within and outside of one's area of work.

Source: Skill Framework for Early Childhood Care and Education (2016)

The information was collated and the number of skill items counted within each category was then tabulated. Figure 9.4 shows the total number of skill items within each category.

Figure 9.4: Comparison of skill item count between Lead Teacher and Centre Leader



- Effective versus affective abilities

The performance competencies in 'Knowledge and analysis' ranked the highest for both Lead Teacher and CL, who are also expected to demonstrate performance competencies in Application and adaptation'. There is significantly lower emphasis placed on 'Social Intelligence and ethics', 'Innovation and value creation' and

'Learning to learn' all of which seem to indicate that being knowledgeable, adaptable and task-driven may be more highly valued in a leader than affective traits.

9.6 Early Childhood Development Centre Act (ECDC Regulations Act)

9.6.1 Analysis

The document was skimmed through and followed by a thorough reading where researcher notes were taken. This process highlighted the use of various leadership related terminology. A keyword search was then conducted for the words 'leader', 'principal', 'licensee' and 'supervisor' to glean any areas of importance within the document. Relevant sections were then coded with themes in relation to leadership roles, functions and tasks.

9.6.2 Results

- **Role of 'licensee' and 'principal'**

The Early Childhood Development Centre Regulations Act 2018 governs the regulatory workings of all preschool settings with the exception of government kindergartens. The term CL does not feature in the ECDC Act, but the title 'principal' is used to refer to the person 'approved to perform principal supervisory duties'.

The Act identifies the duties of the 'principal' broadly as follows:

- a) To manage the staff of a centre to ensure the proper provision of early childhood development services at the centre.
- b) To ensure the proper accounting of the receipts and payments of money in respect of the centre.
- c) To ensure that the daily operations of the centre are carried out effectively.

(ECDC Act, 2018)

The ECDC Act provides a brief understanding of the role of the 'principal', which encompasses service provision, account administration and operations. The Act recognises the 'principal' as the figure with supervisory powers in the centre in comparison to the 'licensee', who is held as the person charged with the responsibility for ensuring that the centre operations comply with licensing regulations. This legal document places more emphasis on the role of the 'licensee' than the 'principal', with the latter mentioned 16 times in the text in comparison to 'licensee', which appears 212 times. The document suggests that it is the 'licensee' who is responsible for the entire management of the centre, while the 'principal' on the other hand is

accountable for the implementation of day-to-day administrative and operational tasks. As the document seems to suggest, the ‘licensee’ will be person answerable when centre requirements are unmet.

9.7 The SPARK Quality Rating Scale

9.7.1 Analysis

The Singapore Preschool Accreditation Framework (SPARK) features a Quality Rating Scale (QRS) that was developed by the MOE. As a measure of quality, this document assesses leadership in Criteria 1 of its list of seven criteria. Two areas of leadership are assessed in the document, which are “Strategic Leadership” and “Curriculum Leadership”. Table 9.5 below summarises the roles using the section headers in the document.

Table 9.5: Summary of roles linked to Centre Leadership from SPARK framework (2019)

Criteria	Area	Extract of roles
CRITERION 1 Leadership	1.1 Strategic Leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understand vision, mission and core values • Communicate vision, mission ad core values • Translating vision, mission and core values into a strategic plan
	1.2 Curriculum Leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Centre Leaders’ role in curriculum planning • Classroom observation • Professional learning and collaboration
CRITERION 2 Planning and Administration	2.1 Strategic Planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self- appraisal • Goal setting • Action planning
	2.2 Programme Structure and Implementation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Programme planning • Implementation of Plans • Addressing different learning needs
	2.3 Administration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data and Information Management • Management of funds
CRITERION 3 Staff Management	3.2 Professional Development and Performance Appraisal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Professional development • Performance appraisal • Recognition

Source: Quality Rating Scale (2019)

9.7.2 Results

In the case of Strategic Leadership, the document refers to the demonstration of how vision, mission and values are articulated in the work of the centre. In Curriculum Leadership, the CL is seen to play a key role in curriculum, teaching and professional development. The QRS appears to have delineated and identified the core expectation of CLs within Criterion 1. However, a close examination of the document shows that the CLs role spills over into Criterion 2 and also Criterion 3.

The 'Glossary' section (p.72) defines CLs as 'Principal /Supervisor and Vice-Principal (if applicable)'. The QRS also espouses leadership terminology such as 'Strategic Leadership' and 'Curriculum Leadership' within the document. The rubric descriptors provide a suggestion of the meaning of these terms in the absence of an available definition.

9.8 Discussion of findings

9.8.1 Context of influence

- The influence of multi-agencies on policy text

The four policy documents were products of collaboration between a number of government-led agencies as outlined in Table 9.1. Since 2013, ECDA, the key regulatory authority, has been involved in the implementation and regular revision of these policy documents, which has led to a stronger alignment of enforcement. However, the construction of these policies did not take place in a vacuum but by virtue of historical, social and ideological influences. Early years policy is influenced by social and cultural trends as well by specific events in the field of early years (Baldock, et al.,2013, p. 35). Presumably, the implementation of policies require time for the desired practices to take root. Ball et al. (2012) explain that policy interpretation is a complex process that involves multiple actors. The pace at which these initiatives have emerged has also created difficulties in enforcing the changes. In this case, the short time window between the implementation of these policies can unsettle the experience for practitioners, amplifying the workload that CLs are already challenged with.

The influence of multiple agencies and the intended purpose of texts have roles to play in the presentation of information. Ball et al., (2012) describe policy artefacts as cultural productions which embody beliefs as a form of governmentality (p. 122). Ball et al., (1992) explain that texts may assume a 'writerly' form, which encourages the

reader in some creative interpretation of the text or a ‘readerly’ form, which imposes a uniform and non-negotiable meaning upon the reader. A review of the three frameworks analysed in this phase revealed a difference in the range of text forms adopted. The QRS, as part of the Singapore Preschool Accreditation Framework, adopts a ‘writerly’ form, which is important, as SPARK is a voluntary accreditation exercise for practitioners and so interpretations of quality in practice could well be expected. It adopts a straightforward, simplified narrative style, which is accessible for its use among practitioners in a similar way to the CPD framework. In contrast, the SFw-SSL, in its aim to create a common skills language for individuals, employers and training providers, adopts a ‘readerly’ style. The challenge lies with practitioners in making sense of these texts bearing in mind the time and site of their production (Bowe et al., p. 21). The lack of coherence creates a risk that text can be misunderstood or worse, be used for personal advantage leading to greater confusion (Baldock et al., 2013; Bowe et al., 1992).

- Contextualised leadership through a national lens

Policy texts are often ‘dematerialised’ with little reference made to details of the environment. Ball et al., (2013) argue that context in the form of situated contexts, professional cultures, material and external contexts, that need to be incorporated into policy analysis to make better sense of policy implementation (p. 21). In the policy documents analysed, context is generalised without particular mention of setting details. The ECDC Regulatory Act, in essence, serves to decontextualise childcare and private kindergartens as a unified entity of ‘early childhood development centres’ to facilitate governance. In contrast, the SFw-SSL is an example of how context is embedded within a policy document, as the hierarchical structure of leadership that it portrays reflects a structural organisation present only in large organisations such as AOP and POP centres. In this case, an understanding of leadership by policy is an understanding of leadership as operationalised in large settings. Given the anticipated dominance of government-supported centres by 2023 (Chua, 2017) this explains the statement ‘policy creates context, but context precedes policy’ (Ball et al., 2012, p. 19).

9.8.2 Context of policy text production

- Variation in policy interpretation of leadership

The policy documents were selected as they contained leadership content although this was not their primary focus in most cases. They emerged just as the sector was

being subjected to an increased level of governance. Sum (et al., 2018) described these policy initiatives as policy levers aimed at developing the sector during the second and third waves of policy implementation in the country. There is significance in recognising the historical background of these policies for as Ball (1993) explains, policy texts are rarely the product of a single author or a single process of production, often the result of a dynamic process that is not finite.

The QRS was the first document that attempted to define leadership through an assessment process and the perceptions of leadership that it depicted continued to be expanded further with the CPDFw and, later, the SFw-SSL. The interpretation of leadership shows the need to re-represent 'policy sediment' of the past in a form that allows present day currency. Ball (1993) explained that policies are often reworked and reoriented over time in relation to the purpose and intention of the state. As policies shift and change, this may give rise to an element of confusion and there can be added complications and possible contradictions, for in reality, even with the emergence of new policies, emanating from older policy texts that may still be in circulation (Ball, 1992, p. 13). In such a situation, it is possible that this dynamic intertextual play could lead to a variegation of leadership perspectives across the policy documents.

- Policy and leadership roles

The SFw-SSL document described leadership in a rigorous and specific manner. The stratified leadership hierarchy that it characterised, addressed the emergence of new leadership roles that would be inherent in the structural expansion of organisations adopting the AOP and POP initiatives. This implementation of leadership in practice formalised the concept of distributed leadership within organisations where work would be delegated to a group of professionals instead of a single person (Heikka et al., 2013). This approach formalised expectations for the CL to work with the Lead Teacher as part of a collaborative working relationship yet the all-encompassing description of the CL occupation suggests that regardless of specialisation, they were still accountable for the school's overall performance.

These developments implied that the CL was sandwiched within a hierarchy of newly-created senior and junior leadership occupations. This hierarchy added a new dimension to the work of the CL as a middle manager, bringing with it new work processes (Gleeson & Shain, 1992). The Moshel and Berkovich (2018) study of early childhood leaders in Israel highlighted the ambiguity in the leader's sense of identity created by the implementation of middle manager roles. This, the study concluded,

resulted in leaders developing coping strategies by assuming different types of leader identities as a representative, a companion and a mediator. Ball (2012) explained that policies from above' can influence and constrain institutional practice. These changes in leadership occupations are examples of 'textual interventions into practice' that can cause problems. As a result, leaders need to make 'secondary adjustments' as a way of managing the policies within their context, which may then lead to a variation in the understanding of leadership in practice.

9.8.3 Context of practice

- Mode of policy communication and engagement

Until recently, governance of Singapore's early childhood sector was managed with a 'light touch' (Lim, 2017) but the establishment of ECDA in 2013 has heralded more centrally-controlled policy initiatives via strategic policy levers that have helped improve the regulation and service quality of the industry (Sum et al., 2018). The observed practice for policy communication in Singapore has been through parliamentary speeches, press releases and official announcements. The National Day Rally, since 2012 in particular, has become a critical platform for the enunciation of key policy initiatives in the field of early childhood education. Tan (2017) describes these rally speeches as platforms for announcing and simultaneously justifying major policy changes while also serving as trial balloons for policy intentions, ahead of being aired across the wider media in the weeks following their initial unveiling. Public engagement in policy would usually follow to inform, consult, build consensus and co-create (Leong, 2011). Tan (2017) describes these public consultations to be at best a light version of public deliberation.

A review of the early childhood policy documents shows effort being made, as typically revealed in the 'Acknowledgments' section of the documents, to involve a range of stakeholders in the form of focus group meetings and consultations in the creation of the policy text. The only known public consultation exercise conducted was for the ECDC Bill in 2015, which led to the ECDC Act in 2017. In most cases, policies would be communicated through ECDA to CLs through email, town halls, briefings and interactions with ECDA personnel. These help to operationalise policies and address the concerns of practitioners. The sector also utilises online platforms such as ONE@ECDA and Child Care Link to communicate and clarify issues with practitioners.

The general policy process reduces the role of leaders as ‘receivers’ of policy (Ball et al., 2013) and leaders function as conduits of policy initiatives. The lack of a system of policy discourse renders leaders compliant and dependent in coping with policy changes. Ball et al., (2013) describe the reaction of those affected by policy as ‘copes with short term survival’ which raises a legitimate concern for the future of leadership.

9.9 Conclusion

This chapter has explored documents related to leadership and identified the lack of intertextual harmony in the understanding of leadership. The analysis provides textual evidence of the gaps and the chronological development of leadership through policy documents. The discussion reveals how this has led to the ‘messy realities’ (Ball, 2013) of policy, with the interpretation of leadership and also how the current political climate forces them to respond rather than to lead. In Ball’s (2015) words, this illustrates ‘how we do not do policy, policy does us’. (p.2)

Chapter 10 – Discussion

10.1 Introduction

This chapter draws together the findings from the preceding chapters to answer the research questions outlined for this study. The Bowe et al., (1992) policy trajectory model will be used as a tool to analyse the findings from all three phases. This section will address each question with key areas signposted and relevant literature will be drawn to support or highlight the findings.

10.2 What is the policy-to-practice context to EC leadership in Singapore?

10.2.1 Context of influence

- Multiple sources of stakeholder influence

The 2014 Early Childhood Parenting Landscape Study (ECDA, 2014) revealed parents to be knowledgeable about child development and have an expressed interest in supporting their child's development. In particular, there is a heavier concern for their child's cognitive and language development fuelled in part by Singapore's competitive culture. The interest in their child's academic competency has led to them to exert their influence in their expectations of school learning outcomes (Koh-Chua, et al., 2022). Preschools are pressured to meet such parental demands to ensure optimal enrolment of students and operational stability. However, current sectoral advocacy for a play based and holistic approach has created a challenge for schools to meet curriculum improvements yet satisfy parental expectations. EC leaders are stretched to meet these obligations whilst maintaining a positive and stable work environment.

The early childhood workforce has also emerged as influential factor for EC leadership. Shaw (2015) discussed the challenge for leaders to maintain the vision of quality provision in the midst of policy reform. Within their respective settings, the EC leader's role is stretched to meet the social and emotional needs of their staff while managing staff workload. Leaders are stretched to continually balance the needs of the people within their preschools.

- Influence of practice types

The variety of service models can influence the work of the EC leader. Although this varies with the size of the centre, staff and student enrolment, there may be variations

in the way leaders organise their schedules and manage their teams as a result of their programming. The organisational structure also predisposes the complexity of the leader's reporting line. Bureaucracy is much more evident in larger organisations and the leader's work may include working with a larger group of stakeholders. The organisational set up, kindergarten in comparison to childcare, can also influence the work emphasis of such organisations.

- Environment Influence

The researcher noted elements of environmental influence in the way leaders organised their work through her observations from the 'Day in the Life' segment. In this study, the leader's work operating within the structural environment and managing the school environment was a source of additional workload. Sites operating out of old buildings with large grounds offers the school the added advantage in programming but can also require more estate management work. In comparison, sites operating in public housing estates require EC leaders to manage community partnerships and safety of the environment. Gibbs (2020) explained how material-economic arrangements could provide comfortable spaces for teachers to engage in discussion and affect decision making processes. The environment affects daily routines and subsequently, the ability to manage responsibilities within the ECCE space.

- Regulation and Governance

The findings underscore the fact that the EC leadership role has become an increasingly complex one as an increasing number of agencies have become involved in ECCE. Penn (2007) discusses the example of UK ECCE policymaking where attempts to 'create a level playing field' across different types of provision has failed to achieve the desired simplification of industry practices. In Singapore, the ECCE system has been caught in repeated 'paradox of change' where its attempts to streamline and unify governance for ECCE has not be fully realised. The government's bold undertaking to unify the sector from a 'two ministries to one agency' structure was short-lived in its application. The emergence of the MKs, excluded from ECDA's control, continue this practice of divided governance, now remodelled as a 'fault plane' between public and private preschool systems. Nevertheless, ECDA has achieved success in streamlining regulation for much of the sector comprised of non-government childcare and kindergarten centres. Thus, the community of EC leaders continue to be subjected to differentiated control, based on their operational alignment.

The industry positioning of ECCE as a ‘Care Economy’ (Loh, 2021), which contributes to the human and health potential of the country, opens ECCE to further sources of influence. ECCE human resource development is nested within a larger structural framework driven by ministries overseeing trade and industry objectives. With the WOG approach applied in the Singapore’s model of governance, the management of ECCE workforce is subjected to initiatives and shifts beyond its sector. At the same time, the work of the ECCE teachers and leaders is guided by developmental and aspirational objectives influenced by social and educational governmental ministries. Although the extent of the challenges may differ across settings, EC leaders seem to be caught in a conflict of roles due to obligations to their team, their organisation and sectoral aspirations. Addressing the concerns of the ECCE community in terms of ‘what we do’ (the pedagogical work of early childhood education) and ‘who we are’ (the professional identity, role and skills) will be a challenge as long as multiple driving forces continue to exist.

10.2.2 Context of policy text production

- Policy texts articulate leadership through multiple lenses

The four early childhood documents discussed in Chapter 9 represent key policy texts which have an impact on EC leadership. SFw emphasises a wide range of skill sets intrinsic to leadership and pairs these skill sets to specific leadership roles. This framework offers the most defined view of leadership and details leadership from a competency viewpoint. In the analysis, the QRS is the only policy text that assesses leadership effectiveness which is defined from the Strategic and Curriculum leadership lens. Although the indicators are linked to the skills identified in the SFw and reveal a spectrum of competencies, the descriptors reflect a limited and targeted interpretation of leadership. The competencies also seem to emphasise leadership actions that are observable. The view of leadership is even narrower in the ECDC Regulations Act (2018). It examines leadership through an administrative lens focused on the provision of services, accounting and operations. The CPD framework offers a developmental lens to leadership learning and offers the view of the need for continued skill development leaders need to undertake. The policy texts suggest that leadership, even from the policy texts, may be problematic as there are variations in definition and emphasis.

The absence of a consistent definition of leadership across policy documents gives rise to gaps in the way leadership may be interpreted and exercised by the very institutions that are responsible for creating them. Such variations are only to be

expected given that the documents were formulated at different times and due to the agenda of the institution for whom the text was conceived. Bates et al. (2011) aptly describe the reality of policymaking as a messy process where rational, linear processes are often unachievable. Instead, policies can turn out uncoordinated and sometimes contradictory (Trowler, 2003). Bates et al., (2011) also noted that policy changes are often trivial, typically involving minor revisions of existing practice. In practice, policy implementation has to accommodate old structures, which are gradually adapted to new ways of working.

Given the variety of documents that make reference to early childhood leadership, Singapore early childhood practitioners need to exercise judgment in the application of these texts to practice. Ball et al. (2012) described the nature of policy texts as 'readerly' and 'writerly' where the latter encourages interpretation by the reader. The lack of a definitive concept of early childhood leadership would mean that organisations need to be guided by their own context in determining the role of a leader. Although the QRS provides a baseline for leadership effectiveness for those centres undergoing SPARK accreditation, the lack of an agreed understanding of leadership implies that measuring the extent of a leader's effectiveness is unclear.

- Policy text and the role of EC leaders

In the analysis of the policy texts, it was noted that several leadership models were used to describe the focus of leadership work, namely 'strategic leadership' and 'curriculum leadership'. Leadership literature has also cited the lack of an accepted definition of common understanding of leadership (Ebbeck & Waniganayake, 2003; Hard, 2004). Within the policy texts, the leadership models are currently used with little information on description and explanation of its meaning. This can prove problematic for practitioners as the meaning is often nuanced. The wide discussion of such constructs reveals a lack of consistency in leadership emphasis across policy texts. Even in cases where an attempt has been made to describe leadership policy, such as in the QRS document, the text may be written in a way that ensures flexibility, thus supporting wide variations in on-the-ground practices.

Within the realm of early childhood literature, several writers have highlighted specific leadership approaches and how they help explain the work of leadership. Male and Palaiologou (2013) argue that a phrase such as 'pedagogical leadership' has a deeper meaning and they propose that pedagogical leadership may extend beyond support of teaching and learning (p. 217). A number of writers have proposed moving

away from using models of leadership to viewing leadership as a praxis. Klevering and McNae (2019) caution that the uniqueness of the ECE sector means that transferring leadership models from other sectors would be unworkable. Thornton (2020) warns that the variation in leadership terminology can also blur the lines between educational and managerial functions. The use of specific leadership approaches has been discussed at length in recent early childhood literature, much of which has come down in favour of a contextually-defined, situational and relational approach (Hujala, 2013). On the other hand, deploying an assortment of models or selecting an unclear model, complicates expectations of leadership work.

It emerges from the interviews that SPARK, the accreditation framework associated with the QRS, is the policy text most familiar to leaders and teachers although leaders also demonstrated familiarity with documents related to licensing regulations as these guided their operational work as CLs. This seemed to suggest that policy documents were seen as texts, used chiefly as reference material to help guide their practice. The responses were indicative of early childhood leaders' disinterest in policy issues which echoes the response to policy related questions in the survey phase of the study. Teachers and leaders were both less vocal and appeared less knowledgeable on policy-related matters. In comparison, senior managers and policy elites were critical about policy issues and emphasised the need for leaders to have a stronger voice. While policy texts were challenged by senior managers and some policy elites, CLs viewed policy texts as artefacts of compliance. This suggests that the various tiers of leadership can harbour quite different expectations from one another in respect of the way CLs respond to policy.

This variation needs to be understood within the educational and political context of Singapore. It is well recognised that the country owes much of its success to its strong governance and efficient systems. Public education policymaking has been described as a top-down process where government policies trickle down into schools. The cultural norm views school leaders as responsible for operationalising policies into curricula and school programmes (Koh & Hung, 2018). Although early childhood centres operate largely as autonomous organisations, private institutions, CLs are more likely to comply to the requirements outlined by these policy texts than challenge them. This seems to be consistent with the findings in a study of Australian early childhood directors (Bown & Sumsion, 2007) who show acceptance of regulation despite the tensions that it posed to their practice. Although there was a level of mistrust of the regulatory system, specifically discomfort with surveillance procedures and ambiguity in the interpretation, the participants viewed themselves

as ‘sacrificial agents’ and came to terms with the angst that had been brought about by regulatory intrusions. A study by Bown et al. (2009) spotlights the complex processes in early childhood policymaking and the influences on political decision making. The writers stress the need for early childhood professionals to engage with key personnel to ensure policies create the best outcomes for the community.

- Process of policy implementation

The interviews shed light on the process of policy implementation in early childhood settings. As government-supported institutions, large organisations such as AOPs and POPs accrue advantages as policy initiatives are often piloted within such settings. Furthermore, these organisations are large enough to have management teams that analyse and interpret policy materials, as well as support leaders in implementing policy in practice. In comparison, small organisations are constrained by time, manpower and the ability to effect changes brought about by policy shifts. However, while the structural support that large organisations enjoy can be advantageous, leadership in larger organisations may also be afforded less autonomy, being essentially subjugate to higher echelons of authority.

10.2.3 Context of practice

- Sectoral challenges

Over the last few years, leadership practice in Singapore has had to cope with changes brought about by rapid policy developments aimed at sector improvement. During this period of transition, leaders have been forced to balance the needs of their centre in the face of increased regulatory demands.

A number of writers have described early childhood leadership as complex and multi-faceted (Rodd, 2013; Hujala, 2013; Waniganayake, 2014). Kivunja (2015) states that leadership in ECE contexts is unlike leadership in other educational institutions as ‘it requires special administrative and managerial skills to plan, organise, lead, control and direct the operations in the ECE context, as well as leadership skills to provide an organisational vision, establish direction and facilitate acculturation. Hence the nature of leadership work in essence is challenging to begin with’ (p.171).

In the Singapore context, the intense phase of policy change between 2013 to 2019 forced leaders to adapt their work tasks swiftly to meet new requirements. These policy initiatives require time to be operationalised and, at times, may generate

overlapping workstreams. Leaders are under pressure to meet these regulatory requirements while also managing their everyday operational tasks.

Hoy and Miskel (1994) illustrate the need to recognise the importance of schools' relationships with their external environments. They maintain that it is critical to monitor changes that occur in these environments as they have the potential to unsettle the internal structure and processes of a school. Ng (2020) in a study of developments in the Singapore early childhood arena, explains how these changes have altered the dynamics and increased competition among private operators. With the expansion of the sector and the constant challenge of manpower shortages, the leaders that are emerging in the sector are younger and lacking experience (Goy, 2016). Such leaders will require time to adapt and settle into their roles. The sectoral changes that accompany policy change have led to a need for leaders to balance their work tasks and adapt swiftly to meet the needs of staff, parents and of their organisation.

- Leadership Conflicts

The need to adapt to change has resulted in leaders encountering professional and personal tension. The interviews reveal leaders feeling moral conflict in making decisions related to staff and operations. In the example of CS.1.L1, this leader was wary of making staff feel uncomfortable during teaching observations. In this case the leader put her concerns about how her staff would react above her need to undertake her task. Pandering to the sensitivities of staff has become more commonplace and the need to ensure a stable pool of staff has emerged as a priority among leaders. This is especially so, given the high rate of attrition in the industry, where the loss of staff can severely injure school operations (Paulo et al., 2013).

Due to their professional role, leaders seem to suffer from 'guilt' as their work requires them to adopt a position expected of them as organisational representatives. They may face a dilemma in decision-making – having to implement what their remit demands of them versus their preferred course of action. They may also face a dilemma where they are responsible for making decisions that would require them to do what is right for the school versus what is right for the teachers and children. In their study of Singapore leaders, Lim and Lippinen (2019) explain that leaders seem to struggle with reconciling child-centric pedagogical work with administrative and business-related tasks that meet a neo-liberal agenda. Ng (2020) states that the challenge for ECE in Singapore from systemic change is not technical, but philosophical, cultural and systemic in nature. Challenges emerging from system

changes are evident also in tensions between regulation and professional identity in Australia and New Zealand (Woodrow, 2007; Thornton, 2020). Leaders in those two countries were found to face immense pressure as they bore the brunt of operationalising such changes. Increased professionalisation, with greater governance, which has been unleashed in a short space of time, has created a situation where leaders may find themselves squeezed by differing stakeholder agendas.

- Leadership Competency

Leadership training is gaining greater traction amid increased awareness of the importance of leadership to process quality. The *Starting Strong* report by OECD (2019) stressed the need for better leadership preparation and development globally, a finding that was supported by Ebbeck et al. (2016) who blamed the lack of leadership readiness among Singapore early childhood professionals on a dearth of leadership opportunities, opaque support and unclear job roles. Lim and Lippinen (2019) weigh in on this front too, explaining that leaders face work difficulties as they are usually selected based on their teaching competencies and not for their administrative skills or strategic vision. The findings in Jorde-Bloom (2003) support this as they reveal that teaching experience is inadequate preparation for leadership roles.

The lack of leadership competency emerged in two areas of abilities: a leader's relational skills and the ability to manage organisational development. The interviews showed teachers expressing a stronger predilection for a leader who was able to connect with them. In the survey, EC practitioners were found to value the human aspects in a professional relationship and traits such as being understanding, communicative and a listener. More recent leadership literature has focused on the interactions between leaders and followers (Hujala, 2013; Rodd, 1998; Thornton, 2020). Rodd (2014) explains that this nurturing approach to staff and adults is an important and foundational quality in an early childhood leader. Without this anchor, the study of ECCE leaders in Australia showed that relational tasks would only grow to be more challenging as compliance and regulatory standards would usually dominate a leader's work (Sims et.al., 2017).

The ability to manage organisational development emerged as an important area of leadership skills building. In Germany, Strehmel (2016) found that directors had little time to devote to organisational tasks and that managing change was an essential leadership skill. With the increased level of governance and change within the EC

sector, leaders needed to develop skills to be adaptable to such shifts in the operating environment.

10.3 What does policy require EC leaders in Singapore to do in terms of implementation?

The roles, functions and tasks of an EC leader have been discussed by a number of writers (Rodd, 2013; Aubrey, 2016; Hujala, 2014; Kivunja, 2015). There is a recognition across these studies of the multiple roles that EC leaders play, with pedagogical and administrative leadership identified as key roles. There has also been a concerted effort to differentiate between the leadership and management roles of the leader. Solly (2003) suggests management roles as those tasks relate to maintenance work whereas leadership encompasses the enhancement of values, qualities and behaviours. McCrea (2015) expands on the notions of early childhood leadership, defining this to comprise four roles, namely team stakeholder, policy designer, pedagogy creator and children's advocate.

This study discovered mixed messaging in policy documents on the role expected of CLs. A variety of leadership models have been identified but there is still a lack of clarity on the emphasis and scope of the roles. A comparison of the documents seems to suggest an aspiration for pedagogical leadership though curriculum leadership is more explicitly defined in the QRS. Perhaps the SFw-SSL document, in its bid to establish greater rigour and specificity, depicts a complex image of leadership work with a broad spectrum of expected skills. Thornton (2020), for example, describes the confusion that arises from the lack of clarity in the articulation of educational leadership roles in New Zealand. Exercising such roles, as defined in policy texts, has been shown to be highly challenging in practice.

- Leaders as policy implementers

Within the Singapore context, the SFw-SSL provides a comprehensive overview of early childhood leaders' work, focusing on a range of articulated pedagogical, administrative and organisational development roles. Nevertheless, the challenge emerges when policy sets the direction of those roles and leaders are expected to manage their work to meet policy outcomes.

The struggles described in the interviews reveal the disconnect that leaders feel when their role as educational leaders is now superseded by their role as technical policy implementers. With strengthened and consolidated governance of the sector and increased investment, the pace of policy implementation has accelerated. The role

expected of leaders as policy advocates is particularly difficult if the mission and vision of the organisation does not align with those articulated by policy. Ng (2020) suggests that the governance approach of the sector needs to be considered, opining that the 'centralised decentralised' approach is beneficial for strategic alignment and tactical empowerment in the governance of public schools while cautioning that the marketised economy of the EC sector may warrant a different management approach.

In a study of Singapore government schools, the role of principals as national policy implementors has been firmly established (Ho & Koh, 2018). In a private and marketised economy, EC leaders needed only to meet the policy demands of their organisation. As a competitive industry, quality was reflected in the ability to deliver a high standard of education and a commitment to sound learning methods. But with increased governance, the outcomes for early childhood centres, particularly government-supported organisations, have now been recalibrated to meet overarching national policy objectives. The rapid pace of change has left early childhood leaders unaccustomed to their new roles and unprepared to repivot from the effected changes. Gibbs (2020) states that leaders have a role as advocates for children's rights but highlights the need, in exercising this role, to consider the language of site policy, practice guidelines and strategic plans (p. 305).

- Leaders as mid-level managers

CLs, traditionally, are positioned as the key leader within their centre. However, with the increased diversity of settings and growth in the organisational structure of early childhood organisations, CLs may not necessarily be the only leader within their school nor might they possess full decision-making powers. Moshel and Berkovich (2018) discussed the role of mid-level managers that emerged with the reform of the Israel's preschool system, which, they observed, produced leaders who had unclear expectations of their roles, grappled with issues of loyalty, and felt lacking in authority.

In the case of Singapore, the SFw-SSL is the first document that recognises the range of leadership roles within the EC system from Lead Teacher to Pinnacle Leader. In practice, CLs are formally acknowledged as the de facto leader of the early childhood centres and serve as the key contact point for regulators on operational matters. It is important to note that their decision-making powers are influenced by another layer of leadership that may exist in their organisation. These positions of senior centre leadership may sport titles such as Directors, Executive Principals or Cluster Principals, to name a few. The individuals who occupy these positions may be owners

of the business, senior management in the organisation, or experienced principals, typically based at the headquarters of the organisation. Little has been written about such roles to date but it is important to recognise that these individuals exert significant influence on the work of CLs. Hence, beyond the boundaries of the centre, yet within the parameters of the organisation, the CL may assume the role of a sandwiched middle manager.

CLs may hold traditional conceptualisations of their leadership roles in relation to their immediate stakeholders who comprise teachers, parents and the children. Transformational change in the sector has given rise to more intensified levels of work and interaction between leaders and policy regulators. The interviews reveal the challenges that leaders and even senior leaders face in navigating policy and regulation issues. The interviews also suggest that some of the demands may leave CLs in a position of conflict. Lim and Lippinen (2019) describe these as critical conflicts that leaders have to contend with in meeting the needs of parents, teachers, operators and the government. In such situations CLs face being 'squeezed from the top and from underneath' (Gleeson & Shain, 1999, p.468) as they undertake their work responsibilities. This becomes even more challenging when the demands of the regulators may conflict with those of the organisation. In such a case, the task falls on the CLs to manage the relationship.

- Leaders as boundary spanners

In reality, the transformation of the sector has led to an evolution of the role of CLs towards one that extends beyond their centre and of their educational responsibilities. It has included multi-agency work and policy navigation is now critical skillset too. The Refreshed Skill Framework for Early Childhood (2021) that was recently launched will demand greater skill in this area with the integration of early intervention and learning support within ECCE. Lipsky (1980) uses the idea of 'street level bureaucrats' to explain the challenges for those in such positions to deliver services to users. Organisational theorists have recognised the role of 'boundary spanners' as people who manage the interface between their organisations and their environments (Katz & Kahn, 1966). Increasingly, the leader's work as a 'boundary spanner' has emerged as a result of the interfacing of agencies and agendas. The work of boundary spanners may involve a range of tasks such an information-processing, filtering, facilitation, representation or gatekeeping functions, often in relation to the substance and content of policy. Given the complexity of issues involved, these roles require a

combination of technical skills along with a strong ability for adaptability (Williams, 2013).

10.4 What are the views, understandings and beliefs about EC leadership of a range of stakeholders?

- Multiple lenses on leadership

The survey and interviews reveal some similarities in the views that teachers and leaders have of leadership. With regard to traits that are highly regarded in leaders, those related to inter-personal abilities emerged as important to both teachers and leaders. Teachers appreciated openness and adaptability while leaders focused more on a demonstration of professional values. This relational component of leadership was also supported by the images of leadership that were drawn, which emphasised connection and support.

Teachers and leaders were relatively consistent in their identification of leadership roles, concurring that this was synonymous with performance and achievement. Nevertheless, the interview results showed that senior leaders had even greater aspirations for leaders. Indeed, the senior leaders expressed the view that leaders needed to have a stronger voice and thought leadership.

In contrast, elites suggested that leaders should perform the role of being advocates. Social justice, the rights of the child and greater critical thinking were all cited as important roles for an early childhood leader. Beyond that, other suggestions were philosophically driven, suggesting leadership at all strata of the system. On the other hand, documents which represented the policymaker and a systems perspective zeroed in on leadership from an economic viewpoint with these documents showing leadership broken down into a complex rubric of knowledge, skills and tasks.

Stakeholders, overall, view leadership from multiple perspectives. Hujala (2004) stated that the perception of leadership often varies between stakeholders. Similar to the study of leaders in Finnish context, those who work with leaders closely, viewed leadership at a micro level and, consequently, demonstrated a narrowed perspective. In comparison, those who were less connected to leaders were shown to display a broader view of leadership.

Rodd (2013) acknowledges 'the complex and multi-faceted nature of leadership called for in early childhood highlights the need for leadership to be viewed more appropriately as a distributed process and continuum, reflecting the power of

communication, relationships, social interaction and cooperation' (p. 27) while Kivunja (2015) maintains that the ECE setting is not just another school setting. Hence, EC leadership requires the leader to perform functions that may differ significantly from the roles expected of school leaders in other educational settings.

10.5 What are the reported EC practices and experiences of EC leaders?

- Pedagogical challenges

The study featured a comparison of the daily activities of early childhood leaders in six different types of organisational settings which enabled a close observation of practices and cultures of leadership within centres. The findings reveal that the emphasis of leadership work is influenced by the culture of the organisation. The CLs that were not part of a large organisational setup, such as CS.1.L1 and CS.3.L1 were better able to exercise their leadership practice and spent some time interacting with children and teachers during the study. These leaders were afforded considerable autonomy in their decision-making process and were able to undertake pedagogical leadership responsibilities as part of their work as well whereas principals from large organisations in comparison, were observed spending more time attending desk bound activities. Although there was mention of pedagogical leadership work, it seemed to focus on classroom observations. In addition, CLs seemed to have identified at least one teacher to whom they delegated pedagogical responsibilities in order to support their teaching team. However, in the case of the Singapore case sites, it was not apparent that pedagogical leadership was a dominant responsibility for CLs. Many of the interviews reflected a focus on operational, administrative and compliance work rather than developing educational quality.

- Environment and routines

The observations of the centres also highlighted the diversity of environments across the case sites, which was particularly noteworthy as the environment setting can influence the deployment of staff, routines and leadership responsibilities. CS.1.L1 was tasked with covering the main building and classrooms before she could go to the annex building, where her office was located. This meant that she would not be able to address any administrative issues until the end of the day – and that, in turn, ate into her evenings. CS.3.L1 remarked that by virtue of having to manage an old building, she has learned a lot about roofing, drainage, insect prevention and landscaping. The school setup also meant that the leaders needed to move around to meet their staff, who were preoccupied in classrooms. The work of the EC leader

seemed to consist of the need to respond and react to urgent ‘firefighting’ situations that arose, leaving less room for control over her work.

- Organisational structures and responsibilities

The size and programme offering of the centre would also lead to variations in the organisational setup. The organograms that were provided by the principals showed some distributed leadership being exercised. In most cases, the structure for the teaching staff is similar in that there would be one teacher and one assistant within each class or level. It is interesting to note that with the exception of CS.5.L1 and CS.6.L1, principals indicated that they sit beneath at least one layer of organisational leadership. Meanwhile, principals function as the leader of the teaching community but find themselves sandwiched between higher and more powerful decision-making structures. The experiences of leaders can differ and may be dependent on the leadership structures that they are exposed to.

10.6 How is EC leadership enacted in a range of Singaporean settings?

- Leadership of person, not position

The importance of the ‘leader as a person not a position’ emerged strongly across the survey and interviews. The exercise of ‘power distance’ between leader and teacher was observed to be low for all the leaders with the exception of CS.5. L1, who demonstrated a more formal relationship with her staff. In broad terms, the findings drawn from the survey supported the expressed desire for a personable approach, defined as communicativeness and openness. Studies of Asian early childhood leadership showed some regard for traditional hierarchical relationships and the tensions that may arise in navigating such structures (Ho, 2012; Yang, 2018; Alameen et al., 2015). The Singapore study reflects a scope for similar tensions where Western ideals of open communication may conflict with the reality of practices. The interviews and survey also showed that leaders earned the respect of their staff through their conduct rather than their position. Teachers preferred to see leaders project themselves as an equal and be able to role model a high level of pedagogical ability. Assertion of power and control was seen in a less favourable light in comparison to a collaborative and nurturing approach. Douglass (2017) supported this in her study of preschool organisational culture, which showed that leaders who modelled shared power and expertise developed programmes that were more relational in their organisational system. Developing leaders with the ability to adapt

their leadership approach in line with situation and needs of a changing landscape would be critical.

- Place and space for leadership

In the observations of leadership work, the leaders were seen to interact with staff in a number of ways. Due to the structure of the early childhood centre, most of the leaders would be interacting with staff in their classrooms, corridors and the office. The nature of early education work meant that it was difficult for teachers to leave their classrooms, so it was not uncommon to find leaders walking into classrooms to chat with their staff. Similarly, it wasn't uncommon either to see teachers trying to have a quick chat with their leader during the leader's walkabout. There would usually be a formal staff meeting where all staff would gather though only once a week in most cases. Hence, leadership is exercised through informal everyday conversations and interactions.

10.7 Who leads the leaders?

- Leading decision making

When the leaders were asked to draw their organisational chart, four of the six leaders acknowledged the layers of leadership above them, which included cluster leaders, heads of department and directors. CLs in large organisations are straddled within a multi-level leadership hierarchy, which means leaders function inside a distributed leadership system where accountability is spread over the various leadership layers and decision-making evolves into a complex process. Strehmel (2016) provides an example of the challenges of change management in the German EC system, which necessitates an elaborate degree of collaboration between stakeholders inside and outside the institution. In Singapore, leaders would be guided by key performance indicators related to the business performance of the centre, often meaning enrolment and operational costs. CS.4.L1 shared the process of how decisions are made in her organisation, explaining that in her case, senior leaders would be the bridge to policy decisions with policy leaders. A directive would trickle down to the centre to be implemented by the CL leaving leaders with the responsibility of articulating these policy decisions but with minimal opportunity to provide any input themselves. CS.5.L1. meanwhile, remarked that although leaders do so much, the reality is that 'we don't have a voice'. CS.2.L1 remarked that in her organisation, 'everybody will listen to the top'. Hence, although leaders, nominally, have the autonomy to make operational decisions, strategic directions are determined by authority figures

superior to the CL. Accordingly, leaders have little choice but to address institution-wide agendas and manage the challenge of their centre to meet organisational needs.

- **Leading roles and responsibilities**

The increased governance and oversight of the sector through a regulatory body has meant that regulators have a stronger say on the work of CLs. All leaders with the exception of CS.3.L1 mentioned how SPARK had impacted their work as leaders and staff. This required leaders to employ practices that would ensure performance indicators were met to maintain the continuity of the accreditation. The interviews showed that government-supported centres, which were Anchor Operators or Partner Operators, faced additional compliance pressures. Three leaders mentioned hefty administrative workloads to meet organisational objectives. Furthermore, such centres were also contractually obligated to improve their quality standards and teacher development programmes. This implied that such leaders have their roles and tasks outlined for them as part of the organisational requirements. In comparison, leaders from more independent settings were able to exercise more control and enjoy greater autonomy in their leadership roles. Organisations of this type needed to emphasise pedagogical leadership, as the quality of their programmes was critical to their enrolment. The interviews seem to suggest that for small centres, the quality of pedagogical leadership quality was motivated more by the needs of survival than by compliance pressures.

- **Leading practices**

Leaders also mentioned the role of parents in their work. The emergence of ‘parentocracy’ (Ong, 2015) as discussed by academics in the field of local education points to the increased involvement of parents in their child’s schooling that has led to wealthier families gaining a competitive advantage. The pursuit of educational excellence is well accepted in the national psyche and the early childhood sector is very much part of this. However, within a marketised system, this has led to undue pressure on early childhood organisations to meet the needs of their paying customers (Lim, 2017). CS.5.L1 and CS.4.L1 described the need to educate parents the rationale for the school’s operations and curriculum activities. CS.3.L1 highlighted the challenge of meeting parental demands and responding to complaints on a regular basis. CS.4.L1 related the story of her perseverance in mollifying a difficult parent until he was finally placated. Lim and Lippinen (2019) too, describe the parental conflicts that principals face in negotiating with demanding parents to the point of having to shield staff from them. Although the leaders did not explicitly admit

that parents are able to exert influence in the way schools are run, the need to manage parents was a common concern for all of them. Ebbeck and Gokhale (2004) noted that parents were more informed nowadays and ready to question teaching and caring practices. A study of early childhood parenting (ECDA, 2014) revealed that parents were knowledgeable and aware of developmentally- appropriate practices. The nurturing environment of the preschool and the tender ages of children in their care, necessitates a strong relationship between the school and parents of their children.

10.8 Conclusion

This chapter presents a synthesis of the findings in relation to the questions of the study. The discussion highlights the unique aspects of the Singapore early childhood landscape that has given rise to the practices of its early childhood leaders.

Chapter 11 – Conclusion

11.1 Introduction

This chapter will address the main findings of the research and discuss the strengths and limitations of the study. Following this, the implications of the research will be presented, along with recommendations for future research.

11.2 Policy to practice tensions in early childhood leadership

The policy trajectory model by Bowe et al. (1992) provides a useful framework to help understand the complex interplay of factors which contribute to the tensions in EC leadership practice. The model provides a critical lens to track the impact of policy, its interpretation and its realisation into everyday practices.

i. Context of influence in early childhood leadership

A key influence on early childhood leadership practice in Singapore has been the intensification of policymaking and governance of the early childhood sector between 2013 and 2020. These changes have led to the increased involvement of multiple stakeholders who influence early childhood centres' operations, quality, and service delivery. But the participation of these stakeholders creates difficulties for leaders as each stakeholder is likely to impose its agenda upon the early childhood leaders, potentially thwarting decision making when these agendas come into conflict with one other.

In 2017, the government set out to achieve accessibility, affordability and quality as its three key planks to uplift and transform the sector. A critical lever to achieve this plan would be to exercise control over the primarily privatised sector, which was ultimately achieved by enhancing the POP scheme in 2016 and AOP scheme in 2018 and the, which led to significant organisational restructuring. In addition to this, the government also launched a suite of workforce-targeted plans and professional development initiatives, which helped strengthen the foundation for sectoral growth but which also redefined the early childhood landscape by introducing additional stakeholders and unprecedented working norms. Consequently, the prioritisation of creating profits was now balanced by obligations to promote national objectives. CLs , who are at the forefront of operational decision making, represent the most visible leadership level implementing these changes.

ii. Context policy text in early childhood leadership

Although the research focused on four policy documents, there are two, in particular, which have far-reaching impact on leadership than others. The first is the SFw-SSL and the second is the QRS. These two policy texts possess an axial significance due to the robustness of its leadership definition, for the former, and the accountability to quality, for the latter. The information in the SFw-SSL acts as a primary source upon which training, employment and skill building decisions rest upon. For leaders, this defines expectations of their work scope and influences the manner in which they undertake their tasks. The QRS, on the other hand, acknowledges the effectiveness of the leader through the indicators of quality in the centre. These two documents complement each other and serve as reference points to understand leadership.

The study revealed how the policy implementation process resulted in leaders undertaking the role of policy translators and policy implementors. Within large organisational setups, support is offered to leaders to understand and manage compliance procedures that accompany policy changes. Large organisations have dedicated resources to help leaders better understand policy requirements and manage operational change. In comparison, leaders in small organisations have to manage the process of interpreting, translation and implementation on their own. Their lack of training in this area and the lack of clarity in the documents create an additional work challenge for leaders, who have to grapple with the ambiguity of processes and a lack of policy know-how. Consequently, the nature of policy change aimed at improvement, becomes burdensome for leaders who cope by responding to the technical aspects of tasks. When applied to leaders whose pedagogical leadership may be lacking, the process of policy change can have the unintended consequence of a conflict of roles and tensions.

iii. Context of practice in early childhood leadership

Global case studies on early childhood leadership have highlighted the complexity of EC systems. The studies have noted systemic, organisational structure and cultural variabilities in the ways that early childhood provisions are operated and supported, which has, to a degree, contributed to the difficulty in conceptualising a common understanding of early childhood leadership. The Singapore case study presents an example of leadership in a time of change. Early childhood organisations have swiftly evolved new operational structures leaving leaders having to cope with the change in work obligations. At the same time, leaders lack the readiness to meet the needs of practitioners, who prefer Western-influenced leadership approaches. In this scenario,

Singapore early childhood leaders are forced to confront and adapt their leadership approaches quickly to meet the sector's changing needs.

Much of the literature on leadership emphasises pedagogical leadership as core work in leadership practice. However, the study underscored the need that Singapore leaders have for organisational support before undertaking pedagogical roles as immediate work tasks leaned towards administrative and operational responsibilities. Work that involved regulatory compliance required skills and knowledge related to policy awareness, which challenged leaders' competency. Consequently, as work tasks have pulled them in different directions, leaders were left to grapple with their professional leadership identity.

Workforce issues were another concern in the Singapore case study. The sector bore witness to younger CLs being appointed to head early childhood centres, a trend that emerged as a burgeoning sector generated heightened demand for leaders who could meet the minimum qualification requirements. The limited work experience of the leaders that were targeted and recruited contributed further to the lack of leadership effectiveness. Despite a growing number of trained teachers, the sector continued to experience workforce issues as attrition rates remained high while inexperienced leaders, finding themselves perhaps ill-equipped to handle the intensity of their leadership roles, have also struggled with workforce quality and the shortage of manpower, issues that have compounded the challenges of leadership work.

11.3 Contribution of the study

The study is significant as it provides an understanding of early childhood leadership in Singapore through the lens of policy- to- practice. It also aims to contribute to the research repository of country studies on leadership, particularly as an example of a well-developed, Western-influenced Asian early childhood system. The timing of the research timing has opened a window of opportunity to capture leadership perspectives at a time of transformational policy reform and developments in Singapore's early childhood education landscape as a whole. In so doing it captures the voices of a community in transition and contributes to an understanding of leadership challenges.

The research approach features a survey that was completed by 258 respondents, interviews with six CLs, 35 teachers, nine policy elites, and Day in the Life observations of six diverse early childhood settings, that provide detailed descriptions

of leadership practices and views. Capturing the spectrum of stakeholder perspectives across settings provides a backdrop that reflects the diversity of leadership perspectives, offering also, comparative perspectives of leadership from teachers and leaders, and a look at the impact of environmental settings on leadership work.

The research utilises a combination of methods of which the choice of a visual method to capture leadership perspectives may prove to be novel for this area of research. The pictures and symbols provide an additional language for participants to express their ideas and enhances inclusivity by embracing those less able to express themselves in the language of the researcher. In addition, the use of video recording documents the physical acts of leadership. The ability to playback such moments provides documentation that captures interactions, nuances of language and expressions of culture that would otherwise be lost in written observations. This information contributes to the literature on EC leadership by providing visual data that could enable cross-cultural comparisons to be more easily achieved.

The study serves to inform of the effects of policy on early childhood practitioners. In relation to the Bowe et al., (1992) model used for analysis, the study illustrates the complexity of the policy process as a discourse. In capturing the growing pains of transformation, this study informs the mechanics of messy policy implementation. It captures the human, cultural and power dimensions of policy as it transcends into on-the-ground practice.

11.4 Limitations of the study

While the study addresses research questions and seeks to provides some contribution to leadership literature, it is worth being aware of the limitations to this study.

Firstly, the study is primarily qualitative in its design and lacks the rigour that a quantitative path might offer. As the study's aim was to be descriptive and exploratory, the findings are unique to the time and community that it was based upon, though this limits the generalisation of the study to other contexts. The study also draws upon policy text material that was available for public access. The researcher did not include material on training or material which are exclusive for early childhood centres. The researcher acknowledges that more material could be used by leaders in practice. However, a decision was made to use key documents with high leadership impact favouring quality over quantity.

Although the study sought to provide a detailed description of leadership, the practical realities of conducting the three phases by one researcher alone meant that compromises had to be made. As a novice researcher with limited time, the researcher could only include six early childhood settings to represent operational diversity, although these six settings are insufficient in terms of ensuring a true representation of preschool provision and programme types in Singapore. The lack of accessibility to public kindergartens also meant that the newest addition to EC provision in Singapore, the MKs, had to be excluded from this study, which is unfortunate as the public kindergarten model could have provided a contrasting picture of operations in the study and yielded interesting data points. Nevertheless, the types of centres chosen for this study were more typical of the majority of practice settings found in Singapore.

The participating schools could only accommodate the researcher for about three days to conduct the Day in the Life segment and interviews. This meant that the interviews had to be completed within pockets of free time convenient to the teacher. Although interviews were conducted in some cases in a quiet corner of the classroom, teachers would inevitably be distracted by children nearby. This, coupled with tight time slots, resulted in several rushed interviews, which contributed to a lack of detail in their answers. During the data collection process, reflections and preliminary analysis was conducted after each interview. It was discovered that the study failed to consider an essential stakeholder within the leadership hierarchy of a centre. After a quick round of phone calls and emails, another layer of interviews with three senior leaders was added. Although this provided some representation, a larger number of interviews with leader of leaders would have enabled a more in-depth understanding of organisational perspectives of leadership. Nevertheless, the researcher has made every attempt to provide the ‘thick and rich’ description of leadership as intended within the time available for the study.

The researcher is also aware of her position as a member of the early childhood community known to her participants. This may well have influenced individuals in their decision to participate as well as their behaviour, which is indicative of the Hawthorne Effect (Salkind, 2010). Nevertheless, the triangulation of data and inter-rater reliability measures ensure the trustworthiness of the data sampled. Due to the researcher’s lack of experience, an effort was made to confirm the reliability of the findings with local leadership researchers, which helped to confirm its validity and trustworthiness.

The study was conducted over six years, from 2014 to 2020 during the time when a number of these key policy changes occurred. These required the researcher to update and revise the study to incorporate new developments and material. As a reflection of the dynamic nature of policy reform in Singapore, a new framework was launched around the time of the submission of this thesis. This was included in the appendix for currency and serves to reflect the evolving complexity of EC leadership.

11.5 Implications

This research has three critical implications: early childhood policymaking, understanding of early childhood leadership, and research methods in early childhood leadership.

The study provides a glimpse into the evolution process of early childhood policy into practice in Singapore by way of a case study of early childhood policy management and its impact on leadership. The research highlights the complexity innate in early childhood systems and the need to address systemic, human and cultural factors in order to deliver effective policymaking (Kagan et al., 2019). The research also showcases the need for leadership development to keep pace with shifts in early childhood systems. As countries around the world begin to take a greater interest in early childhood education and invest in the sector, adapting and managing organisational change will be a constant challenge for early childhood education practitioners.

This study adds to the growing number of Asian case studies of early childhood leadership. The Singapore example here provides an interesting case study of an Asian country with predominantly Western ideals and as such may differ from the results of studies in Hong Kong, China and Japan, which demonstrate more traditional Asian notions of top-down leadership practices. This suggests that there may be some value in recognising social-cultural perspectives in the study of leadership from non-Western sites.

In addition, it encourages understanding leadership from multiple viewpoints. Most studies on leadership capture viewpoints from an ‘outside-in’ approach. Engaging the group of leaders and teachers across different settings has highlighted the differences and the similarities of perspectives across the groups. This supports the value of incorporating voices of a diversity of stakeholders in leadership research.

11.6 Recommendations for future research

The study offers a snapshot of early childhood leadership tensions following a period of intense policy change in the Singapore early childhood education landscape. As an initial study of leadership, adopting a broad-brush approach enables understanding the critical factors in implementing leadership. Nevertheless, the findings do highlight the need for training young and inexperienced leaders. A better understanding of inexperienced leaders' needs or perspectives in contrast to those of more experienced leaders may offer succour in managing their needs, expectations, and challenges.

The study also identified parents as essential stakeholders in leadership work although the study was, unfortunately, unable to capture the responses of parents who may provide another perspective on leadership. Still, with a growing body of research on parent-school partnerships and the early childhood sector's marketised economy, the impact that parent expectations have on leadership would make for an exciting area of study.

In the questionnaire, an attempt was made to employ visual research methods to capture leadership images from the teachers and leaders. Although it formed one minor section of the questionnaire, the results provided an interesting visual leadership portfolio that effectively captured leadership in simple imagery. This suggests that more creative methods could be explored to offer a fuller picture of leadership practice, particularly within such interpretive studies.

Lastly, the study was unable to capture the views of male leaders within the industry. It would be interesting if the relational aspects demanded of female leadership would be the same for male leaders. The challenges for Asian male early childhood leaders would also be a worthwhile area of investigation

11.7 Conclusion

The research uncovers factors that contribute to the challenges of early childhood leadership in Singapore. Using a policy-to-practice lens, the research identifies conflicts and tensions that have emerged in the course of the implementation of policy, which, though invisible, have manifested themselves as real barriers and pressures that leaders have to contend with in their everyday work. Singapore early childhood leaders currently function as operational conduits for policy, but the mixed delivery and operational system potentially allows leaders to play a bigger role in

future. Greater attention needs to be given to leadership support and development to ensure that these challenges are merely the growing pains of a developing sector.

As the field continues to conceptualise leadership and its associated phenomena, the research reminds us that early childhood education needs to be viewed based on its context. The study supports leadership work to be rooted in the understanding of human relations and the community. The unique features of Singapore's diverse early childhood communities and operational systems have the potential to provide richness of learning from varying practices.

The study's discussion of leadership identity, policy dissonance and the impact of systemic change on early childhood practitioners will be a growing topic of concern as governments seek to exert more robust governance over early childhood education. It provides a salutary tale about the struggle of leading change when a system is fraught with crossed and mixed agendas. In the struggle to define leadership, it is important to critically reflect on the question "For whom is leadership created?". This will provide the moral compass needed to ensure that the future efforts of leaders will be well-placed.

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Appendix 1: Survey questionnaire

Please tick the box that best matches your response.

SECTION 1: BACKGROUND INFORMATION	
Q1 .What is your age?	Q2. What is your race?
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. <input type="checkbox"/> less than 20 years2. <input type="checkbox"/> 20 - 30 years3. <input type="checkbox"/> 31 - 40 years4. <input type="checkbox"/> 41 - 50 years5. <input type="checkbox"/> 51 - 60 years6. <input type="checkbox"/> 61 years and above	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. <input type="checkbox"/> Chinese2. <input type="checkbox"/> Malay3. <input type="checkbox"/> Indian4. <input type="checkbox"/> Eurasian5. <input type="checkbox"/> Caucasian6. <input type="checkbox"/> Others : Please specify
Q3. What is your gender?	_____
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. <input type="checkbox"/> Male2. <input type="checkbox"/> Female	
Q4. What are your <i>early childhood education</i> related qualifications?	Q5. Do you have any qualifications <i>in other disciplines</i>?
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. <input type="checkbox"/> Certificate (please specify) _____2. <input type="checkbox"/> Diploma (please specify) _____3. <input type="checkbox"/> Degree (please specify) _____4. <input type="checkbox"/> Master Degree (please specify) _____5. <input type="checkbox"/> Others (please specify) _____	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. <input type="checkbox"/> Certificate (please specify) _____2. <input type="checkbox"/> Diploma (please specify) _____3. <input type="checkbox"/> Degree (please specify) _____4. <input type="checkbox"/> Master Degree (please specify) _____5. <input type="checkbox"/> Others (please specify) _____

Q6. How long have you worked in the early childhood field?	Q7. How long have you worked <i>in this centre?</i>
<p>1. <input type="checkbox"/> Less than 1 year 2. <input type="checkbox"/> 1- 3 years 3. <input type="checkbox"/> 4 - 6 years 4. <input type="checkbox"/> 7- 9 years 5. <input type="checkbox"/> 10 – 14 years 6. <input type="checkbox"/> 15 – 19 years 7. <input type="checkbox"/> 20 years or more</p>	<p>1. <input type="checkbox"/> Less than 1 year 2. <input type="checkbox"/> 1- 3 years 3. <input type="checkbox"/> 4 - 6 years 4. <input type="checkbox"/> 7- 9 years 5. <input type="checkbox"/> 10 – 14 years 6. <input type="checkbox"/> 15 – 19 years 7. <input type="checkbox"/> 20 years or more</p>
Q8. What is your current position within this centre?	Q9. What best describes the centre you work in?
<p>1. <input type="checkbox"/> Assistant Teacher 2. <input type="checkbox"/> Teacher (English/ Chinese) 3. <input type="checkbox"/> Senior Teacher 4. <input type="checkbox"/> Principal 5. <input type="checkbox"/> Others (please specify)</p> <hr/>	<p>CHILDCARE CENTRE</p> <p>1. <input type="checkbox"/> Private childcare (1 to 5 centres) 2. <input type="checkbox"/> Private childcare (6 centres or more) 3. <input type="checkbox"/> Anchor operator 4. <input type="checkbox"/> Voluntary/social welfare organisation</p> <p>KINDERGARTEN</p> <p>5. <input type="checkbox"/> Private kindergarten (1 - 5 centres) 6. <input type="checkbox"/> Private kindergarten (6 centres or more) 7. <input type="checkbox"/> MOE kindergarten 8. <input type="checkbox"/> Church or Mosque Kindergarten 9. <input type="checkbox"/> Others (please specify)</p> <hr/>

SECTION 2 : LEADERSHIP CHARACTERISTICS

Q10. Name **3 personal traits** of a good early childhood leader.

Briefly explain your choices.

a.

b.

c.

Q11. Identify the **3 most important roles*** of an early childhood leader?

* this refers to the tasks of an early childhood leader

a.

b.

c.

Q12. In your opinion, which factors contribute to **effective** early childhood leadership?

Read through all the factors first. Then **choose and rank only the top 5** in order of importance to you.

Effective leadership is determined by a leader's.....	Rank from 1 to 5 (1 is the most important)
a. attitude and adaptability	
b. personal ethics and moral values	
c. academic and professional qualifications	
d. knowledge of early childhood pedagogy	
e. ability to communicate with clarity	
f. organisational and management skills	
g. ability to relate to his/her staff	
h. <i>Please share any other comments you may have.</i>	

SECTION 3 : LEADERSHIP CHALLENGES

Q13. To what extent would the following be a ***leadership work challenge for your current centre?***

	1 Very High Challenge	2 High Challenge	3 Moderate Challenge	4 Low Challenge	5 Very low Challenge
a. Staff turnover and recruitment	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b. Work environment and relationship with staff	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
c. Standard of teaching practice and curriculum quality	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
d. Office administration and paperwork	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
e. Parent partnership and community relations	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
f. Higher management pressure and directives	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
g. Centre resource and budget matters e.g. limited teaching aids, equipment	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
h. Industry awards and benchmarks e.g. ECDA requirements, SPARK	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
i. Staff training and professional development	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
j. Please include any other work challenges or comments here.					

SECTION 4 : LEADERSHIP IN PRACTICE

Q14. Which of the following should early childhood leaders demonstrate in their practice?

Read through all the factors first. Then **choose and rank only the top 5** in order of importance to you.

Early childhood leaders should.....	Rank from 1 to 5 (1 is the most important)
a. bridge research and practice to improve learning and teaching	
b. focus on administrative and financial management	
c. have a vision, is forward thinking and takes risks	
d. enable teachers to progress in their career paths	
e. advocate for the rights of children and teachers	
f. prioritise efficiency of systems and operations	
g. build teamwork and shared values among staff	

Q15. Briefly describe one example of an **effective leader or leadership practice** that you have personally experienced.

Q16. Briefly describe one example of an **ineffective leader or leadership practice** that you have personally experienced.

Q17. What is the relationship between national policies and the work of early childhood leaders in Singapore?

	1 Strongly Agree	2 Agree	3 Not sure	4 Disagree	5 Strongly Disagree
a. Early childhood leaders need to understand policy as part of their leadership role	<input type="checkbox"/>				
b. National economic policies influence the goals and practices of early childhood centres in Singapore	<input type="checkbox"/>				
c. Early childhood leaders have the power to influence policy at the centre level	<input type="checkbox"/>				
d. Policies require interpretation by early childhood leaders before it can be implemented	<input type="checkbox"/>				
e. Early childhood leaders are well informed of policies that will affect their work	<input type="checkbox"/>				

Q18. Name one or more examples of what you regard as '**policy in early childhood education in Singapore**'.

Q19. In the space below, show ***what leadership looks like to you***. (You may like to use quotes, diagrams, drawing, character, symbol etc.) Be as creative as you wish.

Q20. What are your final thoughts about early childhood leadership in Singapore?

Thank you for your participation.

Appendix 2: Pamphlet



Research ethics is an important component of any research . I would like to assure you that the following will be observed:

1. Confidentiality of the participants will be protected. I will not use your name or reveal your identity in a manner that may cause you harm. Pseudonyms or codes will be used instead.
2. You may withdraw at any time without giving reasons. You will not be penalised for withdrawing nor will you be questioned on why you have withdrawn.
3. You may refrain from answering questions during the interview if you do not feel comfortable to do so.
4. Data collected from this research may be used for papers by this researcher aside from this study. All confidentiality conditions will continue to be maintained.
5. If you would like notes of the transcripts to be emailed to you, please indicate this in the informed consent form.
6. All data will be kept in a secure safe for a minimum of 3 years from the date of publication of this study.

*Research is to see
what everyone else has seen
and to think what
nobody else has thought.
Albert Szent-Gyorgyi*

Thank you once again and I look forward to your participation.

Shaireen Selamat

Centre Leader
*Questions for
leader interview*

Project Title
An exploration of policy-to-practice context
to early childhood leadership in Singapore.

Contact Person

Shaireen Selamat
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Page 4 / Page 1

A warm greeting to you.

My name is Shaireen and thank you for participating in my research project. You may have participated in my questionnaire survey before. If so, thank you very much. Your response is greatly appreciated!

For the second phase, I would like to have an interview to understand a leader's views about leadership in greater detail. I will arrange to have a 30 -60 minute session at your centre. It would help if you could read the questions provided ahead of time to enable a more productive discussion when we meet. I will also send you a DVD of your video recording and a sheet of questions to think about as you go through it. Your response will provide vital information for the study. Thank you once again.

Please complete the information below before the session.
(This part of the brochure will be detached and collected at the interview.)

Name	
Position	
How long have you worked in this centre?	
How long have you been in this field?	
How many other centres have you worked in?	
Do you consent to have this session audio recorded? This will allow me to capture your responses accurately for data analysis. Your identities and responses will be held in the strictest confidence.	Yes / No
Experience of leadership	

Perceptions of leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> If you could think of a word to describe leadership what would it be and why? What positive leadership experiences have you experienced in your work? What challenging experiences with leadership have you encountered? What is needed to support such challenges?
Influences on leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do you think leadership in early childhood is different from leadership in other settings? How did you develop your ideas about leadership? Has this changed over time? What caused it to change? What are the key tasks/responsibilities of early childhood leaders? How would you describe the culture of your organization, hierarchical or collegial?
Policy and Leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What existing early childhood initiatives are you aware of that might affect leadership? How would SPARK affect the work of a leader? Are you aware of any other initiatives that may affect the work of a leader? How would the new career progression pathways and competency based assessment affect leadership?
Leadership Training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What do you know of the training for early childhood leaders? How would it develop leadership skills? What is good about the current training programme? What needs improvement? How would you assess good leadership? What measures would you use?

What are your rights as a participant?

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Appendix 3: School case profiles

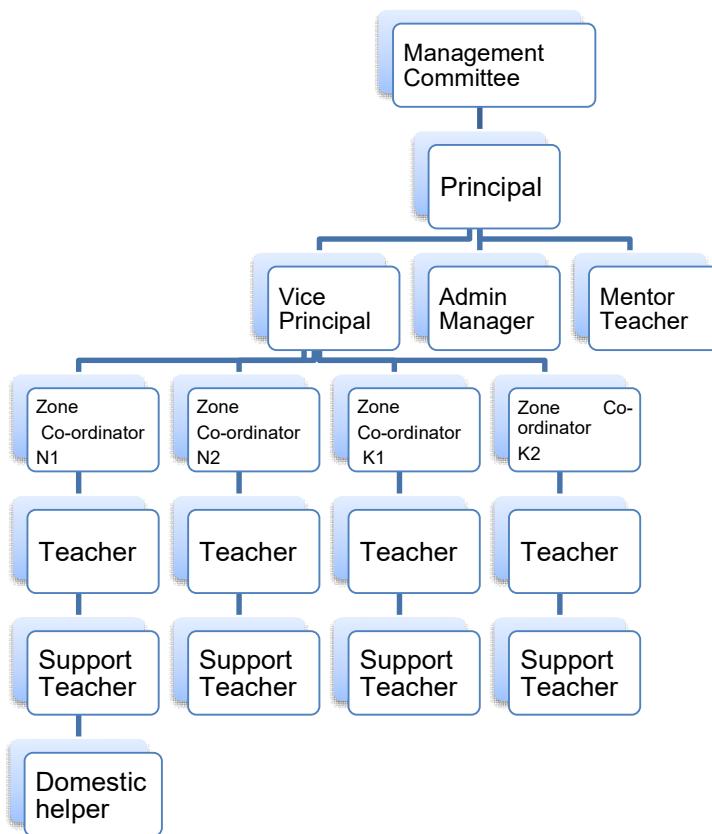
Case Site 1

Profile of CS.1.L1	
Educational background	CS.1.L1 was previously a music teacher who attained her Specialist Diploma in Early Childhood Education. She took over from the previous principal in 2010.
Promotion Process	As a member of the congregation, she was handpicked by the previous principal to take over the role. This was her first role as a principal in the early childhood field. She was interviewed, mentored and groomed to be the next principal by her predecessor and the pastor. The principal reports to a management committee with the pastor being the most involved among them.

Profile of Centre	
Preschool Type	The centre is a church kindergarten. The school has been in operation for more than 50 years and the current principal is its third since 2010, after succeeding the former principal who had retired and served the school for 35 years.
Environment	The premises consist of an old school block and are separate from the rest of the church facilities. The school has its own assembly hall, specialty playground, art room, indoor gym and music room, occupying a gross floor area of 2,240 square metres. Classrooms for the younger age groups adopt a more open concept with large play areas. Children move to different classrooms for their activities and from classrooms only at designated times via the common corridor while a change of activities is signalled by a school bell. The administration and principal's offices are situated in an adjacent building owned by the church. There is a large car park and a drop-off area. Gardens and play areas line the front and back of the school on the ground floor. Almost all classrooms are air conditioned.
Teachers	The teaching staff comprise one principal, two specialist teachers, four senior teachers, six assistant teachers and about eight teachers. Four of the teachers have a certificate in early childhood, 20 have a diploma in early childhood, two have a diploma in leadership and two have a degree in early childhood. The teachers are a mix of Singapore, Philippines and mainland China nationals.
Children	The school currently has an enrolment of 650 children. Demographically, 10% of the children come from low-income families, 70% are from middle income families and 20% from high income households. The children represent a variety of races, nationalities and faiths.

School Programme	<p>The school runs 17 classes in total over two sessions. The first session runs from 8.00 am to 11.15 am and the second session runs from 11.30 am to 2.45 pm</p> <p>Each session is about 3½ hours long and the programmes are divided into Playgroup (2 to 3 years), Nursery (3 to 4 years), Kindergarten 1 (4 to 5 years) and Kindergarten 2 (5 to 6 years) levels.</p> <p>As a church kindergarten, the school programme places strong emphasis on Christian values. It has dedicated motor development and music programmes as part of its main curriculum. As a SPARK accredited school, the programme addresses all areas of learning stipulated by ECDA. In addition, the curriculum includes ‘Bible Knowledge’ and a special values programme.</p>
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Organisation Structure



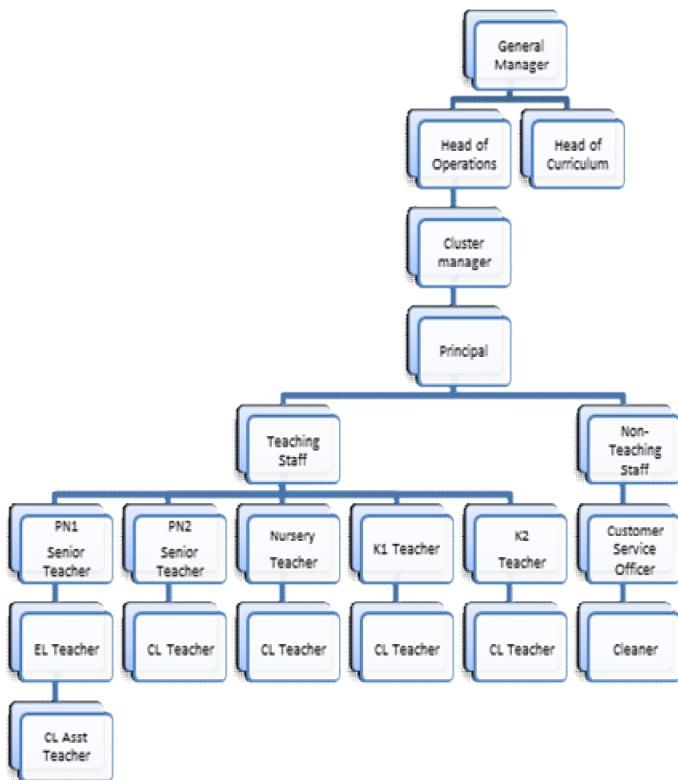
Case Site 2

Profile of Principal	
Educational background	The principal has a degree in early childhood. She previously worked as a teacher in childcare, kindergartens, and later in an international school setting.
Promotion Process	CS.2.L1 has been a principal in this school for four years and it is her first stint as a leader. She was attracted to the organisation as one of her friends was in the company. She was hired through a recruitment company and was initially offered a vice-principal role when she applied due to her lack of experience which she refused. Despite this gap, she was not mentored but had arranged to come in a few days to take over from the principal who was leaving. She gained most of her knowledge from her ground level work and, recognising her capability, she was quickly given additional responsibilities within the organisation as a SPARK team internal assessor cum mentor, Continuous Professional development Head, and a committee member for the Concert and Sports Fiesta for the organisation. These were additional job roles at the organisation level beyond her centre duties. CS.2.L1 had already resigned at the time of the interview and there was a principal designate who was understudying her. (The researcher was later informed that that the trainee principal subsequently resigned six months after taking on the position for unspecified reasons). The principal's direct report would be the Operations Manager and the Curriculum Head. Within the organisation, there would also be a Cluster Manager.

Profile of Centre	
Preschool Type	The school occupies one floor of a commercial building located within a popular shopping and residential area. The preschool was established over 30 years ago and is the oldest branch in the organisation. The organisation has approximately 19 local centres and 35 regional franchise centres in Indonesia, Malaysia, China, Bangladesh and Cambodia. It also runs several other early childhood brands under its business arm. The current principal has been at the helm for four years and there have been more than five principals who have led this centre before her. The school offers Infant care, Kindergarten, Childcare and Flexicare programmes.

Environment	The centre covers approximately 1,047 square metres in floor area, of which the service area is 413 square metres, the usable indoor area is 497 square metres and the outdoor area is 137 square metres. There is a large central assembly space in the middle of the school with classrooms all along the perimeter. Of a total 10 classrooms, nine are used for preschool and one as an enrichment classroom. All rooms are air conditioned and enclosed. There are two toilets, a multi-purpose room, a children's music programme room and a literacy through information technology room. Upon entering the school, there is a service counter with two staff to attend to parents. The office is situated near the entrance to the school.
Teachers	The school staff comprise one principal, three senior teachers, more than 15 teachers, two assistant teachers, one customer service officer and three 'Place and Train' student teachers. Of this group, eight have a Certificate in Early Childhood, nine have a Diploma in Early Childhood and three have a Degree in Early Childhood. The staff are predominantly local Chinese, Malay and Indian, although it also has foreign staff such as teachers from the Philippines and mainland China.
Children	The school currently has 109 children enrolled. Demographically, 5% are from low-income backgrounds, 55% from middle income and 40% from high income households. The school enrols local children of all races as well as other nationalities, as the area is popular with expatriate families.
School Programme	<p>The school runs nine classes in total, across four sessions:</p> <p>Full Day: 7 am to 7 pm. Half Day: 7 am to 1 pm</p> <p>Flexicare: 8 am to 11 am and 11.15 am to 2.15 pm.</p> <p>The centre caters to five levels and plans to have an infant care centre in future too. These are Pre-Nursery 1 (18 months to 24 months), Pre-Nursery 2 (24 months to 36 months), Nursery (3 to 4 years), Kindergarten 1 (4 to 5 years) and Kindergarten 2 (5 to 6 years).</p> <p>The school curriculum is managed by a dedicated curriculum department, which is housed in the same premises as the preschool. The school has a special music programme and literacy through technology programme. This centre has also developed an Author and Artist study component in its language and art programme as well.</p>

Organisation Structure

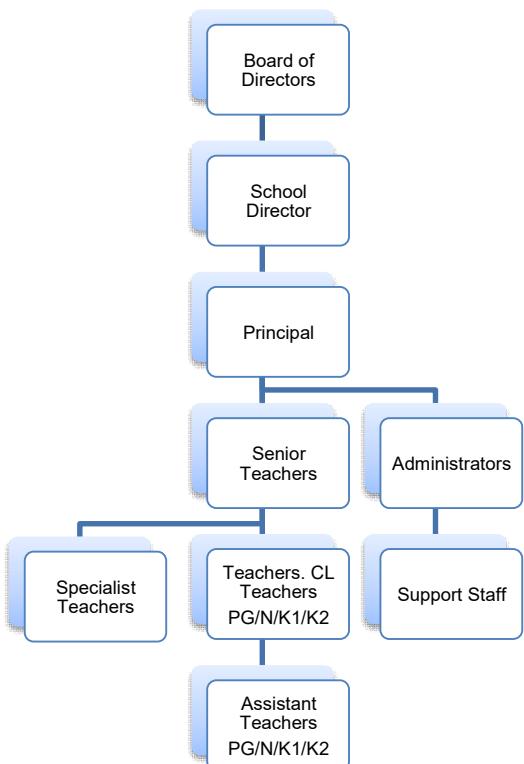


Case Site 3

Profile of Principal	
Educational background	Prior to this, CS.3.L1 was a teacher in a large kindergarten organisation following taught in an experimental kindergarten. During the time of the interview, she had been in this role for two years.
Promotion Process	CS.3.L1 obtained the position, her first as a principal, through a personal referral. As the position had been vacant for some time, there was no induction process for the role. The principal reports to the Director, who, though involved in the school's operations, is not trained in early childhood education.

Profile of Centre	
Preschool Type	The centre is an independent early childhood centre that is owned by a Chinese clan association. The school has been in operation for about 10 years and the current principal is the third in its history. As a not-for-profit centre, the school has less pressure to achieve profits but focuses on the delivery of a high-quality programme.
Environment	The school is situated in the middle of an affluent residential urban district. The centre is spread out over four single-storey pre-war houses with large open spaces between each house. It has a large outdoor area and a special art room. The total area of the complex is 4512 square metres with each building housing classrooms for similar age groups. Teachers have a comfortable designated common workspace and resource room. The principal has an office in the front building. All buildings are connected by a sheltered walkway and all classrooms are air conditioned.
Teachers	The school numbers about 25 staff members, comprising eight teachers and assistant teachers, two specialist teachers, one senior teacher and one principal. The principal reports to the Director of the school, who is also involved in the decision-making processes of the school. One member of staff has a certificate in early childhood, five have a Diploma in Early Childhood Education, one has a Diploma in Leadership, eight have a degree in Early Childhood Education and one has a Master in Early Childhood. The teachers are a mix of all the local races as well as foreign teachers from the likes of mainland China, Malaysia and Taiwan.
Children	The school has a current enrolment of 130 children with 3% from middle income backgrounds and 97% from high income families. A majority of the children are from expatriate families and a minority are local residents.

School Programme	<p>The school runs eight classes and offers two types of sessions. Half Day: 8 am to 1 pm Full Day: 8 am to 5/6 pm</p> <p>The programme is divided into four age group levels Playgroup (2 to 3 years), Nursery (3 to 4 years), Kindergarten 1 (4 to 5 years) and Kindergarten 2 (5 to 6 years) levels.</p> <p>The school curriculum features a strong pedagogical approach rooted in inquiry-based learning. There is an emphasis on learning outside the classroom.</p>
Organisation Structure	



```

graph TD
    A[Board of Directors] --> B[School Director]
    B --> C[Principal]
    C --> D[Senior Teachers]
    C --> E[Administrators]
    D --> F[Specialist Teachers]
    D --> G[Teachers CL  
Teachers PG/N/K1/K2]
    D --> H[Support Staff]
    G --> I[Assistant Teachers PG/N/K1/K2]
  
```

The organisation structure chart illustrates the hierarchical structure of the school. At the top is the Board of Directors, followed by the School Director, then the Principal. The Principal oversees the Senior Teachers and Administrators. The Senior Teachers oversees Specialist Teachers, Teachers CL (Teachers PG/N/K1/K2), and Support Staff. The Teachers CL oversees Assistant Teachers PG/N/K1/K2.

Case Site 4

Profile of Principal	
Educational background	This is CS.4.L1's first leadership position. She was a professional in another field, who entered the early childhood industry as a mid-career switch. After taking the Specialist Diploma in early childhood education, she became a teacher and thereafter a principal.
Promotion Process	CS.4.L1 explained that she was attached to the centre as a trainee teacher to help the previous principal in building the team. That principal left, to be followed by three others being employed, all in the space of just one year. One left in a month, another after two months and the other after three months. She was then promoted to be an acting principal. In addition to her administrative role, she was required to teach a class. She was apprehensive about taking the role of a principal within the centre as the teachers had always known her as a peer. However, as an enduring figure in the centre, she felt an obligation to stay on and take on the leadership role.

Profile of Centre	
Preschool Type	The school is an anchor operator centre situated in a mature public housing estate. The centre has been in operation for about 10 years and the current principal assumed the role in 2012. Prior to this, the centre was headed by at least three other principals.
Environment	The centre is located in the void deck of a block of government flats. There are three 'bays' with one being separate from the main one and about 40 metres from it. The infant bay and the playgroup bay are connected to one another with the principal's office in the middle. Each bay is approximately 200-300 square metres in size. The classrooms adopt an 'open concept' with learning centres created by shelves dividing the space into activity zones. Classrooms are not air-conditioned and use wall and ceiling fans to cool the space, although one enrichment room is air conditioned.
Teachers	There are 10 staff, with one principal and two senior teachers. There are four teachers who are infant care certified. Seven of the teachers have a Diploma in Early Childhood, two hold a Diploma in Leadership, two have Degrees and one has a Master in Early Childhood Education. Most of the teachers are locals with the exception of the Chinese teachers who are from mainland China.

Children	There are 77 children enrolled in childcare and seven enrolled in the infant care school. Some 26% of the children are from low-income families, 26% from middle income and 48% are from high income families. Most children are locals with foreigners predominantly from the Asia-Pacific region.
School Programme	The school runs five classes for children from Pre-Nursery to Kindergarten 1 with the new addition of an infant care centre. The curriculum for the school is managed by a central curriculum office that oversees the 130 centres in the organisation. A full day childcare programme is offered, which entails the centre remaining open from 7 am to 7 pm. It offers enrichment programmes provided by vendors such as Speech and Drama, Music and Abacus.
Organisation Structure	

```

graph TD
    CQM[Centre Quality Manager] --> CL[Centre Leader]
    CL --> ST[Senior Teacher]
    ST --> ICT[Infant care Teachers]
    ST --> CCT[Childcare Teachers]
  
```

Case Site 5

Profile of Principal	
Educational background	CS.5.L1 has a degree in early childhood education and has been a principal at this centre for 10 years.
Promotion Process	This is not her first posting as a leader. As a senior leader she also assumes the role of a Lead Principal which requires her to oversee the operations of about five other centres within the zone including two childcare centres. She obtained the job through a formal interview process. She was not mentored for her role, learning on the job, at least initially.

Profile of Centre	
Preschool Type	The school is part of an anchor operator organisation and one of the oldest early childhood operators in Singapore. This school offers a 'kindergarten' programme which places a greater emphasis on an academic curriculum as the programmes do not include routine care. The centre is SPARK certified and had just gone for a round of certification at the time of the interview. The school has existed for about 13 years and the principal is the second in the seat in this period.
Environment	The kindergarten is located in a public housing estate, situated at the void deck of two different blocks about with each entrance about forty metres apart from each other. There are two bays, one houses a teacher's room, second language room, office, music room, four classrooms and a sports hub. There is also a designated outdoor play area for the children. All the rooms are air conditioned, and each bay covers about 400 square metres in floor size.
Teachers	The school employs two assistant teachers, eight teachers, one senior teacher and one principal. Within this group, one has a certificate in early childhood education, 12 have a diploma in early childhood education, one has a diploma in leadership and two possess a degree in early childhood education. A majority of the teachers are locals while the rest are from mainland China and the Philippines.
Children	The school has a current enrolment of 213 children, which is well shy of its full capacity of 290 students. Demographically, some 30% of the children are from low-income backgrounds, 60% are from middle income and 10 % are from high income families. Almost all the children are from local families with a small number from other Asia-Pacific countries.

School Programme	<p>The school caters to children from N1 to K2. It runs about two sessions for most of the levels with four sessions for the N1 class. Sessions can be between two to four hours long.</p> <p>N1: 8 am - 10 am, 10 am - 12 pm, 12 pm - 2pm and 2pm - 4 pm N2: am - 11 am, 11 am - 2 pm, 2 pm - 5 pm K1 and K2: 8 am - 12 pm, 1 pm - 5 pm</p> <p>The school uses an integrated curriculum, designed by the Central Curriculum Team of the organisation. The centre prides itself in its niche art programme.</p>
Organisation Structure	<pre> graph TD Principal[Principal] --- SeniorTeacher[Senior Teacher] Principal --- AdminStaff[Admin Staff] SeniorTeacher --- N1LevelHead[N1 Level Head] SeniorTeacher --- N2LevelHead[N2 Level Head] SeniorTeacher --- K1LevelHead[K1 level Head] SeniorTeacher --- K2LevelHead[K2 Level Head] N1LevelHead --- N1Teacher[N1 Teacher] N1LevelHead --- N1AssistantTeacher[N1 Assistant Teacher] N2LevelHead --- N2Teacher[N2 Teacher] N2LevelHead --- N2AssistantTeacher[N2 Assistant Teacher] K1LevelHead --- K1Teacher[K1 Teacher] K2LevelHead --- K2Teacher[K2 Teacher] </pre>

Case Site 6

Profile of Principal	
Educational background	CS.6.L1 has been the principal of this centre for the last four years. She has a degree in early childhood education and a Diploma in EC leadership.
Promotion Process	This is her first experience as a principal, having been a teacher in the centre for two years after which the leadership changes started taking place. The previous principal had to manage another centre and there was 'sharing of principals' across the organisation. As she was a senior teacher then, she had to take on the role of a principal on site. Her promotion process involved an interview with the Director of the centre. She took on the position before taking up leadership training but was nevertheless given the promotion upon completion of her course. Her mentoring process involved shadowing a teacher for half a day over three days before she had to take on the role.

Profile of Centre	
Preschool Type	The school is a social non-profit childcare which has about seven centres across Singapore. Due to the work of the organisation, it serves a predominantly Muslim student population. The school places emphasis on the development of character and is part of the Partner Operator Scheme. At the time of the study this centre was undergoing SPARK certification. The school has been in existence for about 13 years and the principal is the second principal to the seat over the period.
Environment	The childcare is situated in the void deck of a public housing estate with two bays, which are situated opposite one another and separated by a corridor. It is 293 square metres in size, comprising a service area of 89 square metres and a usable indoor area of 204 square metres. The office is located in the front of one of the bays while the classrooms are open plan in design, with low shelves used to demarcate areas. There is no air conditioning, with only ceiling fans used to provide ventilation. There is a playground and green open spaces outside the centre for outdoor activities.
Teachers	There are five teachers for each level with one assistant teacher attached to each class. The teaching staff is managed by one principal and a senior teacher. In addition, the non-teaching staff comprise an administration executive, a cook and a cleaner. Of the teaching staff, one holds a certificate in early childhood, two have a diploma in early childhood and three have a degree in

	early childhood education. The teachers are Malay-Muslims with a few from the Philippines.
Children	The school has a current enrolment of 62 children as against a total capacity of 68. At present, 10% of the children are from low-income households, 80% are from middle income and 10% from high income households. The majority of the children are from local families residing in the area.
School Programme	The school programme runs from 7 am to 7 pm with curriculum hours being 9 am to 5 pm. It caters to children aged between 18 months and 6 years with children grouped into PG1, PG2, Nursery, Kindergarten 1 and Kindergarten 2. Unlike the other centres in this study, it offers Malay as a second language. The school had just undergone a curriculum revamp. Teachers plan the lessons with guidance from the senior staff. The school provides enrichment programmes conducted by vendors.
Organisation Structure	

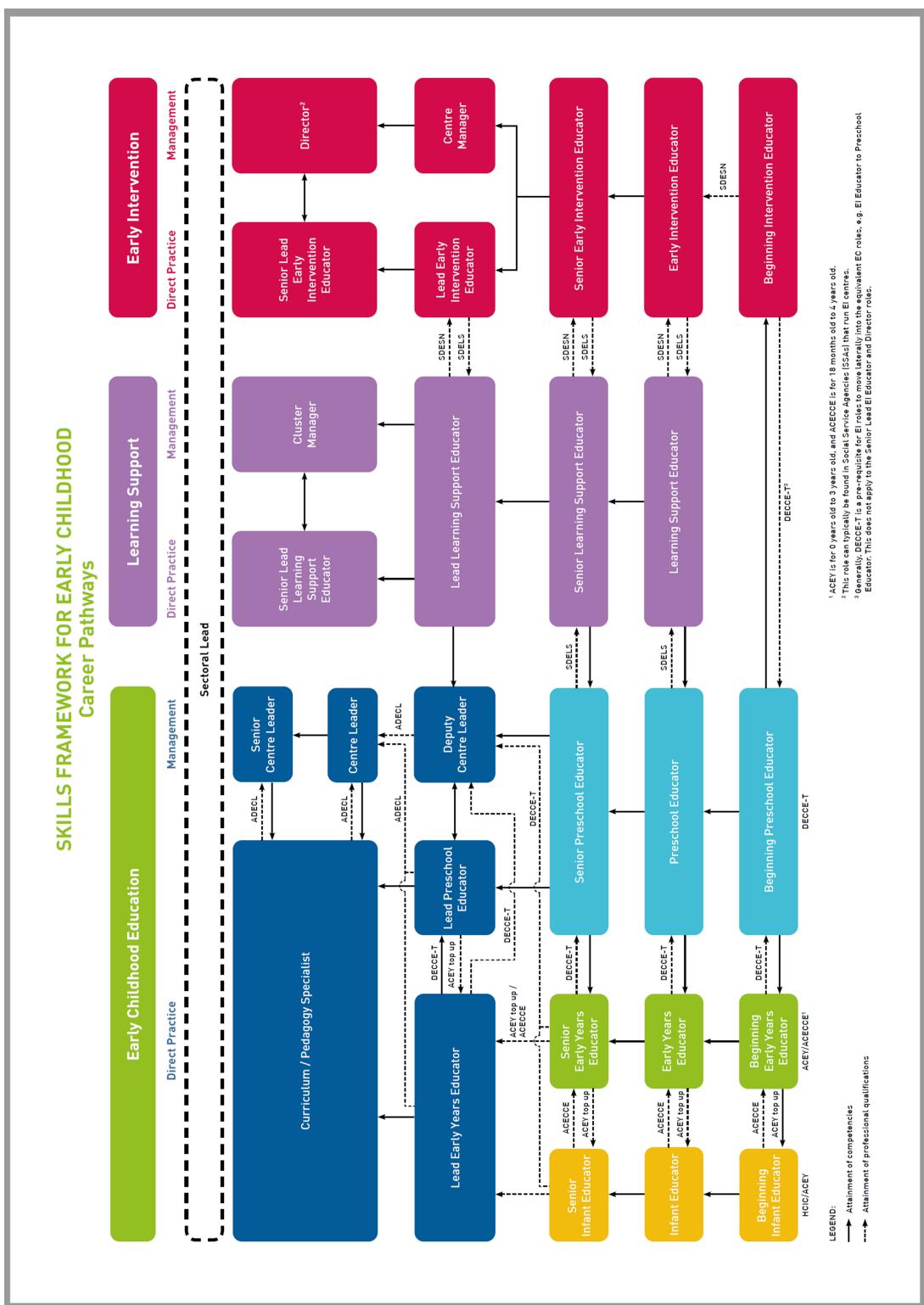
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graph TD
    Principal[Principal] --> SeniorTeacher[Senior Teacher]
    SeniorTeacher --> TeachingStaff[Teaching Staff]
    SeniorTeacher --> NonTeachingStaff[Non-Teaching Staff]
    TeachingStaff --> PG1[PG1 Teacher]
    TeachingStaff --> PG2[PG2 Teacher]
    TeachingStaff --> Nursery[Nursery Teacher]
    TeachingStaff --> KG1[Kindergarten 1 Teacher]
    TeachingStaff --> KG2[Kindergarten 2 Teacher]
    PG1 --> AT1[Assistant Teacher]
    PG2 --> AT2[Assistant Teacher]
    Nursery --> AT3[Assistant Teacher]
    KG1 --> AT4[Assistant Teacher]
    KG2 --> AT5[Assistant Teacher]
    NonTeachingStaff --> Admin[Admin Executive]
    NonTeachingStaff --> Cook[Cook]
    NonTeachingStaff --> Cleaner[Cleaner]
  
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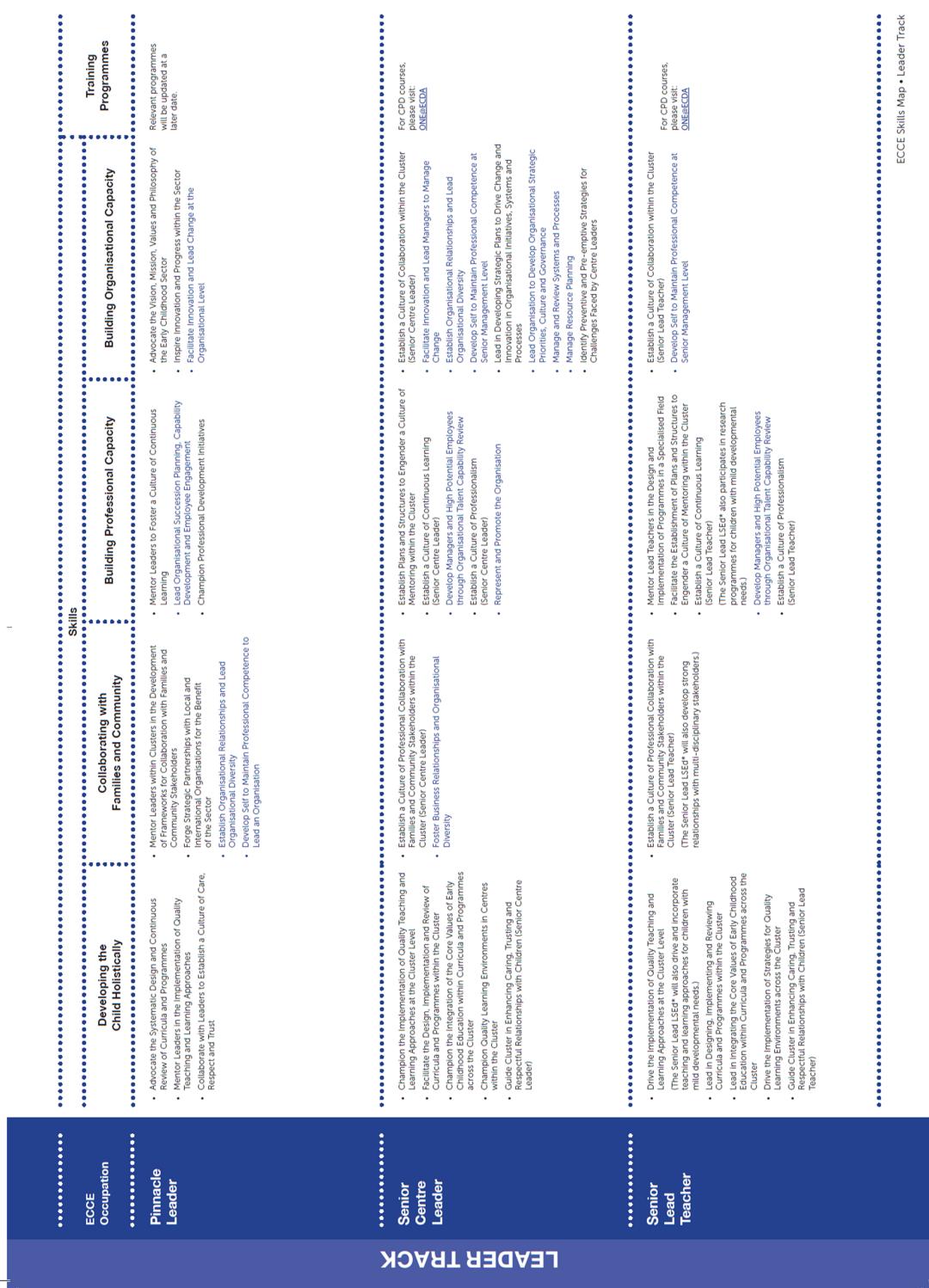
Appendix 4: Matrix of findings

	Questionnaire Survey	Day in the Life	Teacher and Leader Interviews	Elite Interviews	Document Analysis	Themes
Context of influence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> SETTING Impact of settings. Sandwiched by teacher and HQ WORKFORCE Survey reflective of young teachers and novice leaders. Highly educated and low experience. Need 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Leaders need to address multiple concerns from stakeholders. Parental pressure is another element of stress Sectoral challenges e.g. manpower and policy adherence influence the way leaders work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Multiple sources of influence from macrosystem to microsystem Operating mission affects leadership purpose Setting type affects leadership task New models demand new skills Parentocracy and competitive education system add pressure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Influence of public school principal role Leadership layers affect ability to exercise power 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Collaborative but power influence in SFw from other non-centre based leadership roles Influence of multiagency in defining leadership descriptions. Policy texts written in different ways. Reader friendly open and exhaustive 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Multiple sources of stakeholder influence types Environment influence Regulation and governance
Context of policy text production	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Low policy knowledge and confidence. Unsure of policies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Policy information is disseminated top down particularly in large centres. Leaders of large centres implement policy that is interpreted for them Centre leaders are recognised as authority figures within the organisation in implementing operational tasks. Centre Leaders are not necessarily the decision makers within the centre. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Policy information flow is controlled by senior management Policy is determined by SM and policy action is determined for the leaders Leaders have to find a way to navigate and balance intent and larger organisations have better support than smaller organisations to interpret policy and can overcome change better 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Nature of education policymaking within the public schools influences the culture of policymaking in early childhood. Change to strong public style, hierarchical governance. Policy interpretation is weak 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> SFw recognises Lead and Centre as primary leadership roles in centre LT is Pedagogical leader. CL is visionary, professional and operations. Close relationship. High number and wide-ranging roles for CL Disparity in Roles across documents Role of Centre Administrator with HQ and no HQ in PDP process Interchangeable and undefined use of leadership terminology. Curriculum pedagogical , instructional, Knowledge and Achievement oriented less focus on impact 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Policy and the role of EC leaders Process of policy interpretation Policy texts and leadership
Context of practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Importance of human relations in leadership. Personal equally to professional competency Multiplicity of roles in leadership. Core role not defined. Settings can affect primary task How is important as what leaders do 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Measure of leadership effectiveness is different from view of leader, teacher and organisation Leaders face moral conflict in their decision making Profile of leaders are young and readiness, personal and professional is a concern Larger organisation have more hierarchy driven approaches 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Leadership practice is complex. Pressure to perform within privatised sector Work creates internal conflict within leaders Paradox pf practice, relations valued but not a measure of effectiveness Primary task of leader varies with stakeholders Leadership readiness is weak Leader as sacrificial agent 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Interpretation of leadership based on settings Leadership excludes a policy making role. Leadership competency is an issue Curriculum and organisational leadership is recognised to be important Fear of personal consequence to as a result of decisions Hurried leadership 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Written through lens of large organisations structures Documents created by a organisations with varied agenda and focus 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Workforce and Sectoral challenges Leadership Conflicts Leadership Competency

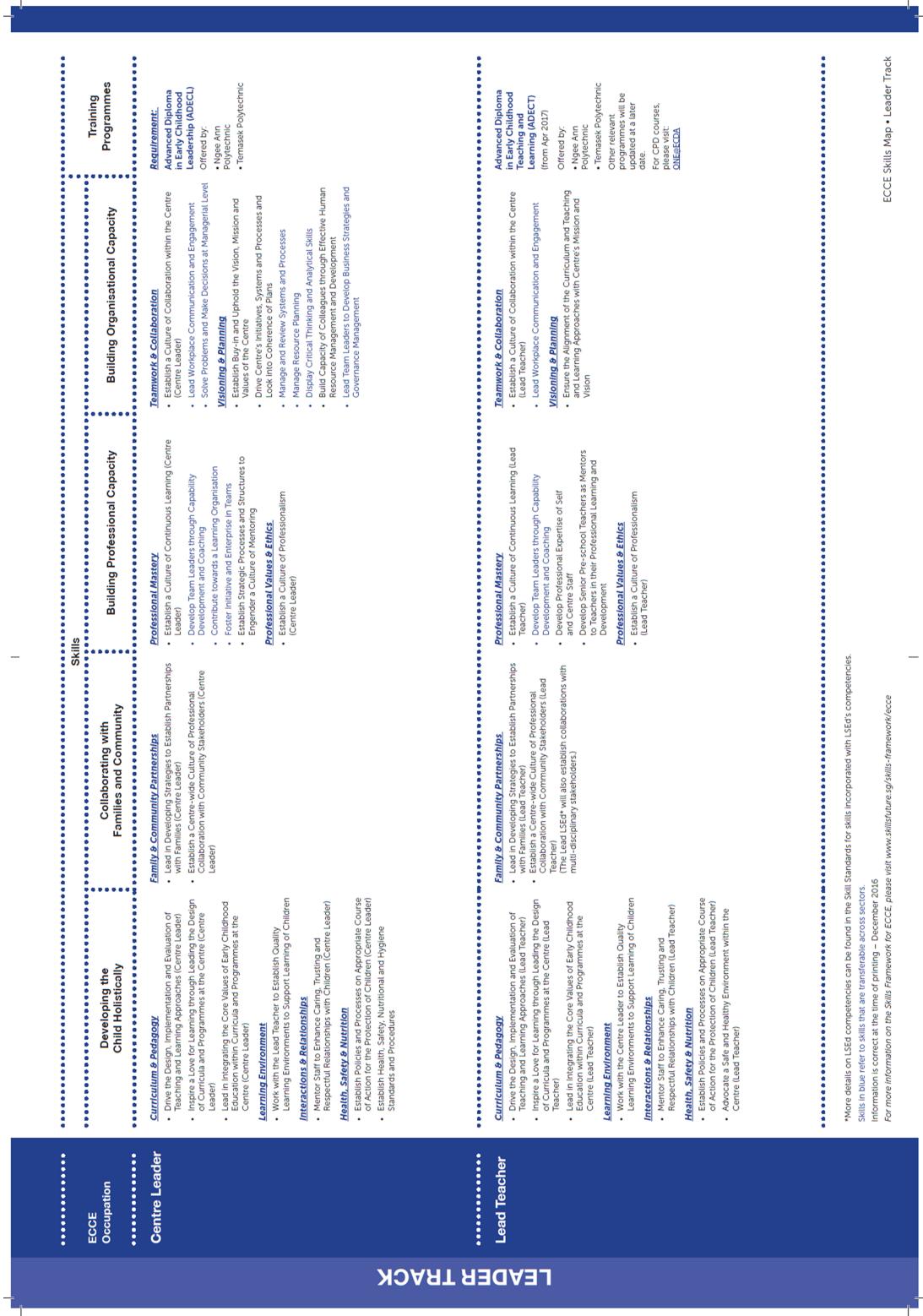
Appendix 5: EC Skills Framework (updated 2021)



Appendix 6: ECCE Skills Map – Leader Track



ECCE Skills Map • Leader Track



ECCE Skills Map • Leader Track

*More details on LSEd competencies can be found in the Skill Standards for skills incorporated with LSEd's competencies.
 Skills in blue refer to skills that are transferable across sectors.
 Information is correct at the time of printing – December 2016
 For more information on the Skills Framework for ECCE, please visit www.skillsfuture.sg/skills-framework/ecce

Appendix 7: Sample of letter of consent



Dear

Re : Approval to conduct questionnaire survey

As part of my doctoral research study, I am keen to explore perceptions about early childhood leadership as seen through the eyes of the early childhood community in Singapore. This area of study presents a relatively new area of research interest hence the understanding of early childhood leadership still lacks a strong conceptual and theoretical framework. There is also limited availability of local Singapore research at present. As such, I would like to invite the principals from your organisation to participate in the questionnaire survey which will contribute to a general understanding of local early childhood leadership. I have included an outline of the research below for your reading.

Title of Research

An exploration of policy-to-practice context of early childhood leadership in Singapore .

Objectives

The study aims to explore how policy is understood and enacted through leadership. It also aims to understand the views, understandings and reported practices of Singaporean early childhood leaders. In addition, it seeks to explore how early childhood leadership is implemented in a range of childcare and kindergarten settings. The information will be useful to understand the ways in which leadership training can facilitate effective leadership development.

Participation

The questionnaire survey involves approximately 200 leaders and teachers from childcare and kindergartens in Singapore from a diversity of settings. The questionnaire will address perspectives related to leadership characteristics, challenges and the practice of leadership. There will be 20 questions in the survey which consist of open ended , ranked and scaled questions. It should take about 20 minutes to complete. The session will be administered by the researcher or a research assistant. Participants will be given a short 2 minute overview before the distribution of the booklets. They may also decline to participate should they wish.

Confidentiality

In accordance with stringent ethics guidelines, all data and information collected will be confidential. Survey forms will be returned in a sealed envelope after completion. The identity of participants and schools will coded for anonymity. The privacy and integrity of all participants will be respected. Upon the completion of the study a written summary of the

overall findings will be sent to the school for your information. If you and your staff are keen to participate, kindly email me at t to indicate your decision to participate. I will follow up with an email to confirm the arrangements.

Thank you once again for your kind consideration and willingness to be part of this learning journey.

Yours sincerely

Shaireen Selamat
Doctoral Researcher
University of Warwick
Email : S.S.B.Selamat@warwick.ac.uk
sshaireen@yahoo.com
Mobile : 91451272

Appendix 8: Leader template for recording Day in the Life activities

Log sheet for Centre Leader 'Day in the Life' Recording

Name : _____

Centre : _____

Please jot down the significant activities or moments that you experienced today.

Time (approximate)	Significant moments

Appendix 9: School profile form

CENTRE PROFILE FORM

Dear Principal,

As part of my data collection process, I would like to gather some general information about your preschool.

The information given will be treated with strict confidentiality and the identity of your centre will remain anonymous in the study.

Please complete the information to the best of your knowledge.

Best regards,

Shaireen Selamat
Principal Investigator
Mobile: +6591451272
Email: sshaireen@yahoo.com

Please fill in the information to the best of your knowledge.

CENTRE INFORMATION

1. How long has the school been in operation?

- a. 0 to 5 years
- b. 6 to 10 years
- c. 11 to 15 years
- d. 16 to 20 years
- e. More than 20 years

2. Indicate the number of teaching staff employed in the school.

(Tick where applicable.)

	1 to 2	3 to 4	5 to 6	7 or more
a. Assistant Teacher	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b. Teacher	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
c. Specialist Teacher	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
d. Senior Teacher	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
e. Principal	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
f. Academic Manager	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
g. Other positions (please specify)				

3. What is the management structure of the school? Please draw below.

4. How many sessions do you have and what are the timings for the sessions?

5. What is the approximate **total number of students** currently enrolled in your school for the following levels? (*Tick where applicable*)

a. Playgroup	b. Nursery	c. KG 1	d. KG 2
a. <input type="checkbox"/> 0 to 10			
b. <input type="checkbox"/> 11 to 20			
c. <input type="checkbox"/> 21 to 30			
d. <input type="checkbox"/> 31 to 40			
e. <input type="checkbox"/> 41 to 50			
f. <input type="checkbox"/> 51 to 60			
g. <input type="checkbox"/> 61 to 70			
h. <input type="checkbox"/> 71 to 80			
i. <input type="checkbox"/> 81 to 90			
j. <input type="checkbox"/> above 90			

6. Provide a physical description of the school and the total size in sq. m.

7. What are the educational backgrounds of your teachers?

Qualification(attained)	Number of teachers
a. Certificate	
b. Diploma In EC	
c. Diploma in Leadership	
d. Degree	
e. Masters	
f. Others (please specify)	

8. Do you have non-Singaporean teachers? No / Yes.

If Yes, please list the nationalities below.

9. How would you describe the **general economic background** of your students?

Income group of students	<i>Percentage</i> <i>(Total should add up to 100%)</i>
a. Low income	
b. Middle income	
c. High income	

10. General information about leadership

Information	
a. How many years have you been a principal here?	
b. Were you a principal before joining this school?	
c. How were you hired?	
d. How were you mentored?	
e. How many languages do you know or use in your centre?	

11. General information about the centre

Information	Details
a. How many classes do you currently run?	
b. What is your current enrolment?	
c. What is your total capacity?	
d. Do you have a waiting list?	

12. Do you share your space with any other organisation/ programme?

No / Yes.

If Yes, please explain.

13. What special areas do the children use in your daily programme?

- a. Music Room
- b. Play room
- c. Outdoor play area
- d. Indoor play area
- e. Art Room
- f. Others (please specify)

14. What special curriculums do you adopt for your centre? (*E.g. Letterland*)

Subject area	Name of curriculum
a. Literacy	
b. Mathematics	
c. Science	
d. Chinese	
e. Others (please specify)	

15. Do you hold any other positions within the organisation or industry?

16. What would be some of the **key challenges** to achieving growth for your school? (*Tick where applicable*)

Area of concern	Low challenge	Medium Challenge	High Challenge
a. Operational Budget	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b. Staff turnover	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
c. Parent support	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
d. Management Support	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
e. Environment limitations	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
f. Demographic changes in local area	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
g. Others (please specify)			

Do you collaborate or work with other kindergartens or/ and organisations? No / Yes. If Yes, please elaborate.

17.

18. Would your centre be known for any **special programme or activity**? No/Yes. If Yes, please specify.

Thank you for your contribution!

Appendix 10: Consent forms



Participant Consent Form

An exploration of policy-to-practice context to early childhood leadership in Singapore

I, the undersigned, confirm the following (*please tick the box to indicate agreement*)

1.	That I voluntarily agree to participate in the project.	<input type="checkbox"/>
2.	That I have the opportunity to ask questions about the project and my participation.	<input type="checkbox"/>
3.	That the information from the interview will be used as part of a doctoral research study and publications related to it.	<input type="checkbox"/>
4.	That I can withdraw at any time without giving reason. I will not be penalised for withdrawing nor will I be questioned on why I have withdrawn.	<input type="checkbox"/>
5.	That confidentiality will be maintained for all persons and organisations participating in this study (e.g. use of names, pseudonyms, anonymity of data, etc.)	<input type="checkbox"/>
6.	That I have the right to consent or decline the use of audio, video or other forms of data recording.	<input type="checkbox"/>
7.	That I consent to the use of my perceptions, experiences, opinions and information in this research and that it will not be attributed to me.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Participant		Researcher
Name		Name
Signature		Signature
Date		Date
Would you like the notes/ transcripts to be emailed to you? YES / NO .If YES , please provide email address below.		Notes

Appendix 11: Coding sample for interview

P1 Experience of leadership

Comment	Unit of meaning	Condensed unit of meaning	Code	Category	Theme
CS.1.L1	P: Why are children not adjusting well to school and you get lengthy conversations with parents, then you realise they have bigger problems at home, not able to cope, you know, to change sessions, very while, even those who want to change session, I've got to talk to them further and understand what's the logistics. If the logistics doesn't change, you change session, it doesn't answer your problem. So that will be the ones that is a bit more lengthy because you got to find out what is that case, before you can help the child.	If the logistics doesn't change, you change session, it doesn't answer your problem. So that will be the ones that is a bit more lengthy because you got to find out what is that case, before you can help the child.	Leaders have other concerns aside from the operational	Concerns of leaders	Leadership Challenges
CS.1.L1	P: Ya, not a lot, because so far my teachers will come back to me and tell me potentially this is gonna happen and then I'll give teachers like ah, ok, so maybe you can suggest this, and then the teacher will talk to the parents. Sometimes it works. Sometimes it doesn't work because it's a logistic matter.	will come back to me and tell me potentially this is gonna happen and then I'll give teachers like ah, ok, so maybe you can suggest this, and then the teacher will talk to the parents. Sometimes it works. Sometimes it doesn't work because it's a logistic matter	Leader works with teachers to manage parents but logistics falls back on the principal	Delegating responsibilities is limited	Leadership challenges
	P: Right now is 'build capacity'	"build capacity"	Leader feels job is to build capacity	Building staff competency	Managing staff

Appendix 12: Question for elite interviews

Themes	Questions
Early childhood sector work	<p>1. How would you describe your work in relation to the early childhood sector?</p> <p>2. How would you like your work to impact the early childhood sector?</p>
Development of the early childhood sector	<p>3. What are your thoughts about current developments in Singapore's early childhood sector? Which areas concern you most?</p> <p>4. From your perspective, who would you regard as 'leaders of the early childhood sector'?</p> <p>5. What type of challenges do you think such leaders face at present? How about future challenges they are likely to face?</p> <p>6. In your opinion, what more is needed to improve the leadership of the early childhood sector?</p>
Early Childhood Policy	<p>7. From your experience, how is early childhood policymaking similar or different to education policymaking of the public education sector?</p> <p>8. What are the conditions governing early childhood policy that most may not be aware of?</p>
Policy and Practice	<p>9. What are the key challenges in the implementation of early childhood education policies in Singapore?</p> <p>10. What suggestions do you have to facilitate better policy implementation within the EC sector?</p>