Parents' Levels of Satisfaction With Early Childhood Service Quality: Insights From Guyana

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Abstract

Understanding parents' satisfaction with quality is necessary for offering services that better meet the needs of children and families. However, there is a paucity of such research in Guyana. Through a descriptive survey, 51 parents provided insights to guide decisions about service at the University of Guyana Early Childhood Centre of Excellence. Five areas of service quality identified by the Caribbean Community policy-making body on effective early childhood settings were examined: programme participation, staff engagement, management and administration, parent/family partnership, and health and safety. Over 90% of the responses about the quality of service were positive, indicative of influence by the detailed self-administered questionnaire. Negative responses, especially by parents of the youngest groups of children, suggest there are elements of services that are not adequately met, acceptable, or sufficiently visible to some parents. Being the first research of this kind in Guyana, early childhood service providers, and other stakeholders might find the parents' recognition and interpretation of quality informative and a reference point for considering critical issues concerning quality provision for young children.

Keywords: Guyana, early childhood, parent participation, parent satisfaction, quality indicators

1. Introduction

1.1 Interpretation of Early Childhood Service Quality in Guyanese Context

> Just a suggestion for my child's in-class learning - I would like my child to learn to read, spell, and write more. My child has the potential and is a fast learner. I feel she needs more exposure to more learning materials from what is provided at the centre…. I would like to see my child come home with homework.

A parent of a 4-year-old provided the quote above in response to a question about the quality of service at the newly established University of Guyana Early Childhood Centre of Excellence (UGECCE). The specific question that provoked the response was connected to the daily play-based activities experienced by children. Another response by the same parent to a question about aspects of services satisfied with, reads: "Classroom is spacious, clean, and tidy for class the next day … they have many teachers to assist the children". Those quotes exemplify the general interpretation and expectation of quality in Guyana's early childhood development (ECD) settings, where noticeable structural attributes and academic-focused experiences are the dominant measures.

Therefore, when Guyanese parents encounter questions about quality, many find it challenging to identify with other forms in the offerings of ECD. For example, a key indicator of quality that parents can overlook as functional aspects of quality in ECD in Guyana is play-based activities built on socialization, constructivism, and inquiry (Leo-Rhynie et al., 2009; Roopnarine et al., 2019). Other indicators that can be easily missed by parents (and, in some instances, teachers) include engaging and intellectually stimulating interactions to develop children's thinking and behaviour management practices that develop children's understanding and rationalization (Semple-McBean & Rodrigues, 2018).

The weight placed on academic, over play-based, flexible, inquiry, and experiential activities in Guyana has been observed elsewhere. For example, twenty-three years ago in the USA, Bailey (2000) reported similar views by some parents about an integrated and developmentally appropriate curriculum initiative. More recently, Bodrova

et al. (2019) findings in the USA show how societal misconceptions about the positive relation between play and learning in pedagogy result in reduced hours devoted to play-based activities. Vadeboncoeur and Goncu (2019, p. 265) deem the misconception of this nature as a promoter of the "factory model schooling," where academic instruction and direct exposure to content area knowledge outweigh play-based and adaptable learning.

With the focus on structural attributes and academic-focused experiences, the element of process quality does not attract a comparable status in Guyana (Leo-Rhynie et al., 2009). As a quick reference, structural quality indicators include features such as teachers' qualifications and experience, adult-child ratios, class group sizes, and learning spaces (Hooper et al., 2021; Huston, 2008; McLean et al., 2022). Huston (2008, p. 2) shared that "the purpose of structural criteria is to protect children from harm, but also to promote positive experiences for children." On the other hand, process quality indicators could be less obvious as they include the more intangible, such as engagements, interactions, and relationships with adults, peers, and early stimulation materials. Evidence put forward by Huston (2008) suggests that "good" process quality might specifically influence children's cognitive, language, and social development.

With regard to the importance of structural and process quality, research continues to show that better outcomes for children are possible when both are adequately addressed (Hooper et al., 2021; Huston, 2008; McLean et al., 2022; Sylva et al., 2004; Wysłowska & Slot, 2020). Therefore, as advised by Wysłowska and Slot (2020) in their study about care provisions in Poland and the Netherlands, process quality should not be compromised because, compared to the more easily detectable structural indicators, the effect on child outcomes is equally significant. Viewed in this light, offering a platform to raise awareness of both forms of quality could benefit families and children.

To ensure the inclusion of process indicators and other less associated operational and system quality attributes, a survey was designed using objective, check-box-type items that captured the variability across a large group of indicators. This paper presents the parents' satisfaction levels with these various quality indicators. The paper also documents the first empirical study in Guyana to gauge parents' perceptions of "quality" in ECD.

Before furthering this presentation, it is critical to note that the official name of the centre is used because a pseudonym will serve an unnecessary role. Being the only centre of its kind in Guyana, the probability for recognition is very high, by even the most basic Google test of the characteristics of this institution. Without describing key characteristics in the report, the findings will become irrelevant to discussing quality indicators in Guyana.

1.2 The UGECCE in Brief

The establishment of the UGECCE was in response to the national need for an ECD institution capable of (1) offering exemplary models of "good" practices in ECD and (2) supporting the development of quality practices through pre-service and in-service professional development and research. The ECD centre is an inclusive public laboratory institution (childcare, teaching, and research) supported by four key sectors: The University of Guyana; The Caribbean Development Bank and the Government of the Co-operative Republic of Guyana through Basic Needs Trust Fund Implementing Agency; The Ministry of Education; and The United Nations Children's Fund.

The centre commenced operations in September 2022 and is regulated under the 2008 Caribbean Community (CARICOM) Regional Guidelines for ECD in physical facilities, staff-child ratios, stimulating materials and experiences, and child guidance techniques. The curriculum is play-based and embraces the theory that learning is social, cultural, and the basis of constructivism. Daily activities are geared toward developing children's physical and intellectual capabilities, social and cultural relationships, creative skills, and emotional stability.

The centre provides spaces for six groups, and children enrol once they reach the following ages at the start of the September academic year: Infant (3 months), Preschool One (1 year, 3 months), Preschool Two (2 years, 3 months), Nursery One (3 years, 3 months), Nursery Two (4 years, 3 months), and Multi-Grade (3 years, 3 months to 8 years). Except for Multi-Grade, an afternoon service, daily programmes are offered from 7:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. Operations began with enrolment at about 50% capacity for 120 children.

1.3 Parent Relations at UGECCE

From the commencement of operations at UGECCE, parents have been provided with information about the curriculum's focus and general operations. The centre's open-door policy allows parents to observe and participate in activities. Children's documented learning and socialization experiences, creations, and productions are also shared with parents. As partners and key stakeholders at the centre, providing a reflective platform for parents to share their experiences about the services offered before expanding enrolment was

necessary.

Guided by international, regional, and local good practices in ECD (e.g., Bridge, 2001; Brooker, 2002; CARICOM, 2008; Davies, 1988; Epstein, 2001; GNEP, 2010; Liu & Chien, 1998; Pugh & De'Ath, 1989; Sylva et al., 2004), the principle of parent partnership was an essential pillar upon which the centre was established. CARICOM was specific about this element in Caribbean countries such as Guyana when it recommended: "Consultation with parents on their views as to the support the setting should be providing…" (CARICOM, 2008, p. 65). Moreover, studies have confirmed and are continuing to show relationships between parents' participation and good provision of ECD services (e.g., Kaiser et al., 2022; Leo-Rhynie et al., 2009; Meier & Lemmer, 2019; Sylva et al., 2004). Offering the parents of this ECD centre a platform for recognition of their opinions and perspectives could very likely contribute to the administration's decisions about advancement.

1.4 Looking Into Parent Partnership Through a Broader Lens

Internationally, research has shown that positive home-school relationships result in outcomes that help children progress further and faster, and give parents a sense of empowerment (Ofsted, 2004; Vincent, 1996). This section documents some of those research findings. Evidence from the UK is presented first, given that Guyana's educational system is built within the British framework. The EPPE project, the first major European longitudinal study of a national sample of over 3,000 young children, proved that the most effective early childhood settings were those that shared child-related information between parents and staff, and those in which parents were often involved in decision-making about children's learning programme (Sylva et al., 2004). The EPPE project recorded overall advancement in intellectual and social development in all children, with more intellectual gains for children who attended centres that encouraged high levels of parental involvement (Sylva et al., 2004).

Many studies show that home-school partnerships extend beyond benefits to children to parents' development. In Taiwan, Liu and Chien (1998) found that parents who were aware of, and participated in the new curriculum project knew why their children were asking for specific materials and learned appropriate ways to teach and interact with their children, while those who had not participated often complained about the expenses, the burdens and the trouble associated with the project. In the USA, data drawn from a 3-year project on family-school conferences was reported by Minke and Anderson (2003) to have improved home-school relationships significantly; many parents felt more comfortable about having their children in the teacher's class, as adults learned about each other and the children's skills and interest. Another benefit of parent partnership is that it serves as one factor in helping parents improve their children's attendance at school (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002). In Epstein and Sheldon's (2002) longitudinal study of 12 elementary schools in Maryland, California, Minnesota, and Pennsylvania, they found that during the year that schools developed school-family-community partnerships (such as improved communication with diverse families), daily attendance increased, and the rate of chronically absent students decreased.

Why is there a positive connection between parent partnership and child-family outcomes? Cullingford and Morrison (1999, p. 257) note that "when parents are familiar with the school's activities, they seem to become more supportive of what goes on in school because they understand it." This understanding reduces clashes of personal and social styles and increases reinforcement of techniques and approaches at home (Cullingford & Morrison, 1999). Bridge's (2001) case study of a small rural English preschool that implemented a strategy requiring parents and children to plan at home found that in addition to helping working parents to be more involved in their children's learning, the benefits of the project ranged from providing emotional support for some children to enabling children to start the preschool session with more precise plans. Other initiatives, such as parental education that teaches how to help children at home with literacy and numeracy learning, also revealed rapid progress in children's work, motivation, and self-esteem (Bateson, 2000; Ofsted, 2004). This resulted from increased parental understanding of the child's learning in the classroom. Notably, such partnership added a fresh dimension to children's preschool activities, that is, increased involvement of fathers, "intrigued by certain activities such as model building, woodworking and sports" (Liu & Chien, 1998, p. 217), thus reducing the concept that parental involvement is mother involvement.

The benefits of home-school partnership are so profound that it has become a central theme in the political arena. In the UK, under the government headed by Prime Minister Tony Blair, parent partnership was viewed as a catalyst for lifting children out of poverty and boosting their potential and ambitions (Brown, 2005). The USA has expressed the importance, too, through President Barack Obama's bold address:

> These education policies will open the doors of opportunity for our children. But it is up to us to ensure they walk through them. In the end, there is no program or policy that can substitute for a mother or father

who will attend those parent/teacher conferences, or help with homework after dinner, or turn off the TV, put away the video games, and read to their child. I speak to you not just as a President, but as a father when I say that responsibility for our children's education must begin at home. (Obama, 2009)

Even though these political views might be too ambitious and an over-prescription of parent partnership, their values are undisputed. As Bridge (2001) notes, "home and school are no longer two separate places where different sorts of activities took place, but one became an extension of the other; … thus, instead of three independent variables, children, their parents, and the curriculum became one" (pp. 14-17). Bridge's comments reflect the decades-old underpinning notions of Bronfenbrenner and Davies, who proposed an "ecological view" of parent partnerships. Respectively they state: "… the least favourable condition for development is one in which supplementary links are either non-supportive or completely absent" (Bronfenbrenner, 1979. p. 215); and "since children grow up in a web of institutions (family, neighbourhood, school, …), the interest of the child will be better served if there are good connections in all of the parts; for what happens in one part affects the others" (Davies, 1988, p. 11).

Obstacles to home-school partnership. The overall benefits of parent involvement are convincing; however, some obstacles to its development persist. Some of these obstacles are highlighted. Pena's (2000) year-long case study of an elementary school in Texas reveals that many teachers have not felt secure enough to have parents in their classrooms. For Australian teachers, Hughes and MacNaughton (2001) report, "There should be nothing to hide, but you would just be...very self-conscious, and I don't think you'd do your job as well as you normally" (pp. 7-8). Similar findings were reported in the UK: "you can feel watched, spied upon. I feel I can't raise my voice" (Vincent, 1996, p. 93); "Chatting stops you doing your job, and it's difficult to strike a balance between working and being friendly to the parents" (Foot el al., 2002. p. 15). One major issue, therefore, is confidentiality and the changing boundaries of relations, as reported by Morrow and Malin (2004).

Another boundary concern is that some parents step beyond the boundaries of "appropriate" parental behaviour by being fussy mums and dads, coming into school without warning, turning up late for their rota, and confrontation about or dissatisfaction with children's level of work (Crozier, 2000; Foot et al., 2002; Vincent, 1996). Other partnership initiatives fail because parents' characteristics and traditional views of learning serve as a barrier, as pointed out by Brooker (2002). Brooker (2002) explains that while she was allowed to sew with the children, in her role as researcher, one parent who operated under authoritarian principles was barred from this activity because she exhorted the children to sew in a straight line or, worse, unpicked their stitches and did it for them. Direct involvement of authoritarian parents in children's instructional activities does not seem to yield the desired developmental outcomes, and other studies have suggested this (see Amollo & Lilian, 2018; Crozier, 2000). Understanding parents' characteristics and circumstances might be necessary for better outcomes. For some parents, participation in surveys, education forums, and other activities that do not require direct engagement with children might be a starting point for strengthening the partnership.

Therefore, how parent involvement is perceived, conceptualised, or implemented influences the relationship. From a practitioner's standpoint, Brooker (2002) notes, "The role of a successful parent consists first in offering the child a school-like curriculum and pedagogy at home, then in bringing her or him to school regularly and punctually, and finally in supporting the school and teacher, as well as the child, in the classroom" (p. 119). Conception of this nature often requires involvement in activities that locate women in their mothering roles (Maclachlan, 1996). This explains why, in Vincent's study (1996), it was found that parents were directed towards a more general support job, such as classifying library books or cooking, and sometimes acting as a resource by coming in to talk to the children on a subject on which they had expertise. With such a narrow conception of partnership, parents are prevented from attaining "insider" status. Similarly, Foot et al. (2002) found that although staff generally welcomed the expansion of parental participation, they lacked enthusiasm for parents' participation in administration and policy decisions.

Like the findings by Foot et al. (2002), granting policy-level decision-making opportunities to parents at the early childhood level in Guyana is not popular. We have not encountered studies that encourage such practice. Therefore, here is where this study about Guyana becomes relevant. The possibility exists that this study will add country-specific and culturally relevant insights surrounding conversations about quality service through partnering with parents. Partnering utilising surveys establishes opportunities for parental contributions at varying levels (Kaiser et al., 2022), including administrative and policy decisions.

2. Methodological Considerations

The parent quotes cited in the introduction to this paper give a sense of the variability of quality indicators shared through an interpretivist survey approach that allowed parents to tell their stories about services offered at the

centre. The quotes revealed that parents' stories were rich and insightful, allowing us to "discover the voices of parents" (Nicholson et al., 2001, p. 184). The quotes also confirm that the interpretivist approach could serve as an "emotional barometer to index parent satisfaction with the quality of their children's schooling" (Meier & Lemmer, 2019, p. 28). While positive outcomes of the interpretive approach are undeniable, exploring parents' interpretations of quality through that lens did not generate anticipated variability in the range of indicators. This limitation meant that alternative approaches to eliciting parents' views were required, leading to the survey reported in this paper.

The central question that guided the survey was: "To what extent are parents satisfied with the quality of service offered by the UGECCE?"

2.1 The Survey

The timeframe for parents' feedback was short (only one month before the April 2023 decision to expand enrolment). Therefore, a quantitative descriptive survey approach was deemed practical. It allowed for broader coverage of quality attributes and for the authors who subscribe mainly to the quantitative paradigm to support analysis of specific aspects of the objective self-administered questionnaire. The survey was also constructed and conducted with the following in mind:

- Researchers exploring parents' satisfaction with ECD services have identified surveys as an essential platform for eliciting their opinions (Bailey, 2000; Kaiser et al., 2022; Meier & Lemmer, 2019).

- Personal experiences have taught the first author that parent surveys (1) empower them to contribute to improvements in their children's learning experiences, (2) provide a reflective space for the entire family, and (3) inform future planning and highlight areas requiring development in ECD settings.

First, constructing the survey instrument requires clarity about what "quality" (whether structural or process) looks like or how "quality" should be interpreted in a Guyanese context. No universal, one-size-fits-all interpretation exists (Cleghorn & Prochner, 2012). The concept of "quality" in early childhood remains complex, constructed, and value-laden (Dahlberg et al., 2013; McLean et al., 2022). Quality could mean different things to different parents, under different circumstances, and with different experiences. Criteria for interpreting quality in this paper were set by the Caribbean policy-making body (CARICOM) on effective ECD settings. Five critical indicators of quality identified by CARICOM (2008) are: (1) programme participation, (2) staff engagement, (3) management and administration, (4) parent/family partnership, and (5) health and safety. While maintaining local and cultural relevancy, CARICOM's indicators of quality are consistent with international expectations and practices that are "good" for children's development (examples can be found in Cleghorn & Prochner, 2012; Hooper et al., 2021; Huston, 2008; Kaiser et al., 2022; McLean et al., 2022; Taleb, 2013; Wysłowska & Slot, 2020).

2.2 Gathering the Data

Parents were asked to rate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with statements concerning the quality of provision on a six-point Likert scale (Completely Agree, Mostly Agree, Slightly Agree, Slightly Disagree, Mostly Disagree, Completely Disagree). The five indicators were subdivided into 24 components. For illustration, two indicators and their accompanying components are presented below.

- Programme Participation: (1) care provided, (2) classroom activities, (3) outdoor activities, (4) special activities/celebrations, (5) snacks and meals.

- Staff Engagement: (6) friendliness and approachability, (7) information sharing of lessons/activities, and (8) information sharing about children's learning, developments, and achievements.

Each component was explained in sufficient detail to facilitate shared interpretations. For example, the items addressing components No. 3 and 5 were structured this way:

- A variety of daily outdoor activities are available to engage my child (*e.g., babies are taken for walks; older children engage in running, climbing, exploring, gardening…*).

- The class teachers try to ensure that my child eats as much of their packed meals/snacks as possible in a manner that is not forceful (*e.g., if the child does not eat much at scheduled mealtime, opportunities are provided at other times*).

Data was collected using Google Forms (online submission) and officially marked paper questionnaires (returned to a drop-box) during the first two weeks of March 2023. The paper version was convenient for parents with limited access to the internet or suitable electronic devices. Thirty-seven Google and 14 drop-box questionnaires were completed and returned. Fifty-one parents participated in the survey, accounting for 64

children (35 males; 29 females) enrolled during the first six months. Parents from all classrooms participated, and the single-classroom response rate ranged between 64% and 92%.

Interpretation of parents' scaled responses capitalised on the automatic integration with Google Sheets. The type of data collected, participants' responses to a rating scale, are considered discrete data, and to analyse this type of data, counting and reporting on the number of occurrences are most appropriate. This was done using frequency counts, percentages, and statistical commentaries.

Anonymity and confidentiality clauses were provided in the questionnaires, and the British Educational Research Association (2018) ethical guidelines were followed throughout the survey. For example, to avoid misrepresenting the data and to ensure that parents of the UGECCE completed the questionnaires, email addresses were needed to access the Google questionnaire, which, upon verification, were deleted. The completely anonymous paper version served both the parents with limited access to the internet or suitable electronic devices and those who did not wish to associate their email addresses with the submission of their questionnaires. One anticipation was that the completely anonymous paper version would have permitted the rating of more negative responses. However, the spread of positive and negative responses was consistent across both submission platforms.

Another example relating to ethical obligations is the representation of data. Given the small number of parents involved, disaggregating responses by individual classrooms was not considered appropriate. Disaggregating by individual classrooms meant that some parent participants would have been easily identifiable in classrooms with small numbers of children. The enrolment was: Infant (n=11), Preschool One (n=14), Preschool Two (n=13), Nursery One (n=11), Nursery Two (n=12), and Multi-Grade (n=3). Therefore, instead of individual classrooms, relations were established by two attributes: (1) lower (Infant, Preschool One, Preschool Two), and (2) upper (Nursery One, Nursery Two, Multi-Grade). Of the 51 parents who participated, 30 (59%) reported on lower and 21 (41%) on upper classrooms.

3. Findings

3.1 Parents' Opinions on the Measures of Agreement

The parents' perceptions of the five indicators are summarised to show how much they agree with the levels at which the quality indicators are met. The measures of agreement for all components are displayed in Table 1. The measures in Table 1 are represented by CA (completely agree), MA (mostly agree), SA (slightly agree), SD (slightly disagree), MD (mostly disagree), and CD (completely disagree).

Programme Participation. Responses to the extent to which parents agreed with the practices and systems for promoting programme participation were offered by all (51) parent participants for each component. The responses recorded for the five components that examined this indicator amounted to 255, of which 248 were positive. This implies that a significant proportion (97%) of the cumulative responses agreed that the five components under programme participation meet children's needs and parents' expectations. More than half (57%) of the agreement responses were on the measure of completely agreeing, and a third (34%) on mostly agreeing. Slightly agreeing responses attracted 6%. Except for the first two components (level of care; classroom activities), where slightly agreeing responses were recorded only for parents of lower classrooms, the agreement responses were consistently spread across all classrooms. Of the seven (3%) disagreement responses, slightly disagreeing accounted for five, with one each mostly disagreeing and completely disagreeing. Three parents of the lower classrooms reported the seven disagreement responses. The first parent disagreed with the services offered in classroom activities, outdoor activities, and meal obligations. The second parent disagreed with meal obligations and the level of care (e.g., nappy-changing and support for children of SEND). The third parent registered disagreement with outdoor activities and meal obligations.

Staff Engagement. Similar to programme participation, there was a 100% response rate to each component under the staff engagement indicator. Cumulatively, there was a 97% positive agreement response rate (148 positive responses out of 153) for the three components that examined this indicator. The highest number of agreement responses (61%) was associated with completely agreeing, followed by mostly agreeing (30%) and slightly agreeing (6%). A lower response rate for disagreement was recorded at 3%, distributed between slightly, mostly, and completely disagreeing. The 3% of disagreement responses were reported only by parents from the lower classrooms, and the dissatisfactions were related to sharing information about planned lessons or activities (3 parents) and children's learning, developments, and achievements (2 parents).

Management and Administration. Responses to the services with direct oversight by the administrators and management staff were given by 49 parents for one component and 51 parents for each of the remaining

components. The four components that examined the indicator of management and administration attracted 202 cumulative responses, and 199 (98.5%) were positive. Close to three-quarters (71%) were associated with completely agreeing. Mostly agreeing responses accounted for approximately a quarter (24%), and slightly agreeing recorded 3%. The negative responses (1.5%) distributed between slightly disagreeing and mostly disagreeing were seen in the areas of behaviour management and advisory support (2 parents) and responsiveness to telephone calls (1 parent). The responses for agreeing and disagreeing were distributed consistently across all classrooms.

Table 1. Distribution of parents' opinions on the measures of agreement

Indicators of Quality	Number of Respondents						
	Measures of Agreement						Total
	CA	MA	SA	SD	MD	CD	
Programme Participation							
Care provided meets the needs of children	28	20	2	0	1	0	51
Availability of classroom activities	31	16	3	1	0	0	51
Availability of outdoor activities	26	18	5	2	0	0	51
Opportunities for special activities/celebrations	34	14	3	0	0	0	51
Teachers' obligations during snacks and meals time	26	19	3	2	0	1	51
Staff Engagement							
Friendliness and approachability of staff	42	7	2	0	0	0	51
Information sharing of lessons/activities	26	20	2	1	2	0	51
Information sharing about children's learning	25	19	5	0	1	1	51
Management and Administration							
Behaviour management and advisory support	37	12	0	1	1	0	51
Clarity of written communication	39	12	0	0	0	0	51
Responsiveness to telephone calls	32	13	3	1	0	0	49
Opportunities for face-to-face interaction	36	12	3	0	0	0	51
Parent/Family Partnership							
Clarity of guidance offered in parent handbook	34	14	1	0	0	0	49
Opportunities to participate in operational decisions	18	22	8	1	0	0	49
Involvement in activities at the class level	20	19	8	2	1	0	50
Respect for culture and religion of families	40	9	2	0	0	0	51
Support of the PTA on matters related to children	30	13	6	0	0	0	49
Health and Safety							
Safeness of classroom fixture	42	7	2	0	0	0	51
Cleanliness of classrooms	39	11	1	0	0	0	51
Sanitization of furniture and toys	32	16	3	0	0	0	51
Furniture arranged for safe movements	45	6	0	0	0	0	51
Safety of outdoor playsets	25	20	2	1	1	0	49
Safety of compound	21	17	7	4	1	0	50
Timely address of health and safety concerns	23	8	1	0	1	0	33
Cumulative Responses	227	85	16	5	3	0	336

Parent/Family Partnership. Among the five components examined under the parent/family partnership indicator, one received responses from all parents (51), another from 50 parents, and the remaining three from 49 parents. Overall, 248 responses were recorded for the five components that examined the parent/family partnership indicator. A significant proportion (98%, or 244 responses) registered agreement. More than half (57%) of the responses were associated with completely agreeing. Respectively, close to a third (31%) and one-tenth (10%) were recorded as mostly and slightly agreeing. The 2% recorded for slightly disagreeing and mostly disagreeing were seen only in decision-making opportunities (1 parent) and involvement of parents in activities at the class level (3 parents). The responses for agreeing and disagreeing were distributed consistently across all classrooms.

Health and Safety. All (51) parents responded to the first four components under health and safety, but the final three components attracted responses from 49, 50, and 33 parents, respectively. The results indicate that 336 cumulative responses were recorded for the seven components that examined the health and safety indicator. Again, the agreement responses were high (98%, or 328 positive responses out of 336). On the agreement scale, a little over two-thirds (68%) completely agreed, 25% mostly agreed, and 5% slightly agreed. There are three aspects of health and safety for which there were eight (2%) dissatisfaction responses: safety of the outdoor playsets (2 parents), the safety of the compound (5 parents), and the speed with which children's health and safety concerns are addressed (1 parent). Overall, dissatisfaction was evenly distributed between the upper and lower classrooms. Among the four dissatisfied responses from the upper classrooms, three were given by one parent. Three parents gave the four dissatisfied responses from the lower classes.

3.2 Rating the 24 Components of Service Quality

The 24 examined components recorded a 90% to 100% response rate on the satisfactory measures of completely, mostly, and slightly agree. For example, the lowest (90%) rate of responses on the satisfactory measures was recorded for the component that required parents to rate the compound's safety. The 90% account for 45 positive responses out of 50 (completely agree: 21, mostly agree: 17, and slightly agree: 7). The component that required parents to rate whether the furniture arrangement allowed for children's safe movements scored 100% on the satisfaction range. There were 51 positive responses out of a total of 51 responses, distributed as completely agree (45) and mostly agree (6).

Eleven of the 24 components received high recognition on the scale of 100% agreement (completely, mostly, and slightly agree) with service provision. The list below is ranked by highest on the measure of completely agree:

- Arrangement of furniture to allow for safe movements (n=45)
- Safeness of classroom fixture (n=42)
- Friendliness and approachability of staff (n=42)
- Respect for culture and religion of families (n=40)
- Clarity of written communication (n=39)
- Cleanliness of classrooms (n=39)
- Opportunities for face-to-face interaction with staff (n=36)
- Clarity of guidance offered in parent handbook (n=34)
- Opportunities to participate in special activities/celebrations (n=34)
- Sanitization of furniture and toys (n=32)
- Support of the PTA on matters related to children's development and well-being (n=30)

Thirteen components shared 27 cumulative negative responses (completely, mostly, and slightly disagree). The response rate for the components that attracted unsatisfactory ratings ranged between 2% and 10%. As seen with the component about care provided, a 2% negative response rate is equivalent to one disagreement response for each component that received such scores. Safety of the compound attracted the highest negative response rate at 10% (5 negative responses out of 50, distributed by slightly disagree: 4, and mostly disagree: 1). The list below is ranked by lowest to highest on the three measures of disagreement:

- Care provided meets the needs of children (n=1)
- Availability of classroom activities for children to be engaged (n=1)
- Responsiveness to telephone calls (n=1)
- Opportunities for parents to participate in decision-making (n=1)

- Timely address of health and safety concerns (n=1)

- Availability of outdoor activities for children to be engaged (n=2)

- Information sharing about children's learning, developments, and achievements (n=2)

- Safety of outdoor playsets (n=2)

- Behaviour management and advisory support (n=2)

- Teachers' obligations during snacks and meals time (n=3)

- Information sharing of planned lessons/activities (n=3)

- Involvement in activities at the class level (n=3)

- Safety of compound (n=5)

4. Discussion

The survey results indicate that most responses were positive (97.7%, or 1167 positive, out of 1194). The data in Table 2 shows that completely agree accounts for the highest positive response at 62.9%, followed by mostly agree (28.8%) and slightly agree (6%). Responses that suggest negative performance account for just 2.3% of the total (27 negative responses out of 1194). Respectively, slightly disagree, mostly disagree, and completely disagree recorded percentages of 1.3%, 0.8%, and 0.2%.

In Table 2, lower (Infant, Preschool One, Preschool Two) and upper (Nursery One, Nursery Two, Multi-Grade) classrooms are represented by L and U. Section 2.2 explains the appropriateness of this data disaggregation into upper and lower classrooms.

Table 2. Distribution of parents' cumulative opinion on the five indicators of quality

Level of Agreement	Classroom	Frequency						Total	Percent
		Programme Participation [5]	Staff Engagement [3]	Management/ Administration [4]	Parent/Family Partnership [5]	Health and Safety [7]	Subtotal	Grand Total	
Completely Agree	L	0	0	0	0	0	0	751	62.9
	U	0	0	0	0	0	0		
Mostly Agree	L	0	0	0	0	0	0	344	28.8
	U	0	0	0	0	0	0		
Slightly Agree	L	0	6	4	10	20	40	72	6.0
	U	0	3	2	5	5	15		
Slightly Disagree	L	5	1	1	1	3	11	16	1.3
	U	0	0	1	2	2	5		
Mostly Disagree	L	1	3	1	1	1	7	9	0.8
	U	0	0	0	0	2	2		
Completely Disagree	L	1	1	0	0	0	2	2	0.2
	U	0	0	0	0	0	0		
Sub Total	L	149	90	119	144	197	699	1194	100
	U	106	63	83	104	139	495		
Grand Total		262	167	211	267	369	1276	2388	200

Regarding the differences in the findings between the lower and upper classrooms, the higher response rate for the lower classroom (L=699, U=495) reflects the number of parents in this group. The lower classrooms accounted for 30 (59%) parent respondents. The number of responses for the lower classrooms is greater on all measures of agreement/disagreement except for staff engagement (20 vs. 26 for mostly agree), parent/family partnership (1 vs. 2 for slightly disagree), and health and safety (1 vs. 2 for mostly disagree).

Positive and negative responses were recorded for all classrooms. Concerning the levels of satisfaction, respectively, 679 (58%) and 488 (42%) of the 1167 positive responses were reported by parents of the lower and upper classrooms (responses reflect the number of parent participants in these classrooms). On the measures of disagreement, 20 (74%) of the 27 negative responses were reported by parents of the lower classrooms, which is considered high compared to the number of parent participants in this group. A total of ten parents (7 lower classrooms and 3 upper classrooms) reported on the negative aspects of service.

Considering the five indicators of quality, positive and negative responses were recorded for all. The positive responses far outweighed the negative on all indicators. In order from highest to lowest in the frequency of negative versus positive responses, the following was observed: health and safety (8 vs. 328), programme participation (7 vs. 248), staff engagement (5 vs. 148), parent/family partnership (4 vs. 244), and administration and management (3 vs. 199). These results suggest that the ECD centre is performing at a satisfactory level on the five indicators of quality and their corresponding 24 components.

Knowing that its parents embrace the pedagogical approaches at this centre offers reassurance that conversations about ECD quality in Guyana are shifting towards directions of inclusive interpretations. The findings indicate an expansion in parents' construction of quality from the rigid, academic-focused measures, as featured in the quote that introduced this paper and observed by researchers (Roopnarine et al., 2019; Semple-McBean & Rodrigues, 2018), to inclusion and celebration of culturally relevant play-based, flexible, and engaging learning experiences. The consistency in the responses to both structural (e.g., arrangement of furniture) and process (e.g., local, cultural experiences) indicators suggests an awareness of the importance of both types of service quality. The findings demonstrate parents' understanding of "good" quality in ECD and could serve as evidence of what high-quality ECD provision should look like in Guyana.

The negative responses suggest that participation in developmental activities, safe learning spaces, and engagement between staff and children/parents might not be acceptable or sufficiently visible to some parents. With specific reference to the safety of the compound and outdoor activities, some parents might not yet be comfortable with the spaces and materials provided for children to explore and take on healthy challenges and risks, such as jumping from tree stumps, exploring patches of overgrown grass, and constructing with mud and other local and/or natural materials. In this case, a restricted image of quality, as described by Cleghorn and Prochner (2012), becomes obvious: overemphasis on the promotion of safety and commercially designed North American/Western spaces, toys, and early stimulation materials. The negative responses might also indicate that remedial interventions should be conducted with staff in these areas, especially those in lower classrooms.

Moving beyond the differences in response, the findings complement existing knowledge about practices involving parent partnerships. The high response rate suggests that parents are eager to get involved in children's learning and development issues. Such attitude, combined with the knowledge about the 24 components of quality, might serve an educational purpose. Participating in the survey very likely made parents aware of quality indicators not previously conceived. This knowledge might empower parents to serve as quality service advocates and encourage them to offer more support, as observed elsewhere where parent partnership was promoted:

- Taiwan - Parents learned appropriate ways to teach and interact with their children (Liu & Chien, 1998).

- UK - Correlation between parents' familiarity with educational activities and increased understanding and reinforcement of children's learning (Bateson, 2000).

- USA - Feelings of comfort about having their children in the teacher's class (Minke & Anderson, 2003).

Surveys like ours also allow parents to expand their contributions beyond general support jobs, such as library assistance and cooking, to administration and policy levels that could inform future planning.

5. Conclusion

The ratings of the quality indicators suggest that the needs of the children and their families are sufficiently met at the UGECCE. The overall high number of positive responses indicates that the services offered are probably sufficiently satisfying parents' expectations of "good" quality provision to help develop children's physical and intellectual capabilities, social relationships, creative skills, and emotional stability.

Where improving quality is concerned, platforms to promote the role of local play-based constructivist experiences in the developmental trajectory of children might need strengthening at the UGECCE to meet parents' expectations better. It may be necessary to intentionally engage with parents to raise awareness of the role of such approaches in high-quality provision, particulary in exploring and taking on healthy challenges and risks. Irrespective of this shortfall, an essential element of the findings is confirmation that research at new ECD centres incorporating parents' views could position them to celebrate their strengths and build on weak areas to sustain and raise standards. And, if research is conducted in ECD communities where parents find it challenging to identify or articulate a wide range and variety of quality attributes, detailed and objective self-administered approaches can be helpful.

6. Limitations

A better understanding might be forthcoming if there is alignment of parents' characteristics to specific kinds of service quality. For example, there was no examination of association concerning gender, age, education level or experience, socio-economic status, occupation, or type of community resided in, *inter alia*. The possibility exists that parents from communities with spaces to play and explore freely but otherwise have limited stimulation activities or adults who could provide such stimulation, might view quality service for their children as academically focused to bridge the experiences missing at home. On the other hand, the reverse might be seen. Another limitation has to do with the nuances of service quality. The 24 quality attributes examined could be considered the minimum for establishing a picture of service quality. A larger number of refined quality attributes might steer the trajectory of negative vs. positive views differently. However, questionnaires with more quality attributes demanded more time for parents to complete and the researchers to analyze. Given the time constraint, this was not possible.

7. Recommendations for Future Research

Although this study records high levels of satisfaction on all measures, further investigation is necessary for the completeness of understanding of Guyanese parents' interpretation of quality in ECD. These include exploring (1) why high satisfaction rates were registered, (2) how extreme levels of positive and negative responses were framed, (3) which demographic characteristics (e.g., level of education, gender) are associated with a specific level or type of responses, and (4) what story might be told from surveying a more refined number of quality attributes.

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