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Exploring Attitudes of Four Groups of Stakeholders Toward Family Childcare and Recommending Best Practices to Promote Positive Experiences

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Recommending Best Practices to Promote Positive Experiences

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DISSERTATION

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Abstract

This research aimed to increase the awareness of licensed family childcare programs and use the viewpoints of four stakeholder groups to construct recommended best practices. These best practices are crucial for supporting effective business practices and providing high-quality services to their stakeholders. Online surveys and virtual interviews were used to acquire the stakeholders' perspectives. The collected data revealed three principal thematic codes: family childcare provider, family childcare business, and family childcare environment. Within these three codes, the family childcare program's areas of improvement, inconsistencies, and strengths were identified and evaluated to construct recommended professional and business best practices. Some of the categories of recommended best practices included professional development, professional identity, marketing, and business techniques, all valuable in supporting high-quality, licensed family childhood programs.

Preface

I owned a family childcare program for over ten years, where I educated children in the home environment. I was licensed through the State of Illinois as a group family child care where I could care for 16 children with a child care assistant. As a former licensed group family childcare provider, I received many comments from families surprised at my professionalism, education level, and learning environment. My program operated in my basement, which had a setup similar to a childcare center classroom. I used a research-based curriculum that was developmentally and age-appropriate for the children in my program. I shared the first floor of my home, where the children ate meals and rested, giving them the feeling of home. I also had a large fenced backyard organized to extend the learning into the outdoor environment. Families were surprised to learn about my program being run as a business that has attained national accreditation, a Silver level of quality in the ExceleRate Illinois program, and successfully completed the Business Administration Scale (BAS) which are hallmarks of a high-quality childcare program.

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Dedication

I want to dedicate this dissertation to my late great-grandmother, Cordelia Orr, who has always inspired me to be the best version of myself.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Overview

Early childhood education sets the foundation for learning in a child's life. The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) *defines early childhood education* as "programs that educate all children, regardless of their developmental and learning needs, in a part-time or full-time capacity in a childcare center, school, or home environment from six weeks old to eight years old." (1993, p.2) It teaches the developmental skills and knowledge essential to a child's educational journey and productive life. Many licensed early childhood education programs serve families and the community. These services are offered in various learning settings, including licensed childcare centers, preschools, and family childcare programs. Of all-the licensed childcare options, family childcare providers believe that they are the least popular option due to a lack of families awareness and the perceived lack of professionalism. Family childcare providers believe that a lack of understanding of their work contributes to their feeling of disdain received by some stakeholders and public opinion (Gerstenblatt et al., 2013). These sentiments, they predict, generate opposing viewpoints insinuated by other early childhood professionals.

According to Fernandez et al., (2018) "Providers' most frequent complaint was not being taken seriously as professionals." (p.5). Lanagan (2011) mentioned that family childcare providers felt that families and even other childcare professionals viewed them as babysitters, instead of educators. This perceived lack of professionalism has also been linked to lower quality programs. A study by Koh & Neuman (2009) found the following:

Plagued by the image of custodial care, studies have described the lower quality associated with family child care when compared to center-based care (Fuller, Kagan, Suzuki, & Chang, 2001; Galinsky, Howes, Kontos, & Shinn, 1994; Helburn, 1995…Similarly, Fuller and his research team in the Growing Up in Poverty project (2001) found that children in family childcare settings displayed significantly lower rates of cognitive and language growth than children in center-based care. In short, the prevailing research has shown that on most indicators of quality, children enrolled in family childcare are exposed to less favorable experiences than their peers in center-based care settings (Dowsett, Huston, Imes, & Gennetian, 2008) (p. 538)

Family childcare, as outlined by the Illinois Department of Human Services, is a "family home in which care is provided for more than three children, including the caregiver's children, related and unrelated, must be licensed by the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS)" (Illinois Department of Children and Family Services (n.d., para 1*).* Family childcare programs can provide care for up to eight children of mixed-ages. The provider can care for the children alone or with an assistant based on the program's ratio. Group family childcare is similar to a family childcare program but has additional requirements and responsibilities and can care for up to sixteen children. They can care for twelve children of mixed-ages under the age of eight and four school-age children under the age of twelve for before and after school care. Group family childcare programs also require the provider to earn six college credits in child development or early childhood education.

Licensed-exempt family childcare programs are relieved from being licensed, and they care for a small number of children or care only for family members (2019). This type of childcare is also referred to by other names, including unlicensed family childcare, non-parental care, informal childcare and family friend and network care. For this research, my focus will be on licensed family childcare.

Licensed family childcare programs implement best practices to ensure every child is cared for in a safe environment. In addition, it provides them with exceptional headway in early learning. These practices are essential to support rich educational experiences. Concurrently, acquiring the necessary support to walk into class on that first day of kindergarten confident, excited, and prepared to learn.

Purpose

Family childcare programs offer benefits that are not always available in center-based programs. This type of care is often referred to as the child's "home away from home." Family childcare is a learning environment where the child can experience warmth, love, and comfort the way they would in their own homes. Because of the smaller setting of eight or fewer children depending on the ages of the provider's children, the relationships are more intimate, and providers are more attentive to their needs. Some children are likelier to thrive in smaller environments with one-to-one personal attention and interactions. Although family childcare is a viable licensed option for consideration, it is often ridiculed as *"babysitting"* and not as an educational environment. This belief is likely due to the need for more awareness of the services and best practices offered in high-quality, licensed family childcare programs. These viewpoints could also contribute to the need for further advocacy in conveying to the public that high-quality, licensed family childcare programs operate above the minimum standards of many state licensing agencies. In addition, the presumption is that benchmarks used to determine high-quality childcare services differ in licensed family childcare programs from other settings. Identifying features in high-quality, licensed family childcare programs will enable families to recognize the imperative services and practices in this setting and their similarities with other high-quality early childcare programs. This lack of knowledge and awareness is why this issue should be evaluated and explored further to provide families with facts in making the critical decision on where to build their child's education foundation.

Rationale

Family childcare offers unique services often ignored or overlooked when exploring childcare programs for families. Tang et al.(2020) stated that family childcare offers services that differ from other childcare services, like being in a home environment, exposure to mixed-ages of children, and the opportunity of forming a bond between the provider and the families. I am committed to increasing families' awareness and engagement in licensed family childcare programs. Using the different stakeholders' perspectives, I want to construct best practices for these programs to guide licensed family childcare providers in enhancing their programs and benefitting their childcare families and the children's experiences.

In addition, the best practices will educate licensed family childcare providers on advocating for their programs and using their knowledge and experiences to market their businesses effectively. At the same time, encourage licensed family childcare providers to become actively involved with decision-making government bodies. These can be accomplished through active participation in community and national professional organizations. Coupled with professional development, licensed family childcare providers will learn to advocate for themselves and other licensed family childcare providers.

My past experiences influenced me to develop a framework to research what constitutes effective and professional family childcare practices. In addition, it helped me to demonstrate how those best practices can enhance family awareness and engagement in these programs. Furthermore, it revealed the best attributes of licensed family childcare

programs and ways to implement high-quality family childcare practices for families and family childcare providers. This approach is essential for completing this research.

Goals

The primary goal of my doctoral research is to bring awareness to the high-quality childcare services offered in some licensed family childcare programs. I will capture data through surveys and interviews to display perceptions about family childcare programs and stakeholder needs. Additionally, I will use the information and research to dispel the negative attitudes regarding this learning setting and share research-supported recommendations of best practices to support licensed family childcare providers.

Research Questions

As a former licensed family childcare provider, I explored the reasons behind the negative perceptions. I used this information to bring positive awareness to this childcare setting, develop best practices and enhance the quality offered in family childcare programs.

1. What key characteristics of family childcare programs do stakeholders report as essential attributes of successfully functioning programs?
2. What issues or problems of practice about family childcare programs do stakeholders report related to their direct or indirect experiences with family childcare programs?
3. What program gaps or deficits do stakeholders report from their direct or indirect experiences with family childcare programs?

4. What recommended systematic program improvements can be derived from qualitative reports of family childcare experiences described by informed stakeholders?

Reflection

This doctoral research was guided by objective experiences and behaviors of the stakeholder groups – licensed family childcare providers, early childhood education subject matter experts, those with family childcare experiences, and those with no family childcare experiences. Throughout this research, early childhood education subject matter experts would be referred to as subject matter experts. By analyzing the viewpoints of these stakeholders, the data provided a more subtle understanding of family childcare services and devised practices and policies to support its distinctive business model. Chapter two included the literature used to address the research questions.

Chapter 2: Review of Literature

Family childcare is a business that operates within the provider's home. It is typically the type of business that serves the local community. It is a crucial option that provides care and educates young children in an intimate learning environment. This research gathered the perspectives of families that have used both centered and home-based childcare services, licensed family childcare providers, and subject matter experts. This information was used to develop best practices to enhance family childcare programs while increasing awareness of this childcare setting.

The literature amassed the views of varied early childhood professionals, including licensed-exempt family childcare providers, relatives and neighbors who provide home care, and center-based staff. The grouping of these childcare options and licensed family

childcare providers were often referred to as home-based care options in the reviewed literature. In addition, several pieces of the literature in this review identified licensed-exempt family childcare as unlicensed family childcare. For consistency, I used these references when discussing the literature pieces. Limited literature was found that related directly to attaining the perspectives of the licensed family childcare providers and addressing their unique needs. However, the literature compiled was valuable and supported my research.

Sections were used to organize the literature, so it would be easier to examine the research about (1) Family Childcare Providers and Families' Perceptions; (2) Family childcare programs; (3) Important Factors Affecting Family Childcare; (4) Recommendations. This literature reviewed family childcare providers' assessment of their profession, interpretations of professionalism, characteristics of family childcare programs, quality of their programs, and recommendations for best practices. These works of literature examined how the different perceptions support licensed family childcare programs and the development of best practices to enhance their family childcare businesses and obtain increased recognition of their quality services. Therefore, the research I explored related to licensed and unlicensed [licensed-exempt] family childcare programs.

Family Childcare Providers and Families' Perceptions

Professionalism

In 2003, Tuominen conducted a study with both licensed and unlicensed family childcare providers on their perspectives on the ideologies that define the role of family childcare providers and the services they offer to the public. This research study was conducted over twenty years ago and shared the voice of the family childcare providers about their profession, public perceptions, and decision to become licensed family childcare providers. It provided valuable information about the family childcare providers, like their prior careers, the rationale for entering this profession, and their insights into their work.

Tuominen's research accentuated the perspectives attributed to the stereotypes that hinder some from viewing family childcare as a business. The family childcare providers openly discussed their concern about the negative connotation of their work being compared to *"babysitting"* and the likely basis for this belief. Tuominen (2003) indicated that providing care in the home environment, unfortunately, influenced the devaluation of the roles of family childcare providers. Having a business in the home environment may cause others to perceive that it is not recognized as a legitimate business model because it is not in a physical space separated from the home. It was also revealed by Tuominen (2003) how the minimization of family childcare was ascribed to some assumptions that caring for children is a natural trait in women and should not be highly compensated.

In addition, the author highlighted licensed family childcare providers' perspectives of those providing care without going through the licensing process.

Tuominen (2003) shared that licensed family childcare disassociated themselves from unlicensed family childcare providers because they believed they did not provide quality care and exhibited professionalism in their work. These opinions proved challenging to the author when seeking recommendations to recruit unlicensed family childcare for this research.

This literature provided the foundation for my research. Furthermore, it displayed the value of encouraging licensed family childcare providers to voice their perspectives about their profession and public perceptions. In addition, it was instrumental in the decision to obtain diverse viewpoints of families that have used childcare services and licensed family childcare providers. It provided a clearer understanding of the concerns of licensed family childcare providers and the importance of the development of recommended best practices to enhance the services and viewpoints of licensed family childcare programs. Although the Tuominen research occurred over twenty years ago, many of these adverse perceptions about family childcare programs remain today since they are associated with being a home-based business. Still, with the incorporation of best practices, families can focus on the positive aspects of a licensed, high-quality family childcare environment and the education and care provided to the children.

Favorable Characteristics to Support Quality Childcare

The research literature by Browne was based on an original study by the Strengthening Family initiative that focused on developing strategies to reduce child abuse and neglect in families in early childhood programs, including center-based programs. As a result of the original research, five protective factors were identified to effectively reduce neglect and child abuse while contributing to positive outcomes for

young children (Browne, 2009). In addition to the protective factors, a self-assessment tool was developed to assist center-based programs in incorporating protective measures into their daily work to support their families and children in these programs.

Family childcare programs were not included in the original research, and the current researchers sought to develop similar self-assessment tools to support these programs. Ten family childcare programs from each of the four states: Illinois, Georgia, New Jersey, and Wisconsin, were included in this research. Even though 40 programs were invited to participate in the study, only 39 family childcare programs completed the process. Thirty-seven of the 39 programs were identified as licensed family childcare programs, and the other two were unlicensed. The researchers used the terms home-based programs and family childcare programs interchangeably throughout this research since the research included both licensed and unlicensed programs. This study included regular site visits made by a coordinator for each state and participants that engaged in focus groups comprised of family childcare providers and two families from each participating family childcare program.

The findings demonstrated an appreciation of the care and education offered to the children and families in their programs. It also exhibited the effort that family childcare providers put into their work to project themselves as professionals, not *"babysitters."* Accordingly, recommendations were made for training to meet the unique needs of family childcare programs and opportunities to promote collaborations to support their growth and development. These findings provided vital information about family childcare programs, their characteristics, professional views, and specific needs. This research supported my dissertation by demonstrating the importance of attaining the

perspectives of families that utilize family childcare programs and family childcare

providers. Last, it emphasizes the positive factors that are influential in meeting the

developmental needs of family childcare providers while providing strategies to support

the diverse needs of family childcare programs and providers.

Benefits and Challenges

Acquiring the perceptions of all non-parental childcare providers, licensed and unlicensed, was also found to be influential to my doctoral research. Like the prior literature reviewed, Herman et al. (2021) conducted a research study that focused on family childcare providers' perspectives on what they affirmed to be the benefits and challenges of their profession. The research used a qualitative research methodology that compiled the perspectives of licensed and unlicensed family childcare providers. They also discussed the support offered by the family childcare provider's family members as it relates to their profession and the learning in this environment.

The constructivist paradigm was used to understand the pros and cons of their profession and the family childcare provider's family role in supporting their home-based business. The researchers used the information collected to learn and assign meaning to the difficulties and resources needed to overcome the shared challenges. Some of the challenges the family childcare providers revealed included working in isolation, personal boundaries, the stress of the job, lack of professional acknowledgment, working with families, undesirable overtones, and issues related to conducting a home business.

Although the research anticipated ascertaining differences between licensed and unlicensed programs, it was revealed that they had similar concerns about operating a business in the home environment. (Herman et al., 2015) An additional finding was that the family members of childcare providers, both licensed and unlicensed, benefitted from the relationships established with the children in the program.

This research aligned very closely with the findings of my doctoral research by using family childcare providers' perspectives to suggest the importance of business

practices to strengthen their programs. The researchers allowed the family childcare provider to share their concerns and opinions regarding their profession and what they believed is required for continued growth. They captured varied participants' demographics to ensure the findings' reliability and transferability. For my research, I am interested in expanding this data to include the educational level demographics of all the survey participants and a more expansive population, including those with and without family childcare experience. With this information, I can build more distinct stances needed for the usefulness of the findings and the voice of licensed family childcare providers across various communities. In addition, it increases the attention given to licensed family childcare programs and their services while attracting more individuals to this profession.

Commitment and Job Satisfaction

In addition, the literature reviewed for this doctoral research pursued the perceptions of early childhood professionals not directly providing home-based services. Unlike the prior research cited, this literature included the insights of varied Canadian early childhood professionals regarding their views on professionalism. Early childhood educators were defined as a collective of varied individual groups that provide care and education to children from birth to age 6 (Harwood & Tukonic, 2016). This research was able to gain the perspectives of other professionals that worked with young children.

Harwood, D., and Tukonic (2016) used these techniques to explore the viewpoints of fifty-four early childhood educators recruited from Ontario, Canadian. Open and closed-ended questions were used to ascertain their commitment to early childhood

education. Also, these questions incorporated factors they believed are vital to remaining an early childhood professional.

This research supported early childhood educators using their own words to define their profession and the elements that frame it. This process was instrumental to my research because it exhibited the importance of participants expressing their views of professionalism and how it impacted their commitment to the field and job satisfaction. This information helped to construct best practices to assist licensed family childcare providers in confidently defining and incorporating professionalism in their daily work. It also supported best practices to encourage them to be more vocal in conveying their concerns and needs about professional development to sustain their unique business model.

Support Positive Learning Outcomes

Another study that was found beneficial to my research pursued the perceptions of families about family childcare programs and their effect on the child's learning. The National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (2006) conducted a study to assess how varied experiences in childcare settings affect the child's development outcome in the childcare and home environment. The researchers included any childcare setting for this study that was ongoing and not provided by the mother. This twenty-year research study represented four phases and followed the development of the child participants from 1 month of age to 9th grade.

Several qualitative methods, including phone calls and observations in the childcare setting, were used to evaluate the childcare features and experiences provided to the child and their families. They also considered features of the families, childcare

setting, and the child when evaluating quality childcare and the child's outcome. The participants lived in locations representing a diverse population across the US, and the researchers collected data from the ten university collection locations (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 2006).

This study's notable findings revealed that the providers' caregiving skills significantly impacted the children's development. A checklist was developed based on the result of the study to assist parents when seeking childcare for their children that can measure the provider's caregiving skills which they attributed to being a strong predictor of optimum child development.

This research impacted my research because it aspired to assist parents in childcare decisions that benefitted their children and their families. This research provided crucial statistics that revealed that some families preferred family childcare for infant and toddler care. It also revealed the need to understand the perspectives of the family's needs and the characteristics they sought in childcare decision-making. In addition, it demonstrated the importance of supplying best practices recommendations to be shared with family childcare providers to enhance features perceived as quality by the families while bringing awareness to family childcare programs.

Family Childcare Programs

Indicators to Measure Quality

Like the prior literature reviewed, this research gathered information based on the diverse stances of family childcare providers. The researchers defined family childcare providers as licensed, unlicensed, and anyone who provides care for children in their home. In 2020, Eckhardt and Egert conducted an international study to ascertain

how to measure the quality of family childcare programs. This research was performed in two parts. First, they evaluated global family childcare programs using the family childcare environment rating scales (FCCERS-R) to measure the level of quality. They selected this tool since it is internationally known and included familiar factors in the different regions. Secondly. the researchers performed a meta-analysis on prior research to fathom quality indicators of family childcare programs, including the provider's educational background and sensitivity, the program's structure and characteristics, and the multiple ages of the children served in these programs.

The findings determined that the care offered in family childcare programs is mediocre as measured by FCCERS-R and Comprehensive Meta-Analysis software version 3 and that improvements in practices and policies are needed to increase the quality of these programs. Also, the meta-analysis of the predictors of quality identified caregiver sensitivity as a relevant factor in gaging quality in family childcare programs. *Caregiver sensitivity* was defined as meeting the needs of the children as it relates to the family childcare provider's interactions with children (Eckhardt & Egert, 2020). Therefore, it was exhibited as an imperative factor in the quality of family childcare programs.

This literature provided valuable recommendations that supported my doctoral research, including supporting professional entry requirements and requiring ongoing professional development. Obtaining this information is instrumental in obtaining the academic knowledge required to meet the children's needs. In addition, the findings also demonstrated the significance of understanding the correlation between the child's

positive outcome and the relationships and interactions with the provider. These were all essential to my research.

It is pertinent for stakeholders that use childcare services to understand the distinct characteristics that support children's development, in addition to the family childcare providers knowing how to use them to meet the various needs of families. These are all fundamental aspects required to bring awareness to high-quality family childcare in my research.

Strategies to Identify Quality

In this literature review, the authors reviewed research that comprised licensed and unlicensed family childcare programs and referred to them as home-based care. Porter et al. (2010) performed a literature review based on prior early childhood education research that occurred within the last twenty years related to home-based care programs. This data was used to develop strategies using the components identified in these research studies to define the quality of these programs. This literature review included regulated [licensed] family childcare providers, family, friends, and neighbors that cared for children in their homes in their definition of home-based care. To better understand home-based care, the authors reviewed the characteristics of these programs and the families that used these services. In addition, the authors assembled the families' perspectives on quality home-based care. Current initiatives and policies were also evaluated for efficacy in sustaining positive development in children, constructing relationships, and collaboration between families and caregivers.

The authors also identified gaps in the prior research to construct strategies to enhance the quality of these programs. Some of the gaps identified were associated with a demand for more public awareness of these services, defining the caregivers' role, measuring quality in this environment, and evidence of the effectiveness of the existing strategies and initiatives to enrich home-based programs. The authors believed these shortcomings in family childcare programs were identified due to revitalized interest in home-based care and early childhood education.

The literature reviewed benefitted my doctoral research because it enabled me to access broadened research about family childcare programs and family childcare

providers. It depicted the need to devise processes to acquire high-quality family childcare programs and competently fulfill the needs of families. In addition, it accentuated the importance of separating licensed family childcare providers from others that provide care in the home. Defining family childcare providers under the collective umbrella of home-based caregivers contributes to the struggle to clarify their profession's role and its entry requirements.

Furthermore, it helped minimize the devaluing of the important work provided by licensed family childcare providers. My doctoral research provides an opportunity to focus on the essential tools to support licensed family childcare providers in operating a successful home business and providing quality care while educating children and families in their programs. My research also aimed to emphasize the significance of building relationships with families. Porter et al. (2010) disclosed that working closely with families is vital for keeping them engaged in the child's learning and best practices to support overall development.

Factors Affecting Quality in Family Childcare Programs

In the literature by Lanigan, the viewpoints of licensed family childcare providers were spotlighted and employed to apprehend the features that contributed to family childcare programs. Lanigan (2010) explored the relationship between the importance of offering consistent, high-quality childcare services and its correlation to the overall development of the children in their programs. The author shared that a lack of uniform regulations, professional development training, and requirements has affected the quality offered in family childcare programs. Lanigan sought to better understand licensed family childcare providers' professional development needs and their role in early childhood

education. The researcher used the information to understand what is believed to be a combination of different elements essential to enhancing licensed family childcare providers' skills.

This qualitative research study included fifty-four licensed family childcare providers from a family childcare network. The childcare providers participated in an annual focus group for three years to discuss the value of relationships, the elements of productive professional development, quality improvements, professionalism, and the roles in childcare systems. The findings showed that licensed family childcare providers valued the experiences gathered with other early childcare professionals in an environment deemed safe and trustworthy. Lanigan (2010) believed these opportunities stimulated positive interactions and increased their desire to acquire and apply the knowledge from the collaborations. It was also shared that implementing opportunities to construct relationship during training is an imperative component that enhances and support ongoing learning when successfully implemented.

Furthermore, it was expressed that family childcare professionals valued professional development with content constructed to meet the distinctive needs of licensed family childcare providers, and that reinforced their role as early childhood professionals. However, the participants shared their concerns regarding the level of disrespect demonstrated to them by other professionals. The literature revealed that the licensed family childcare providers sensed a disdained in professional environments from other early childhood professionals and some families when they were referred to as *"babysitters"* (Lanigan, 2010). Nevertheless, licensed family childcare professionals viewed themselves as early childhood professionals despite the opinions of others. The

research concluded that the information shared in this study should be considered when developing effective professional development for licensed family childcare providers.

This study benefitted my doctoral because it conveyed pertinent information about family childcare providers' perspectives on professional development and networking opportunities offered through professional organizations. It discussed the fundamental factors of providing quality programming and services to families and obtaining the views directly from licensed family childcare providers. In addition, the research disclosed why professional networks are essential and how they can support the growth and development of licensed family childcare providers. It also displayed the importance of constructed professional development opportunities specific to the needs of family childcare providers rather than the topics that may be tailored more to childcare centers.

Important Factors Affecting Family Childcare

Decrease in Licensed Family Childcare Providers

The subsequent three research studies evaluated were literature reviews of prior early childhood research about licensed and unlicensed family childcare programs. Bromer et al. (2021) literature emphasized the decrease in licensed family childcare programs. It evaluated the challenges shared in prior research studies that possibly contributed to the shortage of these programs. The authors constructed a conceptual model that includes contextual factors like the economy, demographics, racism, and inequality that negatively affected the workforce and the likihood it contributed to this licensed family childcare shortage. Some other factors that the authors believed gave rise to the decrease included the working conditions of licensed family childcare providers,

business sustainability, and subsidy programs. In addition, licensed family childcare providers vacated the field to additional elements, that included the COVID pandemic, retirement, education requirements, and a lack of motivation.

However, the authors believed many other factors could encourage more licensed family childcare providers to stay in this field. These factors included providing networking opportunities with other family childcare providers to support them with challenging personal and business barriers. The authors also believed that providing additional funding to support women of color family childcare providers can also assist in alleviating the decrease of licensed family childcare programs. Surprisingly, the findings disclosed that licensed family childcare providers with less work-related stress are likely to be committed to the field (Bromer et al.,2021) and likely to remain.

This literature benefitted my doctoral research by attaining licensed family childcare providers' perspectives about the work and barriers of the family childcare business. In addition, it shared opportunities to enhance family childcare providers' experiences to encourage longevity in this profession. This information was imperative as I developed best practices to enhance licensed family childcare businesses and self-care techniques. These recommended best practices are instrumental in supporting the growth and development of licensed family childcare providers. At the same time, creating meaningful learning experiences for families and their children enlisted in these programs. This is essential to sustain quality care and educational experiences in licensed family childcare programs while motivating qualified and passionate individuals in this field. These best practices are influential in increasing positive awareness of family childcare programs.

Making Childcare Decisions

Unlike the other literature studied in this review, Gamble et al. (2011) exclusively sought the perspectives of families that used childcare services. In this literature, the authors discussed the characteristics that families viewed as essential when ascertaining non-parental, licensed, and unlicensed childcare services. Two hundred and twenty participants in the Southwestern region of the United States completed a survey that included a list of characteristics to be ranked by the participants as essential and instrumental in seeking childcare services. The researchers used the families' beliefs to measure their understanding of child development and how the components included in the survey contributed to the child's learning.

The findings were shown that child-centered learning, school readiness, curriculum options, business structure, and the childcare schedule were crucial factors in childcare decisions. The outcomes displayed that families were more attuned to the essential factors offered in childcare programs that support the child's learning. However, it demonstrated a demand for further educational opportunities to educate families about childcare services.

This information contributed to my research by exhibiting the importance of acquiring the family's perspective on learning and using that information to assist early childhood professionals in educating families and their children. Educating families is essential for expanding learning in the home environment and building upon knowledge acquired throughout the day. Knowing families' perspectives on relevant characteristics is a crucial first step. Additionally, it revealed why it is vital for family childcare programs to have the appropriate training to enlighten families about learning in the early years,

displaying the need for professional development to support those efforts. Developing

best practices based on the families' perspectives is an excellent opportunity to show their

needs and to support these efforts through professional development and building

collaborations with other early childhood professionals to gain those resources. These

efforts assisted licensed family childcare providers in being more effective in educating

and uniting with families to meet the child's unique developmental needs while

supporting advanced learning.

Recommendations

Factors and Practices to Support Successful Family Childcare programs

A literature review by Morrissey (2007) provided an overview of the research studies related to regulated [licensed] family childcare programs. Thirty-nine literature resources were reviewed for this study, including peer-reviewed articles, academic research studies, and a book. The prior researchers used varied quantitative and qualitative research methods to gather their data and used terms like home-based and family childcare to define paid nonparental childcare services. In addition, the author provided an-indepth synopsis on the differences between regulated and unlicensed programs.

In evaluating the prior research data, the researchers concentrated on the structural characteristics and processes of regulated family childcare programs. Some factors conferred in this literature review included defining family childcare, its characteristics, clientele, how quality is defined, funding policies, the family childcare provider, and vital aspects of their role. The authors suggested that future research be used to launch awareness of family childcare providers' professional needs and enhanced quality in family childcare programs. In addition, they recommended an increased effort on family childcare policies. These policies should address funding concerns and increase professional development training to support regulated family childcare providers in underserved communities.

This literature review demonstrated the importance of conducting academic research to bring awareness of licensed family childcare programs to the community and policymakers. Understanding these programs and promoting quality programs is critical

because they are instrumental in educating young children. My doctoral research has brought awareness to the significance of licensed family childcare providers by developing best practices derived from the perspectives of families that have used child services. Using this information to support relevant policies is paramount for recognizing licensed family childcares' relevant role in educating and caring for young children.

The research by Bromer et al. (2022) discussed the beneficial facets of integrating mixed-delivery Pre-K systems into family childcare programs. Providing Pre-K resources to these programs would aid in offering equitable educational resources and opportunities to the families and children enrolled in these programs (Bromer et al., 2022). Therefore, enriching the learning experiences and supporting positive outcomes for the children. The authors developed guiding principles and a conceptual framework highlighting the efficacy of these systems and strategies to embody these approaches into family childcare programs. For these programs to be successful, it is suggested that family childcare providers and support staff have an integral role in building these systems. This process revealed the intentionality of developing an authentic Pre-K program that appreciates the operations of family childcare programs.

This literature was vital to my doctoral research because it depicted how Pre-K systems in family childcare programs can promote supplemental learning for the children, their families, and the community. The literature provided a significant resource to support my argument on how the government-funded Pre-K programs offered in other childcare programs can be just as productive in licensed, high-quality family childcare programs. In addition, it demonstrated the capability of licensed family childcare environments to provide high-quality educational service, enhancing their credibility.

Furthermore, the literature affirmed the impact of licensed family childcare providers' role in enhancing their programs and the perceptions of professionalism in their business.

Last, the authors, Viera and Hill (2019), collaborated with the organization, All Our Kin, to develop best practice recommendations to enrich licensed family childcare programs. All our Kin created a relationship-first model based on their direct interactions with licensed family childcare providers. This publication provided an overview of the organization's view of family childcare, its benefits, and its vision for these programs. It also discussed ways to increase the supply and quality of licensed family childcare programs while understanding their current state and ways to improve them. According to Viera and Hill (2019), "strengthening family childcare often involves combating existing assumptions about the quality and professionalism of home-based childcare" (p.9).

The authors and All our Kid partners constructed strategies to promote conditions that would improve licensed family childcare programs. Their plans concentrated on six areas: funding, quality, strengthening and sustaining operations, licensing, housing, home childcare zoning, and engaging stakeholders to support home childcare programs. I chose this publication because it reflected my intent to devise best practices based on the perspectives of the family childcare provider, subject matter experts, and stakeholders that use childcare services. Likewise, this research provided ideas on how to support the emerging themes, business, environment, and provider, in my doctoral research to assemble best practices to improve the business of licensed family childcare and the services provided to the children, families, and the community. This technique is essential to comprehending different perspectives and producing lasting mindset shifts.

Reflection

When developing best practices for licensed, high-quality family childcare programs, it is central to consider these factors. The recommended best practices should also include tactics to provide family childcare providers with the confidence and verbiage to use when their professional roles are challenged. In addition, recommend best practices to encourage learning opportunities that meet their unique professional and business needs. These best practices are crucial in disseminating the essence of their work and contributions to the community and the field of early childhood education.

In the next section, the mixed-methodologies are discussed that were used to collect the data for the research.

Chapter 3: Methodology and Design of the Research

Overview

The evaluative process should be an agile model focusing on adaptive changes, providing best practices that offer flexibility where the family childcare providers can interject practices exclusive to their programs. In addition to providing ongoing training, there need to be more innovative solutions that dispel the negative perceptions of family childcare programs while increasing high-quality and positive awareness.

As stated in (2020) Patton's development evaluation, the preformative development prototype gives the individuals affected by the change an active role in this emergent change by having a voice in developing innovative solutions throughout the program's evaluation process. This approach empowered the participants to participate in the change they wanted. The participants are more inclined to share their viewpoints on family childcare programs, factors influencing childcare decisions, and their notions of best practices for this childcare setting.

According to Creswell (2009), researchers are more knowledgeable utilizing mixed methodology and can produce authenticated outcomes. As a researcher, it is crucial to be intentional when developing questions for the methodology tools, surveys, and interviews, which is beneficial in gathering the data required to answer the dissertation research questions. The questions should be straightforward but effective in emboldening the stakeholders to communicate their perspectives about family childcare programs. The questions enabled the participants to guide the process and develop effective best practices. It is believed that this approach would answer the dissertation research questions.

Patton (2012) also shared that when people feel they are heard and their opinion matters, they are more likely to appreciate and use the findings. The goal was for all participants to have shared their honest opinions and disclose tenets to increase awareness, develop best practices, and dispel the negative stereotypes that define family childcare programs. This research improved the quality of services offered to families and provided tools to build positive relationships with the families and the community. Building relationships are vital in early childhood education, and the connections lead to trust. Trust creates an environment where family childcare providers and families are open to learning and supporting one another to educate children in the classroom and home environment.

The Beginning

Initially, I believed interviewing licensed family childcare providers and individuals with family childcare experiences and using data gathered from an early childhood database would be sufficient to acquire the information needed to support my research.

The Family Child Research & Data (2022) shared essential demographics and statistical data on family childcare providers and the services offered in their programs from the 2016 national survey of the early childhood and education project team. However, it did not provide the information to explain the "why" behind comprehending the challenging perspectives of family childcare programs and the feedback needed to gather suggestions of best practices to overcome these opposing perspectives. Therefore, the shared family childcare data from the database and selected stakeholders were inadequate to answer the research questions.

To acquire a broader span of viewpoints on family childcare programs, participants with childcare experiences were pursued using a mixed methodology approach. A survey and interviews were used to procure data by asking closed and open-ended questions and parsing the data into more productive, consumable, and manageable information. This method was favorable in constructing best practices and recommendations to assist family childcare providers in making the proper modifications to shift the participants' thinking while increasing awareness of the high-quality services offered in this childcare setting.

Participants

The doctoral research evaluated all stakeholders' views and ideas, including licensed family childcare providers, subject matter experts, those with family childcare experiences, and those without family childcare experiences. Using mixed methodologies was imperative for collecting a plethora of information using a wild-ranging group of participants with childcare experiences. This approach allowed the data to be analyzed into four stakeholder groups: licensed family childcare providers, subject matter experts, those participants with family childcare experiences, and those without family childcare experiences. These four stakeholder groups enabled the data to be explored from various perspectives that effectively fulfilled the research questions and cultivated best practices to enrich family childcare programs.

The social media platforms, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and LinkedIn, were utilized to recruit participants for my doctoral research and distribute the survey electronically. On Facebook, the survey was distributed to different early childhood and

doctoral professional groups. In addition, email dispersed direct links to the same population and stakeholders with childcare experiences.

Data Gathering Techniques

Mixed methodologies were used to collect data for the dissertation research questions, including interviews and surveys. The combination of data provided a range of information including, but not limited to, what behaviors are believed to contribute to the negative perceptions and their expectations of quality childcare, including opinions regarding the strength and weaknesses of family childcare programs. This data brought me closer to developing best practices to support high-quality, licensed family childcare programs and increased positive awareness of these programs. The doctoral research assisted in dispelling the negative perceptions of family childcare programs by recommending best practices for family childcare providers to incorporate into their programs. These practices comprised strategies and formalities suggested by stakeholders and reinforced by research to authenticate and exemplify professionalism in family childcare work and business practices.

Interview

Interviews allowed me to probe for information that some participants may not have shared in a survey (Section 12. Conducting Interviews Community Tool Box, 2021). In addition, this research method enabled me to gain specific information from stakeholders, licensed family childcare providers, and subject matter experts. I also asked for recommendations to conquer these barriers and questions about what they believed contributed to the stereotypes.

Survey

In a survey, I was able to reach a larger group of early childhood professionals and stakeholders using childcare services with the questions to obtain individualized perspectives on family childcare services and their practices. Prior family childcare research studies and the lack of information influenced the development of the survey questions. As Pew Research Center (2012) stated, information gathered through previous research methods is necessary for designing an effective survey. I also asked additional questions about the trust factor in this learning environment and how it influenced others when making childcare decisions. Including these questions in the survey helped acquire valuable data to answer the research questions and recommended best practices and policies.

Ethical Considerations

In conducting my research and collecting data, I requested that the participants complete an informed consent form to confirm their participation in the doctoral research. As mentioned by Connelly, "Consent consists of the following: Consent should be given freely (voluntary), subjects should understand what is being asked of them, and involved persons must be competent to consent "(2014, para 3.). I was transparent with my intentions and used the data to advance early childhood education.

The participants were reminded that their anonymity would be maintained during this doctoral research. Pseudonyms would be used when their responses were referenced to respect and protect their privacy. The participants were also encouraged to be honest and ensured they were in a judge-free environment. All of their opinions were welcomed, even the unpopular responses.

Children were not used in this doctoral research. The demographics for the research included individuals ages 18 years and older. Going through the IRB process reassured me that the proper precautions were taken to protect the privacy and safety of the participants. This process also guaranteed that the research methods and procedures used in this doctoral research did not harm them.

Data Analysis Techniques

To effectively capture and analyze the data, the participants' permission was obtained to record the information gathered from the interviews and surveys.

Interviews

Licensed family child providers and early childhood education subject matter experts were interviewed for this doctoral research. Individual interviews were conducted using the technology platform Zoom in a face-to-face setting where they had the option of having their video on or off. The interview times were arranged based on the participants' availability in a comfortable location and were limited to a maximum of 30 minutes. The software Otter.ai was used to record and transcribe the data gathered through the interviews. The record feature on the Zoom platform was also used to record the interviews. Multiple recording methods were used to ensure that all information was acquired from those interactions. Microsoft Word was used to review and parse the interview text to discover patterns and themes in the responses.

Surveys

The social media platform Facebook early childhood and doctoral groups were used to distribute the survey constructed by Qualtrics software to collect data from stakeholders. An email was used to disperse the survey link directly from the Qualtrics software to my personal Facebook page, Twitter, and LinkedIn. The surveys were also disseminated through direct email to family childcare providers, subject matter experts in early childhood education, and stakeholders. Once the participants began the survey, Qualtrics permitted them seven days to complete it before recording their results. Qualtrics also sent automated reminders to the participants that initiated the survey to inform them of the remaining time to finish the survey. Participants were also asked to share the online survey link with their families and peers to recruit additional participants. The varied text and statistical features in Qualtrics were employed to evaluate and explore the data collected.

Furthermore, triangulation was used to examine the data gathered through the stated research methods. As referenced by James et al. (2008), triangulation is used to validate data obtained through various research methods to analyze and interpret the data. This process produced findings that delivered a keener insight into answering the dissertation research questions.

Reflection

The methodology portion of the dissertation needs to be detailed and precise (Bowen, 2015). When the proper methodologies are used in answering the dissertation question, it makes it easier for the audience to understand how you reached your

conclusion and assess the authenticity of your results through your data collecting and analysis process. From this point forward, participants will be referred to as stakeholders.

Chapter 4: Analysis of Research

Findings

This chapter analyzed the data collected using the online software application, Qualtrics. Digital applications allow users to create, distribute, gather, and analyze data collected in real-time to reach a broad customer base (Qualtrics, 2022). In addition, interviews were conducted electronically, face-to-face, and recorded using the Zoom platform for licensed family childcare providers and subject matter experts. Otter.ai was used to transcribe the interviews. With this approach, a more profound look into the data collection transpired and revealed the emergent thematic codes, business, environment, and provider.

Before I conveyed the data analysis, I shared a brief overview of my early childhood experiences. I have been an early childhood professional for over fifteen years in many capacities, including an adjunct instructor, quality improvement evaluator, and a licensed and accredited family childcare provider. As a licensed and accredited family childcare provider, I worked closely with families, community resources, and other early childhood professionals. My experiences enable me to understand the importance of high-quality early childhood experiences and the tools needed to support positive developmental outcomes.

Survey Stakeholder Survey

The social media platforms used to distribute the survey included LinkedIn, Twitter, Facebook personal pages, and social media educational groups using a direct link. In addition to social media, the survey was disseminated to over 300 people through email and text messaging. The survey was opened by 113 stakeholders in the Midwestern states and partially completed by 50 stakeholders. The remaining 63 stakeholders consented and completed the entire survey for a response rate of 48%. The ten interview stakeholders, five subject matter experts, and five licensed family childcare providers also consented and completed the survey. These individuals were asked to participate in the doctoral research study via email and LinkedIn messages. The interview stakeholders also verbally agreed to participate in this portion of the doctoral research via Zoom. The average interview lasted less than 30 minutes.

Data collection for this doctoral research was completed in the Winter of 2022 to comprehend the stakeholder's perspectives of family childcare and the characteristics that were perceived to be instrumental in operating a successful family childcare business. It was essential to attain the viewpoints of the stakeholders that have used childcare services and use this information to develop best practices while increasing awareness of family childcare programs. The stakeholders were divided into four stakeholder groups: licensed family childcare providers, subject matter experts, those with family childcare experiences, and those with no-family childcare experiences.

Most of the 63 stakeholders had some experience with family childcare (FCC) programs. Twenty-seven stakeholders shared that they had no experience with family
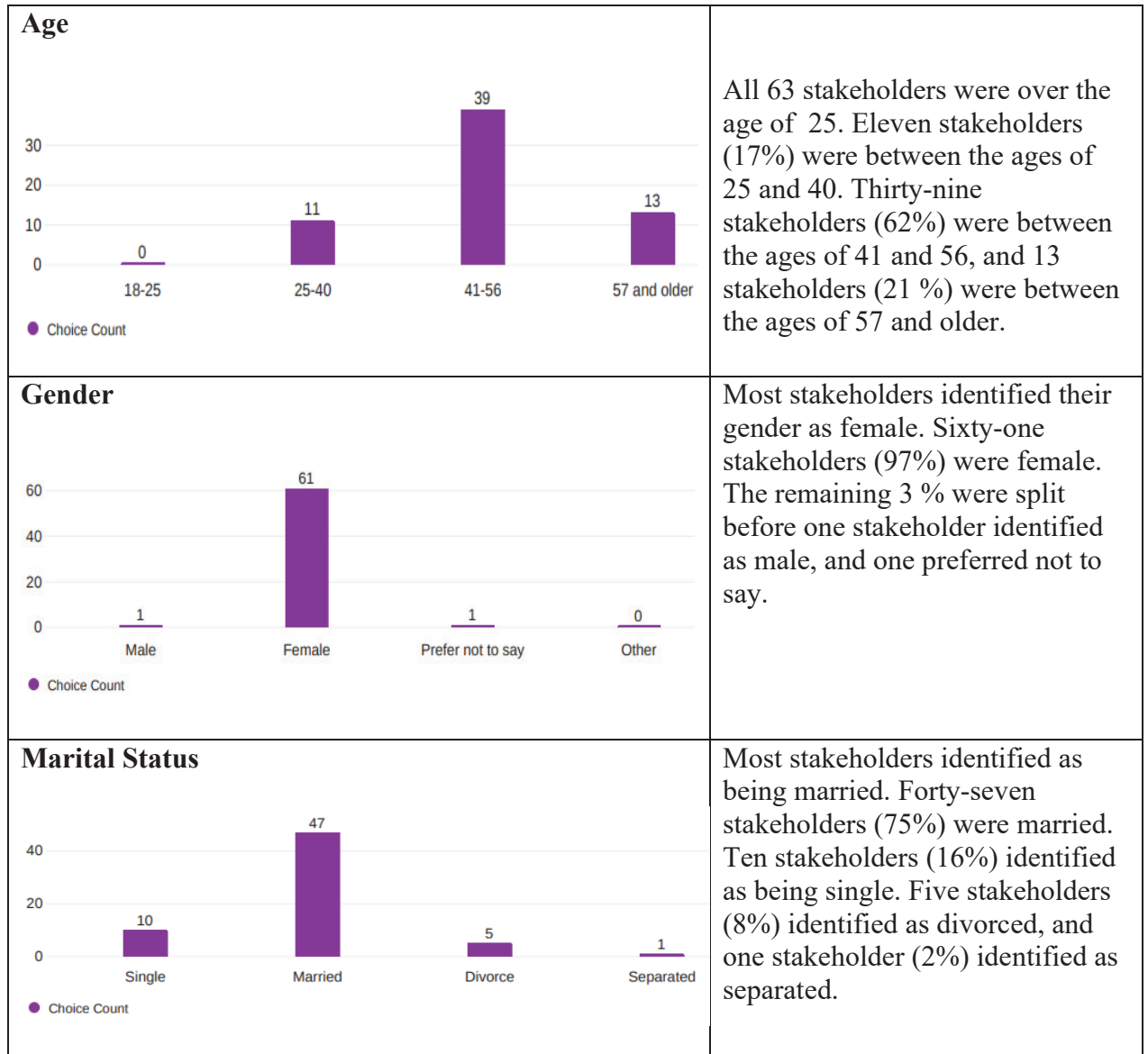
childcare programs (43%), which makes up the No-family childcare experience

stakeholder group. Thirty-six stakeholders had some family childcare experiences (57%),

which embodies the Family childcare experiences stakeholder group. See Figure 1.

Stakeholders Demographics

The stakeholders were asked six mandatory demographic questions in the survey to gather vital information about the stakeholder. The data was captured in the following categories: age, gender, marital status, income, level of education, and racial characteristics, based on the list provided.

Figure 2

Demographics of the Stakeholders

Age	
	All 63 stakeholders were over the age of 25. Eleven stakeholders (17%) were between the ages of 25 and 40. Thirty-nine stakeholders (62%) were between the ages of 41 and 56, and 13 stakeholders (21 %) were between the ages of 57 and older.
Gender	Most stakeholders identified their gender as female. Sixty-one stakeholders (97%) were female. The remaining 3 % were split before one stakeholder identified as male, and one preferred not to say.
Marital Status	Most stakeholders identified as being married. Forty-seven stakeholders (75%) were married. Ten stakeholders (16%) identified as being single. Five stakeholders (8%) identified as divorced, and one stakeholder (2%) identified as separated.

Income	Most of the stakeholders shared that they had an annual income level between $51,000 and $149,999. Thirty-one stakeholders (49%) have an annual income of $51,000 and $149,999. Twenty stakeholders (32%) have an annual income of $150,000 and over. Six stakeholders (10%) preferred not to share their annual income level. Five stakeholders (8%) have an annual income level of $25,000 and $50,000, and one stakeholder (2%) have an income level of less than $25,000.
Income	

Income bar chart: Choice Count — 0–$25,000: 1; $25,000–$50,000: 5; $51,000–$149,999: 31; $150,000 and over: 20; Prefer not to say: 6

Level of education

Level of education bar chart: Choice Count — High School/GED: 0; Some level of post high school education: 4; Bachelor Degree: 20; Master Degree or higher: 39

Most stakeholders identified as having earned a master's degree or higher. Thirty-nine stakeholders (62%) have earned a master's degree or higher. Twenty stakeholders (32%) earned a bachelor's degree. Four stakeholders (6%) earned some level of post-high school education.

Racial characteristics

Racial characteristics bar chart: Choice Count — Black/African American: 39; White: 21; Latino or Hispanic: 2; American Indian or ...: 0; Asian: 3; Native Hawaiian or ...: 1

Most stakeholders identified their racial characteristics as Black/African American. Thirty-nine (59%) identified as Black/African American. Twenty-one (32%) identified as White. Two stakeholders (3%) identified as Latino or Hispanic. Three stakeholders (5%) identified as Asian, and one (2%) was Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander. Two stakeholders identified as having more than one racial characteristics. One stakeholder identified as Black/African Americans and White. The other stakeholder identified as White and Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander. None of the stakeholders

	identified as American Indian or Alaska Native.

Survey Quantitative/Qualitative Results

In evaluating the survey data obtained from the 63 stakeholders regarding their childcare preferences and experiences related to the services offered in these programs, three thematic codes were revealed from the data. The thematic codes provided valuable information on how the stakeholders depicted the various aspects of family childcare programs and the perceived challenging features of this childcare setting. The three thematic codes are Family Childcare Provider, Family Chilcare Business, and Family Childcare Environment.

Family Childcare Provider

Education

The stakeholders indicated that the family childcare provider's education level and educational resources provided to enhance the child's learning experiences are crucial elements of a family childcare program. Gamble et al. (2008) revealed that in addition to seeking economic and safety features as essential characteristics in childcare programs, they [families] also sought programs that meet their children's developmental needs and prepared them for school. A stakeholder expressed that the "Level of education of provider and the environment, curriculum and number of children" are primary components that impacted their childcare decision. Additionally, these indicators have been found to support a quality learning environment. According to Clarke-Stewart et al. (2002), an educated provider that participates in training to

enrich the learning environment exemplifies the quality of care provided to the children.

Stakeholders also agreed that providing "[an] engaged learning and very interactive [environment]" with a "play-based curriculum" were envisioned to occur in a quality and productive learning environment. Coupled with ongoing professional development, a stakeholder suggested that "knowing the need and the opportunities for training" indicates purposeful learning. The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) shared that regular professional development is critical to acquiring and utilizing new knowledge (1993).

Relationship

Several stakeholders indicated that having a relationship with the family childcare provider included regular communication with the family. One of the stakeholders shared, "I expect them to be professional, respectful of family wishes, knowledgeable of child development, and communicative with the family." Another stakeholder shared that "FCC staff should play an integral part in interactions with families. FCCs are with the children for much of the day. They should be able to relate information about a child's school day".

Stakeholders also communicated how ongoing development with the children supported their development. It was shared that "we partner with the parents for their child's development. Regular communication with family members is also important to build trust and respect." This inference is also supported by research. The literature

denoted that creating a relationship based on an amicable interaction is essential for family childcare programs to meet the child's and their family's needs (Browne, 2009).

Provider Inconsistencies

Stakeholders shared the following statements about the inconsistencies in the care offered in family childcare programs: "Some FCC homes provide a level of care comparable to centers. The good ones will do more than 'babysit' the children. Unfortunately, some homes still provide sub-standard care and sub-standard business practices. Although, the same goes for center-based care." Additionally, it was shared that "some providers are just 'babysitting,' no curriculum or professional development".

Furthermore, the inconsistencies in defining the roles and requirements of family childcare programs may have contributed to the interpretation of the services provided and experiences of the stakeholder because there need to be entry requirements. Eckhardt and Egert (2020) believed that irregularities in family childcare qualifications contributed to the need for more family childcare providers with formal training. Some claimed that providing in-home childcare without understanding how to acquire and maintain quality services diminished positive learning outcomes experienced in this childcare option. This frame of thinking collaborated with stakeholders' view of some family childcare programs having a service approach similar to "babysitting." Despite this, most of the stakeholders disagreed with the prior statement. However, a small population of stakeholders agreed with this statement implying the role of family childcare providers as "babysitting."

Qualification

Another concern shared by the stakeholders is the qualification of the provider/staff and the utilization of subpar education resources in the child's learning experiences. A stakeholder shared that they feared "FCC employing people not capable [of] /having the qualifications of working at an FCC." A stakeholder also said, "My concerns with FCC are a stimulating curriculum and qualified staff. A stimulating curriculum will keep the children engaged and help them to meet their academic milestones." The absence of perceived quality materials and staff has elicited individuals to conceive negative connotations about family childcare providers. One stakeholder indicated that a lack of materials leads people to believe that" some providers are just 'babysitting' [when they have] no curriculum or professional development." These concerns may be addressed with consistency in state regulations and guidelines. Prior research has shown the importance of reorganizing and aligning regulations across national agencies to provide consistency in interpreting guidelines (Viera & Hall, 2019).

Professionalism

Freeman declared, "Exemplary family childcare demands a clear, persistent, and well-grounded sense of professionalism. This includes knowledge and skills related to high-quality educare, which in turn implies reciprocal relations with other adults" (2011, p.841). The stakeholders perceived professionalism as a business expectation for family childcare programs. A stakeholder stated, "I expect them to be professional, respectful of family wishes, knowledgeable of child development, [and] communicative with the family." Some stakeholders also alluded to professionalism when distinguishing between licensed and licensed-exempt family childcare providers. A

stakeholder indicated, "Yes. It shows commitment and professionalism to the industry." Contrarywise, family childcare programs without sound business practices are perceived as of inferior quality and amateurish. One stakeholder said, "Some FCC have great business practices and others not so good or professional."

Family Childcare Business

The stakeholders disclosed what they believed was essential in operating a successful family childcare business and educating children. It was shared that the family childcare provider "must know all aspects of being a business and professional educator." A stakeholder also declared family childcare providers as "…small business owners, in addition to educators, but they often need support or advocacy related to their role in the business side of the work." Some of these roles include comprehending, creating a budget, tracking income and expenses from varied sources, and managing daily administrative duties (Hooper, 2019). It is imperative to have acquired these necessary skills when managing a productive business with valuable organizational skills. Research supports these beliefs and proclaims that family childcare providers can be successful business owners and educators with the appropriate reinforcement in acquiring and enforcing the appropriate standards (Viera & Hill, 2019).

Babysitting

Nevertheless, some stakeholders referenced family childcare providers as "babysitting" when professional business practices and educational offerings were not evident in their programs. Some stakeholders proclaimed, "Well-organized programs with trained personnel are not 'babysitters,'" and "I have seen FCC that does compare to 'babysitting,' but most have a learning-based approach from what I observed." However,

when the stakeholders answered the survey question about the service approach of family childcare providers being compared to "babysitting," the majority disagreed with the statement. See Figure 7.

Family Values/Location

The stakeholders also discussed the role that accessibility, cost, and similar values harbored in choosing family childcare and how it influenced their childcare decision. Research has shown that families' beliefs are vital when selecting childcare for their children (Kensinger & Elicker, 2008). For example, a stakeholder declared, "Our family availability, culture, and values " as deciding factors for childcare. The likeness in values and beliefs assures the family that the environment is safe and the provider's beliefs will not be disruptive to teachings instilled in the child's home. As it relates to cost, stakeholders shared that "Whether it was part- or full-time daycare, proximity to my job for drop off and pick up and the cost [in that order]" are their priorities taken into consideration when making childcare decisions for their families.

A stakeholder illustrated why seeking cost-beneficial childcare options are important "

> Again, I would say cost. Middle-class single-parent households are the working poor. We do not qualify for state assistance, and many costs can burden a household with one income. I placed my daughter in a parent co-op which made FCC more affordable. However, the cost is still a heavy lift, especially when there is more than one child to place."

Viera and Hill (2019) reported that affordable childcare is a concern for families when it surpasses the recommended 10% of the family budget advised by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

In addition to family attitudes and cost benefits, the location was shared as a vital factor when seeking childcare services. Leach et al. insinuated that "…careful studies of the effects of cost on childcare choice show that relatively low price is only one of several extrinsic characteristics parents take into account; location, hours and reliability often being equally important" (2006, p.473). A stakeholder said, "When I had my daughter, I looked at location and accessibility, quality of care, and cost. I needed it to be accessible to both my husband and me and provide a rich, child-led environment."

Business Inconsistencies

The stakeholders shared inconsistencies in the quality of care, environment, and professionalism. Some of the comments regarded family childcare business practices as having "Some inconsistencies," "The right one can be amazing. The wrong one can be devastating," and "The great ones are great, and the terrible is terrible." These discrepancies shared by stakeholders could result from tension and misunderstanding between the families and the family childcare provider. According to Porter et al. (2010), disputes about the expectations of caring and day-to-day routines provided to the child could affect the relationships and perspectives of the care routines and expectations of the services.

Several stakeholders referenced the variations in the services provided by some family childcare programs that contributed to the fluctuations. They shared, "It depends. I have seen 'babysitters' and professionals." and "It depends on the home." The inconsistencies could result from the provider having little or no concept about operating a business. However, the instabilities can also be attributed to the myriad of State regulations and professional development required for family childcare programs (Morrissey, 2007). The inconsistent standards, guidelines, and definitions of family childcare can confuse stakeholders using the services.

Licensing

The stakeholders with family care experiences shared that they valued licensed family childcare programs. A stakeholder said, "Yes, because if the program is licensed, it will have to follow state FCC standards." Another stakeholder's response identified other perceived distinctive factors that accompany a licensing status "Yes, licensure is

one important indicator of quality care and demonstrates adherence to metrics that relate to quality care." In addition, a stakeholder focused on the operation of the family childcare program, "Yes, it does make a difference. A licensed facility is likelier to follow the rules and provide a higher quality of care." The literature declared that the licensing process encourages family childcare providers to be a part of a more extensive network to promote professionalism, training, and the confidence to serve children (Viera & Hill, 2019). Viera and Hill (2019) also suggested that becoming licensed is a route to delivering quality services. This piece of literature exhibited that licensing provides regulations, standards, and access to training that supports producing a safe, healthy, and quality environment to care for and educate children.

Concerns about Outside Guest

Some stakeholders expressed concerns about including others outside the provider's family in the childcare environment. An alarming number of stakeholders revealed concerns about guests in the family childcare program's home during business hours. Stakeholders feared "Dangerous situations arising with uncontrollable family issues of [the] provider." An additional stakeholder said, "Safety, not being familiar with the occupants or visitors of the home."

Family Childcare Environment

Research by Vandell (2004) shared that there has been an increase in families using out-of-home childcare options due to the number of women returning to the workforce. These were similar reasons shared with me when families disclosed their purpose for seeking childcare during first-time visits to my family childcare program. However, center-based childcare programs are families' most common care choice

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(Johnson, 2005). Surprisingly, over 75% of the 63 stakeholders who participated in my research concurred that family childcare was a favorable option.

The families that utilized family childcare services used them for many reasons, including the environment, culture, accessibility, flexibility, affordability, mixed-age groups, and a catalyst to drive economic growth by allowing others to return to the workforce and build their businesses (Viera & Hill, 2019). The stakeholders shared an expanse of characteristics of family childcare programs they deemed as beneficial to the families. In addition, they provided opportunities to enhance the child's educational experiences and developmental outcomes. Features shared varied from having a smaller and more intimate environment to having a familiar setting that encourages interactions of multiple age groups.

Smaller/Intimacy

Browne (2009) reported that families choose family childcare programs because of the smaller environment and intimacy provided to the children. The stakeholders said they supported family childcare because it is "a home environment that is more intimate." Another stakeholder mentioned they appreciated having "smaller and fewer children" in the environment. Similarly, a stakeholder referenced family childcare as a "smaller setting [that is] more intimate for each child and family" as an essential characteristic. This statement highlighted the contributing factor of intimacy in constructing relationships between the caregiver, the children, and their families.

Individual Attention and Care/Learning

The smaller environment was also found to support individual care and attention provided to the child. Morrissey (2007) shared that parents who selected to enroll their children in family childcare programs believed the child receives individual care and attention. A stakeholder agreed and shared, "I believe children get more one-on-one care [in a family childcare program], and there is a different level of comfort and connection with families." In addition to being found to provide individual attention and care, the smaller and more intimate environment supported the child's ability to attain optimal learning possibilities. The literature found that intimate relationships in family childcare environments can promote positive interaction that can enhance the child's developmental outcome (Viera & Hill, 2019). One of the stakeholders conveyed that "A smaller group would provide highly individualized education to the children enrolled in the program. Viera and Hill (2019) demonstrated that family childcare programs cultivate an environment that supports healthy growth. Individualized learning supports healthy development.

Younger Children

The smaller setting in family childcare programs was also an attractive feature for parents of infant children. Research indicated that some families with younger children are more partial to smaller and more intimate childcare environments when selecting childcare options (Bromer et al., 2021). A stakeholder agreed and shared, "I believe family childcare is another option in the early childhood education space, and it has strong benefits, especially for families looking for care for infants and continuity of care." Additionally, a stakeholder said, "It [family childcare program] is a less stressful

environment for infants-2 years of age." These factors contributed to the data that shows that over 20% of infants are enrolled in family childcare programs. (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 2019)

In addition, literature has shown that these smaller environments are instrumental in supporting overall growth and development beginning in infancy. Browne (2009) communicated that "home-based/family child care provider is responsible for all aspects of child care and early education experiences—from encouraging an infant's first steps, to toilet training, to encouraging prosocial behavior, to modeling language skills, to reinforcing children for appropriate responses." (p.5). Furthermore, it demonstrated the benefit of infants in family childcare programs.

Home-like Environment

The sense of home and familiarity offered in family childcare programs were other relevant characteristics that transpired when describing the family childcare environment. Lanigan (2010) stated that families value a childcare program with a homelike environment that supports mixed ages groups with one consistent provider. Several stakeholders compared the comfort received in family childcare to what a child receives in their own home. They indicated that a" home environment is more nurturing and offers the same comforts of home" and "a home environment provides an extension to a child's home that lends a level of comfort to a child." In addition, a stakeholder implied that "a home environment would likely be a more relaxed environment mirroring more of a family." One stakeholder shared their experience with family childcare "My daughter attended a home daycare, which gave me a feeling of an extension of my own home and made me feel more comfortable leaving her for long periods."

Mixed Age Groups

Along with smaller environments and one-on-one interactions being a valued feature of family childcare programs, the stakeholders communicated that they preferred mixed-age grouping and adaptable environments. Stakeholders portrayed family childcare environments as a setting that "is more intimate, mixed-age groupings and less formal in nature." The less structured setting enabled family childcare providers to care for the mixed-age groups at a comfortable pace for the child. This structure is influential in eradicating the anxiety that can be evolved in a more formal environment. At the same time, it fostered consistent interchanges with the child and ongoing interactions and alliances between the different age groups. Vosniadou (2001) indicated that a productive environment that supports collaboration is fundamental to enriching student learning. A stakeholder also disclosed that the mixed ages "simulates a family" where the children of various ages and developmental phases can be together and learn from one another in the same environment.

Mixed Age Groups- Children with Different Abilities

Collaborations in these environments were also instrumental in supporting learning in children with varied abilities. As reported by Bromer et al., "A mixed-age group could be a good environment for children with disabilities because it gives children at different developmental levels opportunities to play and learn together" (2006, p.112). In agreeance, a stakeholder shared that "FCC can meet a child's individual needs easier. FCC is more flexible" for children to learn and explore. Flexibility was crucial for all children but especially valuable for those requiring additional assistance. The diverse

needs of children were easily achievable in a smaller environment because they were not diverted or daunted by the large crowds they may find in other childcare settings.

Mixed Age Groups – Relationships

The mixed age groups also abetted in fostering relationships with the children and other families due to being together in the same environment throughout the day. A stakeholder inferred that a benefit of a family childcare environment is "The relationships [formed] between children, families, and the provider. They stay together as a mixed-age cohort." Another stakeholder shared,

> "I was referred by a close friend who was well acquainted with the FCC owner. I also know that the community has had some input because the reputation of the FCC is excellent. Also, that first interaction with the FCC staff and my child nailed it for me. I observed very positive interactions, and my daughter was comfortable. That made all the difference for me."

Both comments disclosed the critical role the children's daily interactions with peers in the different age groups had in forming meaningful relationships.

Having a good standing in the community also supported the continuous relationship with the families that live in the community. Freeman (2011) stated that the provider's relationship with the children is often extended because they live in their community. The family childcare provider often lived near the child's home, being a regular part of their community life for many years. As reported by Bromer et al. (2021), factors like group sizes and intentional learning strengthen the provider's relationship with the children and their language and cognitive development. These skills were

considered essential when preparing children for school readiness and building skills to

assist them in improving positive developments.

Stakeholders with Family Childcare Experiences

The data gathered from the stakeholders identified as having family childcare experiences (stakeholders with family childcare experience) shared that the learning environment and the provider's response to the children were ranked as favorable factors of family childcare programs. These components were rated higher than the provider's education, the presence of assistants, the professional development of the family childcare provider, and the quality of the materials/curriculum in the learning environment. See Figure 3

A significant element that emerged from the data in Figure 3 is that the stated factors were critical and had some correlation with their preference for home childcare programs. These stakeholders understood the positive impact of learning environments and the child's response to the provider when evaluating a family childcare program. More emphasis was on factors believed to influence a child's development, not the provider's perceived educational requirements and additional staff.

The data in Figure 4 also exhibited that these stakeholders have used these services for an average of two to three of their own children. It conveyed that the stakeholders that used family childcare programs were either repeat customers or chose this environment because of the multi-age options. The stakeholders expressed their appreciation for being able to keep their children of different ages together in the same childcare environment throughout the day. In addition, it demonstrated their satisfaction with family childcare programs.

As shown in Figure 5, these stakeholders also revealed that 75% believed that quality of family childcare programs was comparable to center-based programs. This response may coincide with their decision to enroll their children in a family childcare environment. If they harbored bad feelings or believed that the family childcare setting was inadequate, they would not have chosen this setting to care for and educate their children.

However, about 25% of these stakeholders agreed that the quality of center-based programs believed that this childcare option was better equipped to serve children. Since these stakeholders expressed they had some experiences with family childcare, these sentiments could be attributed to remorseful encounters in family childcare programs. At the same time, Figure 6 displayed that over 95% of these stakeholders with family childcare experiences conveyed favorable views of family childcare programs. These perspectives likely aligned with their decision to use family childcare programs. Additionally, it demonstrated their approval of the services offered in these programs.

As shown in Figure 5, these stakeholders also revealed that 75% believed the quality of family childcare programs was comparable to center-based programs. These responses coincided with their decision to enroll their children in a family childcare environment. If these stakeholders harbored bad feelings or they believed that the family childcare setting was inadequate, they would not have chosen this setting to care for and educate their children.

Family Childcare and Subject Matter Experts Interviews

Five licensed family childcare providers and five subject matter experts were interviewed using the questions in Appendix A and Appendix B to probe further and emphasize the data shared in the survey. The subject matter experts selected to interview for this portion of the doctoral research are experts in the field of early childhood education with both center-based and family childcare experiences. The chosen interviewees are highly regarded in the field of early childhood education. They have over twenty years of experience in this profession, with multiple educational degrees ranging from graduate level to post-graduate level. The subject matter experts have also served in many leadership capacities, including professional research specialist and trainers, elementary school principal, early childhood higher education faculty member, and higher education administration leadership.

The interviewed licensed family childcare providers were selected based on recommendations of other early childhood professionals and peers in the industry. Most licensed family childcare providers interviewed have served in this role for over ten years. They have educative experiences ranging from a college education to a master's degree. In addition, these licensed family childcare providers have earned numerous professional certifications, including Family Childcare Credentials, Early Childhood Education Credentials, Infant and Toddler Credentials, Child Development Associate Credentials, and First aid/CPR. The goal was to interview stakeholders with wide-ranging experiences in early childhood education to capture varied perspectives to enrich the quality of information assembled to construct best practices to benefit licensed family childcare providers and increase the awareness of these programs.

After evaluating the ten interview transcripts from the licensed family childcare providers and the subject matter experts, similar feedback was recognized by the survey stakeholders. However, for this section of the chapter, I highlighted the distinctive facets of the interviewee's responses that provided a higher level of insight and understanding of the factors that contributed to the three emergent themes: Family Childcare Provider, Family Childcare Business, and Family Childcare Environment.

Family Childcare Provider

As anticipated, the subject matter experts and licensed family childcare providers displayed a high regard for family childcare providers and their role in educating young children. Nevertheless, factors were shared that are essential to understanding licensed family childcare providers' work and its challenges to serve in this capacity successfully. Some of the factors referenced included (1) expectations of a provider; (2) love language; (3) reasons for entering the field; (4) challenges; and (5) "babysitting." In the following text, the different elements were described.

Expectations of a provider

The subject matter experts conveyed their expectations of family childcare providers. They all expressed the need to be knowledgeable in the business of family childcare and educating children. Stakeholder "Rita," communicated,

> The provider is, has some experience and is knowledgeable about child development, …had some training some in early childhood education. And some training in running a business …some training on how to develop appropriate I'm going to call them lessons not just activities, but appropriate lessons for children.

How to set up your environment, to help children be successful as they may be

move on and thinking about pre–K as they move on, into kindergarten. You

know, being able to manage all of that.

Stakeholder "Zenobia," also revealed,

I would offer they participate in professional development and seek out networks

of other family childcare providers. I think there is so many resources available

for family childcare providers, especially now there is so much online they have a

lot of opportunities to learn and grow. So, I would definitely encourage them to

take advantage of those resources.

Love Language

A subject matter expert also discussed the love language experienced between the

family childcare provider and the children was acknowledged as a strength of family

childcare programs. This love language is a term of endearment often expressed in these

environments when the family childcare provider is referred to by the child as one of

their family members, resembling a special family relationship. Stakeholder "Olivia,"

shared,

You hear kids in family childcare, call the provider, grandma…sometimes the

language they use hints at how the children develop a love for that provider in a

way that I think might be deeper than just being in a center.

This stakeholder additionally shared the love language is a result of the continuing

caregiver and the long hours spent together throughout the day.

Reasons for Entering the Field

Most licensed family childcare providers shared that they initially entered this profession to assist their families and the community. Some reasons included staying home with their children or grandchildren and helping their neighbors with childcare. However, one family of childcare providers shared that their primary reason for entering this profession was the children's lack of preparation for advanced learning. Stakeholder "Willow," shared,

> I was working in elementary school district, my local elementary school district, and just noticing the kids coming in, their lack of ability to do, their lack of foundational skills...these kids were not, in my opinion, receiving quality childcare, either they were not going or they were in the center or home environment that was not engaging…I said, you retire, you're leaving the elementary school district. My next step was how can I help? What can I do and that was where I focus[ed] my attention to try to make a difference and that was my way of trying to make a difference.

Challenges

Primary concerns indicated by subject matter experts regarding family childcare providers included many areas. These circumstances varied from lacking the capability to meet the varied developmental needs of the children enrolled in their programs, working alone, and attempting to assemble the appropriate materials required to educate the different age groups. Stakeholder "Yolanda," reported, "the weaknesses are the pluses, the multi ages, but the weakness is meeting the needs of all the different age groups simultaneously."

The literature by Viera and Hill (2019) also implied that the isolation of providers could be reduced with the interaction of other family childcare providers during training and learning opportunities events. In addition, stakeholder, Rita," conveyed, "the weaknesses can be the isolation of families and childcare providers, not having many resources, and realizing that there is a network of other providers out there for them."

Licensed family childcare providers agreed that in addition to work isolation, insufficient funding negatively affected the family childcare provider and the program. According to Bromer et al. (2021), insufficient funding and the working conditions of a family childcare business can impact the endurance of a business. This lack contributed to the work-related stress of the family childcare programs and generated apprehension for the children and the families in those programs. Stakeholder "Tracy," disclosed, "The weakness is that you must make your own funding. Also, you only get paid if we have children. So, resources are hard to come by, and you must make the best of it." Another stakeholder "Rachel," expressed, "You are here 24/7. You cannot always break away from the daycare." Last, stakeholder "Sarah," shared, "Sadly, I think because not all providers are willing to keep learning, or they think they really are babysitters."

Babysitting

The term *"babysitter"* was viewed as demeaning to family childcare providers who were invariably working on reimaging their work (Tuominen, 2003). This process demonstrated their contribution to educating young children. When licensed family childcare providers were asked how they viewed their role as family childcare providers, they all resoundingly said they were business owners. They all embraced the different facets of running a family childcare business. Nevertheless, some licensed family

childcare providers communicated that initially, they were unsure of the responsibilities of operating a business and exhibited behaviors inconsistent with their current role. Stakeholder "Sarah," shared,

> I feel so sad because we are not 'babysitters'… Because not all providers are willing to keep learning, they think they are 'babysitters.' Also, I would not say I like the name of childcare providers. I am an educator for young children. I work in my home; that is the only difference. I have a curriculum in this program. We have our daily routine and the support system you know to teach the kids to be ready for kindergarten. So, it is unfortunate when I hear that I am a 'babysitter.'

Stakeholder "Rachel," disclosed,

> I did have one parent who constantly said, oh, the 'babysitter,' we had to have a few times, little discussion, you know, [about] the difference between a 'babysitter' and daycare provider. I think keeping it very professional, which I do, and ensuring all my documentation constantly keeps the parent in the loop of the educational expectation and what is going on. It is just a reminder that the child is in school, and they are learning.

Last stakeholder "Tracy," declared,

> It is degrading because of everything you put into your program. At school, you are not going to call a preschool teacher a 'babysitter.' You are not going to call your elementary school teacher a 'babysitter.' Although we are in my home, we are still doing the same things they would do in a school setting because my daycare is set up like a school…we are focusing on education.

Although the subject matter experts unanimously consented that family childcare providers are educators and not babysitters, they conveyed other attributes they considered contribute to the "babysitter" reference. Stakeholder "Yolanda," stated,

> The family childcare providers educational background is so vast, even more so than in a center-based program. And so, because you can just walk into a family childcare job, you know, pretty easily. For the most part, it's perpetuating the idea of not being able or not being as high quality as other programs.

In addition, stakeholder "Rita", disclosed,

> Don't have a daily plan. Don't put up a lunch menu or what? Whatever it is, you know, or schedule or routine don't have a newsletter where you communicate, you know, just make everything very, very informal. Try to formalize some of your practices make it look like you're not just a babysitter.

The stakeholder "Zenobia," said

> I think if they don't see themselves as professionals, if they don't have that, understanding of the importance of the work that they do, that kind of thought that Oh, anybody can do family childcare. but not everyone can do it well. I think not having a structured environment for the children and not focusing on their learning, all those kinds of things. Just perpetuate that stereotype.

Furthermore, the stakeholder, "Olivia," implied how the verbiage used by some family childcare providers is a disservice to their effort to overcome the adverse perceptions. This stakeholder shared, "[the word] '***daycare'*** underplays what they do. I

think it is easy to make the leap from daycare to just 'babysitter'…it is much like a convenient service, not an educational component."

Family Childcare Business

In addition to the accentuated elements communicated to support family childcare providers, the licensed family childcare providers and the subject matter experts denoted relevant business components associated with family childcare. The facets included (1) mission statement; (2) business expectations similar to center-based programs; (3) business owner. They are described in the text below.

Mission Statement

The licensed family childcare providers discussed the importance of having a mission statement. The mission statement denotes the goals and purpose of their family childcare program and the educational, community, and safety aspects as relevant business components. According to Cochran et al. (2008), this statement describes the business objectives, goals, and policies. These are vital components added to the uniqueness of the business that demonstrated a commitment to quality service provided to the families and the community. At the same time, it enabled the families and potential families to be aware of the family childcare program's purposes and goals for caring for and educating their children. It also provided a sense of ease and comfort that the children were enrolled in the right program. Stakeholder "Sarah," shared,

> My mission is every single day the kids will learn something new, they feel safe
> in a healthy environment, and most importantly the parents feel happy and secure
> when they go to work or their school their child is in the right place.

Stakeholder "Breana," disclosed. "I believe the purpose is to make with, say, an enduring, positive impression on every child trusted in my care, enabling them to grow into a productive member of society." In addition, stakeholder "Rachel," conveyed that their mission is "To be a staple of the community and service to the families and to use me basically for any educational things… I am an advocate, not only for the families but other childcare providers."

Additionally, Viera and Hill (2006) cited,

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"When family childcare providers feel valued for their professional contributions to early childhood education and can earn a fair wage for their labor, they are more likely to identify family childcare as their chosen occupation and intend to remain in the field for longer periods of time, building sustainable businesses that serve children and families for years to come." (p.24).

Business Expectations Similar to Center-based programs

Subject matter experts acknowledged that childcare programs should operate within the same guidelines and standards, so the child's learning and safety are supported regardless of the setting or location. Stakeholder "Zenobia," shared,

> They operate with the same ethical guidelines, the same programmatic standards or similar programmatic standards. The same developmental understanding, developmentally appropriate practices as a center-based program would, you know, regardless of where the location is, to me. Children should be treated the same way and the expectations for their safety their health, their well-being their learning, their development, should all be very consistent, regardless of the location that they're in.

Stakeholder "Rita," said,

> My expectations were very similar to when they went to center-based care in that I expected them to have opportunities to engage in activities and lessons that you know, enhanced, or stimulated their curiosity about the world around them.

Business Owners

Almost all the licensed family childcare providers viewed themselves as business owners that operated a childcare business inside their homes. However, a licensed family childcare provider shared that they concentrated more on loving the children and ensuring they are comfortable in their environment than defining their role in a specific category. This finding supported the literature that implied that family childcare providers could be compassionate providers, educators, and business owners (Viera & Hill, 2019). Nevertheless, the licensed family childcare providers identified as business owners disclosed that it gave them a different perspective on their day-to-day work. Stakeholder "Sarah," conveyed,

> I was thinking this is just a job and do the best you can. But then I started going to different conference and training workshops. And they taught me this is a business and not a job. I had to take care of so many areas, so many things. So, for me, I'm a business owner…I had to learn everything every single piece of my business.

In addition, stakeholder "Willow," stated,

> Well, I'm looking at it as a business because I look at it as a bigger umbrella. A job is strictly just a job. You are just focusing in my opinion on one thing, so when I look at it as my business, I have [learned] different aspects of my business that you know, the financial part, the manager part, you know, being educator, so all those things fall under the umbrella of having my business.

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And last, stakeholder "Rachel," exclaimed, "A business, absolutely. I think when I did the Business Administration scales that really gave me a backbone."

However, one subject matter expert shared their perspective of family childcare providers as independent business owners. They focused on the opportunities presented to them to thrive in a manner that reaffirmed their personal and business aspirations. Stakeholder, "Olivia," shared,

> Family childcare allows women to be independent business owners, and to work for themselves to set their own boundaries, writing their own contracts, policies, to ensure they get the paid time off, set their own hours…that is not something a teacher in a childcare center could do.

Family Childcare Environment

The licensed family childcare providers and subject matter experts similarly agreed with many of the survey stakeholders on the importance of the environment in family childcare programs. They indicated that the family childcare programs' learning environments are vital to properly caring for the children and meeting their academic needs. Davis cited, "The large amounts of time that some children spend in childcare mandates early childhood professionals, parents, and the community at large to ensure the highest quality interactions and environments for young children and adults who use these services" (1998, p. 120-121). This suggestion applied to both indoor and outdoor learning environments in childcare programs. The outcomes were interrelated to these four factors related to the environment: (1) description of the program; (2) quality of program; (3) Supporting families; (4) physical layout; (5) multiple ages; (6) culture, which will be discussed in the sections below.

Description of the program

When the licensed family childcare providers described their programs, they focused on the learning environment. They implied that the environment should encourage learning by providing emotional support that enables the children to explore and be successful in their learning. They also emphasized the positive affections they believed are essential in educating children and apparent in family childcare environments. Stakeholder "Breana," shared, "I would say my childcare would be best described as a loving and nurturing environment focused on helping the child grow into their best selves." Another stakeholder "Willow," said, "I have a loving, caring, educational environment that focus on education development. Definitely nurturing."

Quality of program

The subject matter experts disclosed their definition of what is perceived as a quality program. Many subject matter experts defined *quality* as a practical environment where children are encouraged to learn naturally. A stakeholder, "Yolanda," disclosed, that quality included

the ethical and programmatic guidelines that the learning standards are still honored. I think that is important.. a good family childcare home has a feel to it that you walk in, and it is a natural family-like feel; it is so not like putting a preschool in a home.

In addition, stakeholder "Olivia," revealed,

It is like a beautiful, organized chaos like…it could be quiet and serene, but it has freedom for children to move through their days, still, structure but it is not as strict. You can identify centers in or like activity sections, like the blocks and the art and this and that, but it is not so like sterile. The flow of it feels more organic.

Interestingly, the subject matter experts defined their perception of "quality" in family childcare programs by describing the atmosphere and relaxed environment resembling the responses disclosed by the licensed family childcare providers when they described their family childcare program.

Supporting families

Besides the expectation of a learning environment where the children are nurtured and cared for, the licensed family childcare providers and subject matter experts overwhelmingly centered on relationships. They believed that constructing relationships with families has a significant role in supporting the child's education. Furthermore, it

demonstrated the measure put into building these relationships to ensure that families and children were pleased with the services provided in the program. This effort also affirmed that the families were a good fit, forming a sense of community. Stakeholder "Rachel," declared,

> I am basically collaborating with the parents and the child when they come here. I am all about communication, first and foremost, [I] make sure it is a perfect fit for the child.

Stakeholder "Olivia," agreed and shared,

> What I really think young kids and parents can get out of family childcare is that family component. I think, even interacting, picking up your child at the end of the day is a different ballgame when you're going into a home, and you are seeing these other kids often varying ages. You could see, a four-year-old walk up and start chatting with you versus if you're only picking your infant in an infant room, you're not going to have one of the infants' crawls over and start chatting you up. I think family childcare offers this opportunity for children and their families to feel like they're in this deep community, not just a classroom.

Physical layout

A licensed family childcare provider and subject matter expert declared that the physical layout of an environment was a pertinent component that supports school readiness. This statement alluded to the assumption that the physical environment has a role in mentally preparing children to transition to an elementary school classroom successfully. Stakeholder "Willow," reported, "Having your child exposed to an environment that is not set up, like a school or whatever, they do not have a visual of a potential school setup. It can be confusing to the child." At the same time, a subject matter expert stated the potential adverse impact on a child if the environment is not implemented adequately with the correct staff. Stakeholder "Dana," subject matter expert, conveyed, "if it is done well, it is nurturing, more like a home atmosphere with care than it is in a school type setting, which, could possibly be institutional if you don't have enough adults."

Multiple Age Groups

Multiple age groups are another factor that the subject matter experts highlighted as being instrumental in promoting growth and development in different age groups. Porter et al. disclosed, "The mixed-age groups, sibling groups, and homelike settings... can contribute to increased social competence and self-regulation needed for school readiness (2010, p.78)". These circumstances allowed the children to learn from one another while interacting throughout the day. Creating a rich atmosphere that benefited all children enrolled and enhanced the skills and knowledge required to support future learning. Stakeholder "Olivia," shared, "Idea of mixed age groups, the notion of a blended family that's born out of a family childcare program where you are around

people… you learn from the older [children], and you get to interact with younger."

Another stakeholder "Yolanda," revealed,

> I see a benefit in the mixed age group. It allows the program to be more flexible to
> the needs and development of the children there... and to learn from one another
> really easily and help one another, which I love.

Culture

Viera and Hill (2019) stated that the childcare provider must provide purposeful
interactions with the community and the families to provide high-quality and culturally
competent services. This statement displayed the critical role culture incorporated in the
learning environment has in the child's learning experiences. The subject matter experts
agreed that this process should be intentional and that the families should be involved.
Stakeholder "Zenobia," shared, "You need to communicate with the families, help them
feel some ownership of the space and their children's education, and understand not just
like their ethnic culture, but the culture of their family." In addition, stakeholder
"Olivia," disclosed, "It should not feel like a DEI program, and it should flow in
the program. It is intentional and almost like subconsciously and ingrained."
Stakeholder "Rita," similarly shared,

> I think culture is very individual. It is important that even if you have people who
> are from your community, it is important to build that relationship…and to not
> make assumptions about people even if they have the same values.

 Simultaneously, the licensed family childcare providers consented that
comprehending the family's culture and integrating cultural materials and resources into

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the learning environment was critical to being culturally responsible when educating the child. In addition, it created opportunities to bring awareness to similarities and differences in people, promoting cultural awareness. The licensed family childcare providers shared how cultural responsibility was embodied in their programs. Stakeholder "Tracy," shared,

> Things are labeled English and Spanish depending on the family race or ethnic background. I will try and do things like newsletters and things like that will be given to them in their language. Also, I will get someone to translate for me if I need a translator.

Another licensed family childcare provider stakeholder, "Willow," shared, "All of my clients are African American; I try to focus on activities that bring awareness to the African American culture and other cultures. Although they are young, we can bring awareness to how we are alike and different." In addition, stakeholder "Breana," a family childcare provider, declared, "We celebrate cultures and holidays, and all the kids learn to better relate to one another. I think all cultures and races should be recognized and respected."

Interpretation

The findings shared in this chapter were a compilation of the views of the licensed family childcare providers, subject matter experts, and survey stakeholders about family childcare programs. Most prevailing thoughts about family childcare programs were optimistic, and stakeholders agreed it was a conceivable childcare option for families. The families that used family childcare programs appeared pleased with their services and used them for more than one child. However, the few stakeholders who used opposing viewpoints as they described family childcare programs did not use these childcare services. They perceived that family childcare providers only cared for children and that these programs had no educational component. In addition, some stakeholders needed help understanding the difference between licensed and accredited programs. They were assumed to be the same. These assumptions also indicated a need for more understanding of the quality features and education offered in the family childcare program. Also, the above and beyond effort goes into the accreditation process to support higher-quality programs.

The licensed family childcare providers interviewed depicted themselves as educators and business owners. They openly discussed their businesses and shared the different features of their programs that they believed contributed to the quality of their programs. In addition, they shared ongoing training and networking opportunities they experienced as they enhanced their skills and knowledge. Although they referred to themselves as business owners, only a few licensed family childcare providers were familiar with training and tools that enriched their business administration skills, like the Business Administration Scale training offered through the McCormick Center for

Leadership Center. Several family childcare providers shared that they only attended the required licensing training and were not members of national early childhood organizations and family childcare association professional groups. This lack of involvement in these professional organizations exhibited a need for more awareness provided to family childcare providers on training tailored to their business needs. In addition, better marketing measures are provided by these organizations to meet the needs of this uninformed market.

The licensed family childcare providers also discussed the not-so-pleasant topics associated with being a family childcare provider, like the minimization of their work. They believed there needs to be a consistent message about the services offered by family childcare programs and the benefits of these smaller, intimate environments. This message must be developed collaboratively with family childcare providers and early childhood organizations to address these issues and strengthen the profession. Nevertheless, they shared their love and passion for their work and the families enrolled in their programs.

The subject matter experts interviewed supported family childcare programs and believed the programs conducted professionally were suitable for families. They were familiar with the feature of these programs and how they benefited the community. They believed the intimate experiences and relationships formed with families were distinctive characteristics of family childcare programs.

The licensed family childcare providers and subject matter experts supported ongoing training and development to enhance professional skills. Both stakeholders

deemed these skills crucial for working with families and children in their programs. They also understood how the lack of consistency in the operations of family childcare programs, the presentation of the environment, and the family childcare provider contributed to the devaluation of these programs. These inconsistencies were instrumental in those unfamiliar with the family childcare programs to uphold negative perceptions.

Interestingly, licensed family childcare providers and subject matter experts accentuated that consistent language enhanced the profession. The licensed family childcare providers used verbiage such as "business owner" and "educator" to clarify their role in the profession. In addition, the subject matter experts emphasized not using the word "daycare." Both had similar intentions as they strived for homogeneous messaging when they defined family childcare providers' professional titles and expectations.

Judgments

The stakeholders' responses from the surveys and interviews provided rich data that answered and addressed the dissertation's primary research questions stated below sufficiently. The data collected provided vast essential information that provided better insight into the components required to construct best practice recommendations. They enhanced the awareness and business practices of family childcare programs. These recommendations are discussed in the next chapter.

1. What key characteristics of family childcare programs do stakeholders report as essential attributes of successfully functioning programs?

2. What issues or problems of practice about family childcare programs do stakeholders report related to their direct or indirect experiences with family childcare programs?

3. What program gaps or deficits do stakeholders report from their direct or indirect experiences with family childcare programs?

4. What recommended systematic program improvements can be derived from qualitative

The stakeholders' responses provided comprehensive paramount data used to effectively construct the best practices recommendations to enhance the awareness and business practices of family childcare programs to be discussed in the next chapter. This doctoral research aimed to develop best practices based on the perspectives of licensed family childcare providers, subject matter experts, and stakeholders that have used childcare experiences.

Chapter 5: Recommendations

This research aimed to develop best practices for licensed family childcare providers to support high-quality learning and experiences. These best practices were based on the perspectives of licensed family childcare providers, subject matter experts, and stakeholders who have used childcare experiences.

Best Practice Recommendations

Based on the responses to the survey and interview questions, I have constructed best practice recommendations to help increase awareness for stakeholders looking for childcare services and best practices for licensed family childcare programs. These best practices included suggestions to assist national groups and policymakers in providing additional research to support high-quality programming. Also included are recommendations to prepare family childcare providers sufficiently to educate children and to develop environments that support healthy learning. Prior literature referenced a myriad of best practices. However, I gathered additional information utilizing the recently attained data from this doctoral research stakeholders.

Properly implementing the recommended best practices creates a system that sustains a continuous process required to build a successful childcare business and promote high-quality experiences. According to Talan & Bloom (2004), a system integrates the strategic alliances of different entities collaborating to establish procedures that provide accountability that produces substantiated evidence. In addition, a thriving system benefits the family childcare provider, the stakeholders, their children, and the local community. This section reviewed the recommended best practices organized by (1) family childcare provider; (2) business practices, and (3) family childcare environment.

Family Childcare Provider

     For the licensed family childcare provider to operate at a level that promotes high-quality services, it was pertinent to integrate practices that supported their ability to do their work sufficiently. These practices included participation in professional network associations and professional development that enriched their skills and strategies to perfect their work. In addition, they utilized best practices that supported their professional identity through continuous advocacy. Moreover, these practices incorporated flexibility into their daily routine and promoted individualization in the child's learning. Furthermore, these best practices have assisted the licensed family childcare provider to develop a balanced life through self-care. These procedures were vital to providing high-quality services.

Family childcare network

     Participating in a family childcare network was a great way to connect with other providers who functioned as resources who understand one's business.. According to Viera and Hill (2019),

> "Supporting quality in family childcare is about more than quality enhancement initiatives; it is also about ensuring that family childcare providers are connected to a professional community of their peers and have stable, sufficient financing and strong business practices, all of which contribute to making quality possible and sustaining those quality programs once they are established so that they can serve children and families for years to come." (p.16)

Networking created opportunities for a provider to share their skills and expertise. Learning new skills and sharing ideas while supporting each other with common issues only family childcare providers understood helped develop and strengthen the program for everyone involved. In addition, these communities supported the quality of services delivered in these programs. Eckhardt and Egert (2020) implied that family childcare providers that participated in family childcare professional networks offered a higher level of quality in their programs. Furthermore, networking enabled family childcare providers to encourage each other during difficult times and provide support when they felt depressed or burnt out.

Professional Organizations

It was imperative to take an active role in early childhood education professional organizations at the local, state, and national levels. Collaborating with these organizations could enhance one's skills and knowledge while supporting network opportunities with other providers. More importantly, building relationships with associations familiar with family childcare's structure, dynamics, and challenges were instrumental when advocating for their programs. According to the National Association for Family childcare (NAFCC) (2022), early childhood educators understand their role as advocates for children and others in their profession, giving them a unified voice. Participation in these organizations creates opportunities for them to champion to enhance their professional identity through collaboration and consistency.

Professional Development

Family childcare providers should participate in ongoing professional development opportunities beyond the minimum training hours required by some state

licensing agencies. They should be receptive to learning new ideas and strategies to educate children while enhancing their professional and business skills and knowledge, like acquiring the latest educational strategies to promote learning experiences that support school readiness. These new strategies included being open to incorporating technology into the curriculum that enriched the children's learning experiences while preparing them to use these resources that are often used in elementary school environments. The professional development should include conferences, webinars, online resources, network meetings, certifications, and college courses offered on the local, state, and national platforms.

It was essential to take business training and college courses that included money management topics to assist family childcare providers in developing a better relationship with money and sustaining prosperous and stable businesses. These money management learning opportunities should contain topics that advise the family childcare provider on saving for retirement, allocating funds for specific resources, and budgeting to avoid overspending. Additionally, it was beneficial to seek business training supportive of the unique format and needs of the family childcare business, like the business administrator scale (BAS) tool training. BAS is a tool designed to evaluate and enhance business and professional practices in family childcare programs (Talan, 2018). Since this tool was specifically tailored to family childcare programs, it likely included components valuable to providing the family childcare provider with pertinent information to support quality business practices.

Some family childcare provider stakeholders shared that they regularly participate in peer mentor engagement to guide novice family childcare providers and

rejuvenate seasoned providers to support their learning and help avoid burnout. Browne (2009) reported that family childcare providers benefit from joining professional organizations and network groups. This procedure was vital for learning new concepts and techniques to enhance their skills and knowledge while overcoming challenges attributed to working in isolation. This information was also accurate for professional development training opportunities, as they should be tailored explicitly to meet the unique needs of family childcare providers. The literature supports that ongoing professional development training should be offered at times that best support the family childcare provider's schedule. The training should strengthen their roles as business owners and educators (Viera & Hill, 2019). This flexibility increased the likelihood of family childcare providers attending training beneficial to their growth and development.

Family childcare programs should consider enrolling in an associate's or bachelor's degree in an early childhood-related program. The coursework should provide ongoing opportunities to learn the elements of child development essential for understanding and educating young children. In addition to attaining a college degree in early childhood education, family childcare providers may consider earning a credential. The child development associate (CDA) credential is earned when a particular level of skills and knowledge in early childhood education is demonstrated through different opportunities (2021). Some CDA training is also offered through coursework and training.

In addition to the CDA, other early childhood credentials are available to support family childcare providers. The State of Illinois offers a Family Child Care credential. This credential is created explicitly for those working in family childcare programs

(2022). However, it was crucial for supportive services and agencies to make the family childhood provider(s) aware of the training and credential opportunities. Several family childcare provider stakeholders revealed they were unaware of the family childcare credential.

Additionally, this combination of active membership in an organization and networking with peers was vital to ongoing professional development. It promoted intentional learning for the provider and an effort to remain updated and prepared to educate children. Family childcare providers should stay current, assessing the children's knowledge and the learning environment for opportunities to improve the quality of teaching and learning. Often, family childcare providers are involved in many activities and tasks throughout the day. These duties cause the family childcare provider to inadvertently lose focus on these vital aspects of staying relevant and applying new approaches to engage children and enhance learning.

Professional Identity

Family childcare providers can construct their identity by implementing quality business practices, providing appropriate documentation, and communicating necessary information to the stakeholders. Researchers found that integrating their professional identity into a parent-provider handbook through policies and procedures would be instrumental in solidifying one's status as an expert in the field (Gerstenbratt et al., 2014). These resources would assist in undoing the devaluation of the family childcare provider profession. In addition, on a national level, family childcare providers need to take a dynamic position role in collaborating with the national early childhood organizations to

extend that professional identity to include proficient entry and expectations for family childcare providers.

The Power to the Profession initiative facilitated by the National Association for the Education of Young Children is working to create a unified framework to shape and identify the early childhood workforce (n.d.). It restated the importance of including everyone to create a diverse, influential voice regarding early childhood professions. This inclusive process enabled family childcare providers to share their professional viewpoints. It is pertinent for family childhood professionals to continue to engage in these efforts on different levels and stay updated on issues affecting their livelihood.

Flexibility in Learning Approach

Family childcare providers should be open to following the child's lead and using different teaching modes to keep learning fun and engaging for the children. According to (Sao et al., 2020), a child-centered environment enables the child to learn and develop comprehensively through their experiences. Incorporating items of the child's interest into the learning environment enabled the child to be creative in their approach to learning. Samuelsson and Carlsson (2008) cited that children are vibrant, requiring educators to integrate learning interests to capture the child's attention to support their learning. In addition, it encouraged autonomy and freedom to learn in their own way. Furthermore, it allowed the family childcare provider to learn from the children and incorporate more resources into the environment to foster learning.

Self-Care

Professionalism includes recognizing one's limitations. Family childcare providers should be proactive in taking care of themselves, pursuing guidance as needed, or risking burnout. Lewis and King (2019) implied that partaking in self-care procedures is essential for minimizing stress and work burnout. Incorporating paid days off in the stakeholders' contracts and using those days for self-care is paramount in seeking life balance. These opportunities enable the family childcare provider the time and space to rejuvenate their physical and mental capabilities, which is pertinent for functioning at their best while conducting a successful business. This lack of preservation is a disservice to family childcare providers and the stakeholders they serve.

Professionalism – Daily Operations

Professionalism is expected from the stakeholders that use these services. It should be represented in the dress attire, business practices, and learning environment. A person's attire influences how one feels about themselves and how other people perceive you. (Tolani, 2018) Although it is a home business, family childcare providers should understand that operating a professional business requires demonstrating professionalism in everything they do, even in a flexible work environment. Family childcare providers must refer to themselves as business owners that educate children in their homes. It is not easy for an individual to influence others when they are not confident in their role and contributions as family childcare providers. Although this place is also a home, providers should remember that operating a professional business requires demonstrating continuous professionalism. These practices diminish the possibilities for public perceptions that devalue the work of family childcare programs.

Business Practices

Incorporating the proper business practice is necessary to support the success of a family childcare business and add value that is beneficial to the stakeholders. Some components included clearly defining their purposes by integrating a mission statement. At the same time, utilizing practices that support safety for the provider and the stakeholders enrolled in family childcare programs. In addition, it is imperative to consistently communicate with the families and keep them updated on enhancements in the programs to exhibit continuous improvements that enhance learning opportunities. Last, it is vital to utilize effective marketing to keep the community informed of the offered services and ensure financial stability through complete enrollment. These business practices are instrumental in providing high-quality childcare services.

Mission Statement

Having a known vision and understanding of operating an influential business is vital when working with the public and entrusting others to identify individuals as business owners. Pursuing this objective requires ongoing professional development and business analysis to ensure public perception aligns with the program's vision and perspectives. Before taking on the role of a family childcare provider, I owned a children's boutique resale franchise business, so I understood the importance of perceptions and effective business practices. However, when joining the field of early childhood, I had to develop goals supporting my vision of this profession, running a business, and educating young children. Enhancement entails continual learning and implementing valuable business practices and structure to support success in this career.

Enhancements

Notifying and updating stakeholders on all childcare program improvements is essential. Family childcare providers should articulate the efforts and success of their programs through Accreditation and participation in quality improvement programs. NAFCC shares that "Accreditation offers national recognition to family child care programs meeting the highest standards for home-based early care and education. Helping parents recognize and choose high-quality family child care, our symbol of quality honors diversity and reflects cultural competency." (2023, para 1) This information will demonstrate the family childcare provider's commitment to providing quality programming and learning experiences for the children and their stakeholders enrolled in its programs. This information should be regularly shared with the stakeholders, and the certificates acquired from these accomplishments should be publicly displayed in your environment.

Community

Typically, the family childcare provider lives near the child's home, being a regular part of community life for many years. Living in the community where my business was located enabled me to continue to extend a relationship with some stakeholders, see firsthand accounts of their child's growth, and celebrate their accomplishments. Viera and Hill (2019) note that childcare providers must provide purposeful interactions with the community and the stakeholders to deliver high-quality and culturally competent services. It also enables the childcare provider to learn more about the child's culture and stakeholder's family dynamics which is vital in educating

children. These features are imperative for higher-quality programs that support the child's learning and development.

Concerns about Outside Guests

Family childcare providers must address concerns related to outside guests, incorporating them into business practices and enforcing them with their family members. Family and friends should clearly understand that only individuals associated with the family childcare program will interact with the children and their families during business hours. Family childcare providers should have such information written in business documents to remind families to view the establishment as a professional business. Additionally, this protocol protects the families and their children from individuals not approved to be in the childcare environment.

Communication

Communication is crucial in building relationships with families and seeking resources to support the family childcare program. Family childcare providers should frequently convey information to families using verbal and non-verbal methods. Each day, family childcare providers should make time to speak with families. These communications are necessary to understand and appropriately plan the child's day. Family childcare providers should verbally communicate all new and modified policies and procedures. When families understand the procedures, it helps avoid misunderstandings, promotes transparency, and encourages family buy-in to a program's mission. Furthermore, it is essential to work closely with the families to develop goals for

their children by promoting individual learning and building a strong home-school connection, thereby better preparing them for advanced learning.

Keeping families aware of milestones and educational gains reminds them of the partnership with the family childcare providers and that the children are learning daily. It also exhibits that the family childcare provider is approachable and open to receiving feedback from the families. In addition, it is imperative for family childcare providers to learn how to read non-verbal cues. Some families may need to be more comfortable sharing their opinions verbally or receiving feedback in this same manner. Understanding non-verbal cues allow the family childcare provider to communicate effectively with the stakeholders while respecting their communication style.

Marketing

Marketing a business typically comprises numerous channels and tools to attract prospective families seeking childcare services. Many family childcare programs recommend using signage in front of the home and on their vehicles, like door magnets. This technique enables the community to recognize the business as they travel through the neighborhood. Also, the vehicle door magnets enable the family childcare provider to advertise outside the community. They are reaching prospective families outside the community who may be seeking childcare in that area.

A business owner may consider using social media as a marketing tool to advertise their business, display activities, and build a professional brand. Social media also allows the family childcare provider to join industry-specific groups like early childhood education groups to broadcast their business and connect with other early

childhood professionals. It is also a helpful tool to consider when a provider wants to communicate with families and share new information. This strategy is cost-efficient and another mode of communication for families.

Business owners may consider investing in a quality website, creating multiple avenues for families to make contact. One family childcare (FCC) stakeholder disclosed that they had to search for contact information when attempting to reach out to a program. Business owners should consider including a phone number, email, and social media tag(s). Families are looking for quick options when seeking information. Incorporating search engine optimization (SEO) ensures that one's commercial ranking is high and that the business name appears in the first few returned search results. In addition, forming a community partnership with the local school is crucial. It can allow the family childcare provider to distribute flyers and interact with the local school district during open houses and school registrations. It is also a strategic method to consider when forming relationships with kindergarten teachers to gain insight into how to prepare children better for school.

Finally, business owners should consider tailoring their communication to meet the needs of future families. For example, a business owner aiming to connect with a diverse community may consider marketing tools like flyers and postcards in multiple languages. This measure shows the families that you practice inclusivity in your program and appreciate diverse cultures. In addition, it gives the families a sense of belonging, strengthening social interactions.

Funding

There is a common misconception that funding opportunities are only available for center-based projects. A stakeholder believed that grant opportunities were only for center-based programs. This fact demonstrates the importance of being aware of the funding resources available to family childcare providers and participating in professional development and networking opportunities that often share this information. Additionally, it is crucial for family childcare providers to understand their value and project that in their tuition fees. The fees should reflect the services provided to the stakeholder. Unfortunately, some family childcare providers manage their businesses at a loss because they need to increase tuition fees. A business owner may consider participating in quality improvement systems that provide financial incentives for incorporating higher quality standards and practices in the programs. In addition, some states have programs that provide family childcare with bonuses several times per year based on one's training and educational level.

Furthermore, family childcare providers may use federal programs like Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) and state-designated funding to provide additional program funding and personal financial support. According to Viera and Hill (2019), funding set aside expressly to support family childcare stakeholders through subsidized tuition payments and infant and toddler care are helpful to these programs. This funding should be equitable so that stakeholders avoid burdening family childcare providers by engaging in excessive paperwork and late payments that can be detrimental to a family childcare business.

As a family childcare provider, I participated in several of these programs. Although tedious and time-consuming, it provided additional funding to my programs and the opportunity to acquire resources to enrich the learning materials in my program. Participating in the food program was especially helpful because, besides the reimbursement, it provided valuable educational resources about health nutrition that benefitted the program. These resources can also be sent home with the children to promote healthy eating for the entire family.

I have always been curious about preschool programs and their effect on licensed family childcare programs. I did not understand why licensed family childcare providers could not receive the resources to train this age group properly or enable preschool teachers to come into the programs to provide special lessons. In agreeance, Bromer et al. (2022) expressed that integrating Pre-K programs in family childcare can create more accessible high-quality early childhood learning in the child's community, including cultural values essential to supporting whole development. Additionally, these opportunities can provide supplemental services and resources to prepare the children to succeed in elementary school with leaving the comfort of their family childcare program.

Family Engagement

Family childcare providers may consider using the enrolled stakeholders to bring awareness to diversity by urging them to share cultural resources with the program. Additionally, early childcare providers may respectfully encourage stakeholders to volunteer in the learning environment by reading to the children and leading activities. They can also donate cultural resources to the learning environment to expand the child's learning experiences and increase the resources in the family childcare program. This

gesture shows an appreciation for differences in beliefs and perspectives and supports a diverse business model.

Family field trips were essential to my family childcare program; the children could share their world with their stakeholders and vice versa. Family field trips enable the stakeholder to include those members not enrolled in the program, creating a family-friendly environment where all are welcome. Stakeholders that did not have the opportunity to volunteer during childcare hours can engage with their children and the other stakeholders. This event is also an excellent opportunity for family childcare providers to get to know their stakeholders during a fun event.

Support Future Family Childcare Providers

Providers may benefit from developing a program that encourages college students to attain work experience by allowing them to work in family childcare programs. This opportunity gives potential future educators hands-on experiences and the ability to apply their academic teaching to the real world. These programs can be subsidized by their schools or the government, where the students can receive college credit and a stipend for their contribution. These programs can operate similarly to work study or internship programs that enable the students to gain these experiences. The student can gain work experience and learn about operating a family childcare program while assisting a family childcare provider.

Back Up Care

Family childcare providers should consider incorporating a backup system into their programs. Constructing a list of trusted family childcare providers with similar qualifications and values to function as backup care for their stakeholders. This system is a great asset to integrate into a program to support stakeholders when the family childcare provider is unavailable to serve them. Additionally, this system reduces the stress for the stakeholders of finding provisional quality care.

I encircled myself with other family childcare providers that were successful business owners and simulated practices that would contribute to my program's success. I remained receptive to making periodic modifications that best fit my program and meet the needs of the stakeholders I served. For this reason, I maintained good enrollment in my family childcare program because many stakeholders live in my community or work nearby.

Family Childcare Environment

The learning environment in a high-quality, licensed family childcare program should be welcoming for the stakeholder and their children, demonstrating warmth and comfort while providing care and educational experiences. This environment should encompass intimacy and individualization to promote meeting the child's unique needs. The flexibility provided in this environment encourages autonomy and removes restrictions found in a more structured setting that can hinder creativity and imaginary play. These are paramount practices to cultivate in an environment to build positive relationships and development outcomes.

Intimacy

Intimate relationships are critical for the family childcare provider to become acquainted with the families and collaborate with them to determine the information required to care for and educate the child. Furthermore, the smaller environment promotes family engagement with extended family members authorized to drop off and pick up the children. These relationships often include other members of the child's family, like the aunts, uncles, and even grandparents, as they attend childcare events and field trips and volunteer in family childcare programs as a standard practice. These relationships demonstrate the benefits of family engagement and how they blossom into relationships that continue to grow beyond the boundaries of any childcare program.

Individual Attention and Care/Learning

Individual attention allows the family childcare provider to take a distinct approach to the child's acquisition of knowledge by constructing personalized materials and techniques. This pathway to teaching and caring for children allows the family

childcare provider to incorporate creativity into the curriculum and pedagogy. Additionally, the limited enrollment allows the children to grow and explore materials as they immerse themselves in varied learning experiences at a comfortable pace. These elements create a more relaxing atmosphere for the children and family childcare providers, enhancing the likelihood for children to participate in productive individual learning.

Flexibility

While it is vital for family childcare providers to set up a learning environment similar to a formal school, it should also maintain the balance of a home-like feeling. This approach provides children with a rudimentary understanding of what to anticipate when they begin kindergarten but also provides them the comfort they still need at a young age. Flexibility is crucial for all children but especially valuable for those requiring additional assistance. The diverse needs of children can be easily achievable in a smaller environment because they feel they can handle the number of people as may be in other childcare settings.

Chapter 6: Conclusions

The concluding chapter briefly outlined the goals, findings, and lessons learned from this doctoral research. In addition, I shared suggestions on how this information can be expanded through future research.

Discussion

This doctoral research strived to increase stakeholders' awareness of high-quality, licensed family childcare programs while enhancing their programs by developing best practices based on the stakeholders' perspectives that use childcare services. Obtaining the viewpoints directly from these stakeholders was imperative, and they perceived high-quality childcare services and the services they desired for their families. Furthermore, the doctoral research provided licensed family childcare providers insight into how stakeholders perceive their programs and professional identities. Optimistically, family childcare programs would review the proposed best practices and consider using those procedures to strengthen their business and professional practices. These strategies should assist in increasing their presence in the community and acknowledging the significance of their work as business owners, educators, and caregivers.

Lessons Learned

This doctoral research has shown that stakeholders using childcare services deemed licensed family childcare programs viable for this form of care for children. Nevertheless, some of the stakeholders in the research chose other childcare options. Their decisions to use other prospects varied, alluding to misconceptions and inconsistencies about family childcare programs and providers. With the inception of the

recommended best practices, the aspiration was that stakeholders could see the quality

offered in these programs and embrace licensed family childcare.

Equally important, this doctoral research has shown that family childcare

programs exhibit characteristics that foster an inclusive environment. These

programs encompassed the family in the child's learning and prepared them for

advanced education. Incorporating the suggested best practices can enrich the child's

learning experiences while building stakeholder relationships. This collaboration

constructs an imperative bridge to provide the children with the tools to continue learning

in their home environment.

Relationships are a critical feature in supporting a child's learning. The quote

from James Comer (2022, para.1) states, "No significant learning occurs without a

significant relationship." As it relates to early childhood education, this quote symbolizes

relationships' critical role in children's learning. When family childcare providers

collaborate with stakeholders to provide their children with the best early learning

experiences, supporting individual learning and care and meeting their developmental

needs. Family childcare program offers the flexibility to propel individual learning and

care that is instrumental to meeting the child's developmental needs. This feature is

influential in nurturing the relationships essential for gaining insight into the child's world

and cultivating productive learning experiences.

Conclusion

Early learning builds the foundation for a child's future success in advanced

school environments. This approach has been evident in the increased measures initiated

by research and governing policies to educate young children. Therefore, the community

must be aware of the varied quality of childcare options to educate and care for children. Likewise, understanding how the services provided in these programs can support the child's growth and development is crucial in preparing children to be productive adults.

Licensed family childcare programs are a reputable option for stakeholders seeking high-quality childcare. They exhibit characteristics identified as valued by stakeholders and paramount when tending to young children and equipping them with the appropriate skills and experiences to cultivate whole development. These meaningful features of licensed family childcare programs exhibit the positive impact the programs bestow on stakeholders and the community. In addition, these champion local independent business owners by investing in your neighborhood.

With the appropriate tools and supportive resources, licensed family childcare providers can shape their professional identity and create a professional environment to support current and future stakeholders. As a unified voice, they can convey their concerns and common issues identified to improve their business practices to display the valuable work demonstrated by this profession, thereby minimizing the adverse public perceptions. The work to support positive perception requires ongoing effort.

Stakeholders shared that their perspective of licensed family childcare programs was based on personal experiences. Therefore, licensed family childcare providers must provide the quality experiences that stakeholders seek for their families. The research findings revealed that family childcare providers have the power to collectively improve their programs and their professional identities to refine their roles as professional business owners.

Communally, they can request training and resources to support their business. In addition, invest in acquiring new approaches and techniques to operate effectively as business owners. They can also mentor novice licensed family childcare providers to equip them with the tools to run a successful business. Family childcare providers are instilling them with the confidence to reference themselves as professionals and educators in early childhood education.

Future Research

When future research is conducted, I recommend analyzing the suggested best practices incorporated in licensed family childcare programs and tracking their progress through a specific timeframe. This process is critical to determine the effectiveness of the best practices in enhancing the quality of their program. Additionally, the viewpoints of their current families about the modifications should be gathered along with how it has impacted their experiences and if their perceived high-quality benchmarks align with the licensed childcare providers.

Also, I recommend utilizing focus groups to gather the perspectives of a comprehensive group of licensed family childcare providers to discuss the relevance of the quality measures used to define high quality in family childcare programs. Simultaneously, I recommend that it is conveyed how these measures can be integrated into future quality rating tools to assess these programs adequately. Utilizing the qualitative method, focus groups increase the probability of building upon shared responses and acquiring more valuable information.

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Appendix A

Family Childcare (FCC)

Subject Matter Experts interview questions

1. What are your expectations of FCC?
2. What are the strengths of FCC?
3. What are the weaknesses of FCC?
4. What does quality childcare look like in FCC?
5. What recommendations do you offer for FCC?
6. How do FCC providers perpetuate the "babysitter" stereotype?
7. What behaviors and practices do you believe family childcare providers can implement to dispel those negative perceptions?
8. What business practices make FCC different from other forms of childcare?
9. What does culturally responsive teaching look like in childcare programs? How can that be incorporated into FCC programs?
10. How long have you been an early childhood professional?
11. What is your educational background?

Appendix B

Family Childcare Provider interview questions

1. In a brief summary, how would you describe your FCC program to a prospective customer/family.
2. What is the mission or purpose of your FCC program?
3. What are the expectations of your childcare program?
4. Why did you become a family childcare provider?
5. Do you refer to it as a job or your business? Why?
6. What enhancement have you made to your program? How have you shared those enhancements?
7. How do you market your business?
8. What business practices make you unique and different from other forms of care?
9. What do you do to improve your skills and knowledge?
10. What are your feelings about being referred to as a "babysitter"?
11. What do you think contributes to this stereotype?
12. What behaviors and practices do you believe family childcare providers can put in place to dispel those negative perceptions?
13. What are the strengths of FCC programs?
14. What are the weaknesses of FCC programs?
15. What new ideas have you implemented into your program? Is it effective?
16. What does culturally responsive teaching look like in childcare programs? How can that be incorporated into your program?
17. How long have you been an FCC provider?
18. What is your education background?

Figure 1

Stakeholders' description and population chart

Stakeholders	Participants
Family childcare experiences are participants identified as having experience using family childcare services	**36 of the 63 participants** identified as having family childcare experiences.
No-family childcare experiences are participants identified as having no experience using family childcare services	**27 of the 63 participants** identified as having no-family childcare experiences.
Family childcare providers are licensed paid family childcare providers that have cared for non-relative children for multiple years in their homes. Five of the participants were selected to be interviewed and completed the survey and identified as Family Childcare providers.	**Five family childcare providers are included in the 36 participants** having family childcare experiences.
Subject matter experts are early childhood professionals with many years of leadership and service. These individuals include higher education faculty, the higher education department chair of the early childhood program, quality learning professionals, and former elementary school principals. Five	**Two of the 5 subject matter experts are included** in the family childcare experiences stakeholder group. **The remaining three subject matter experts are included** in the no childcare experiences stakeholder group.

| participants were selected, interviewed, completed the survey, and identified as Subject matter experts.	

Figure 3

Favorable components for stakeholders with family childcare experiences

#	Question	Extremely Important		Important		No opinion		Not important		Extremely unimportant		Total
1	Education level of the provider	58.33%	21	33.33%	12	5.56%	2	2.78%	1	0.00%	0	36
2	Professional development or training for FCC staff	61.11%	22	36.11%	13	2.78%	1	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	36
3	Business practice of the FCC provider	58.33%	21	30.56%	11	5.56%	2	5.56%	2	0.00%	0	36
4	Learning environment at the FCC program	88.89%	32	11.11%	4	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	36
5	Presence of assistants in the FCC program	38.89%	14	44.44%	16	8.33%	3	8.33%	3	0.00%	0	36
6	Quality of learning materials/curriculum in the FCC program	69.44%	25	27.78%	10	2.78%	1	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	36
7	Children's response to the FCC provider(s)	88.89%	32	11.11%	4	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	36

Figure 4

The number of children the stakeholders with family childcare experiences enrolled in family childcare programs.
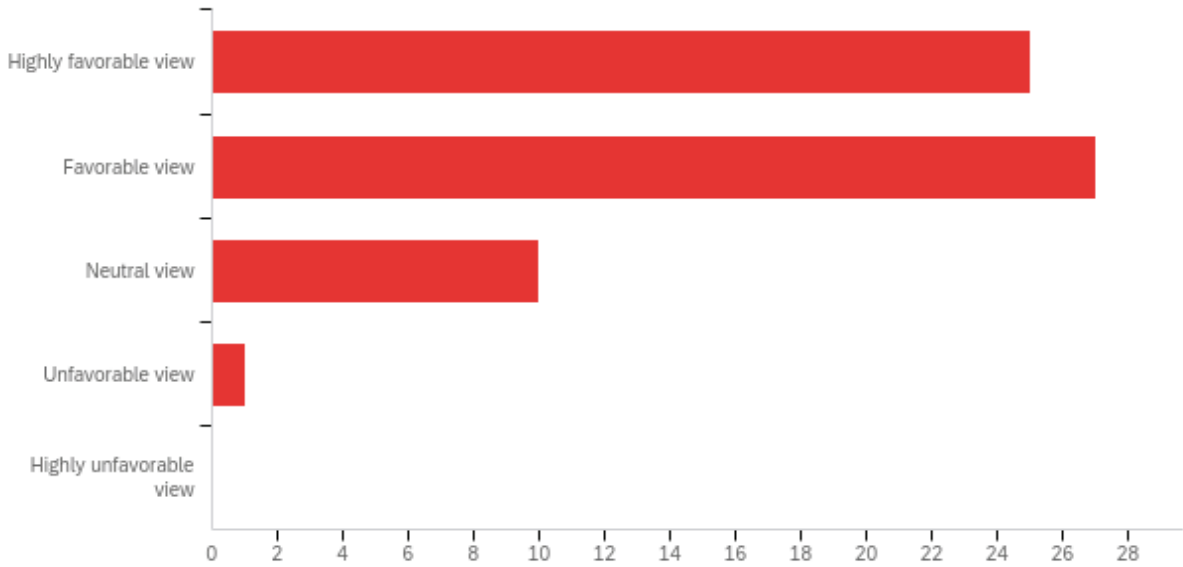
My family have used FCC for:
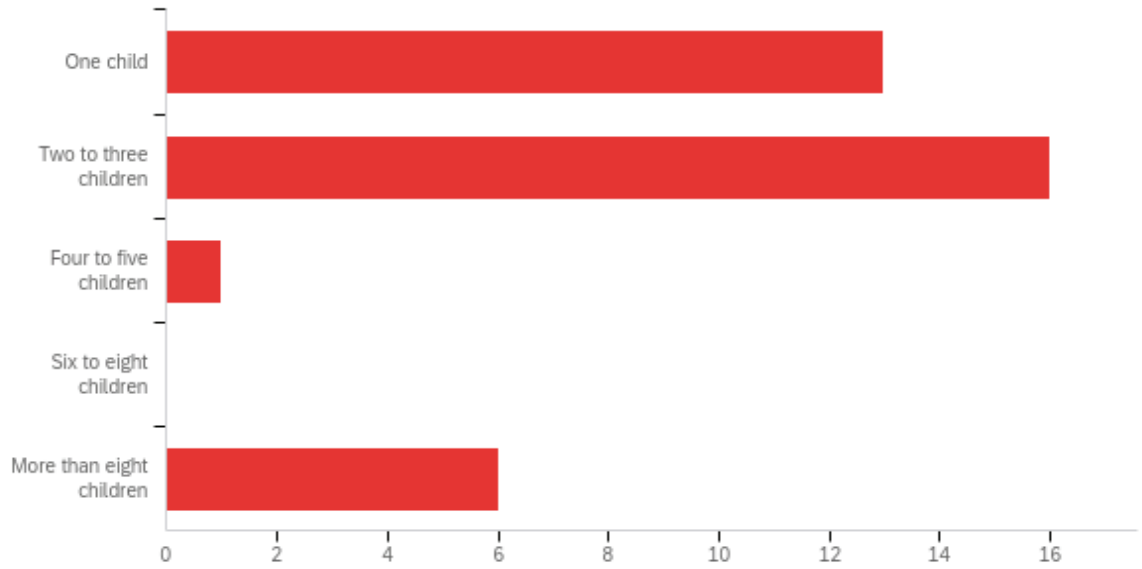
Figure 5

Stakeholders with family childcare experiences' views on family childcare services
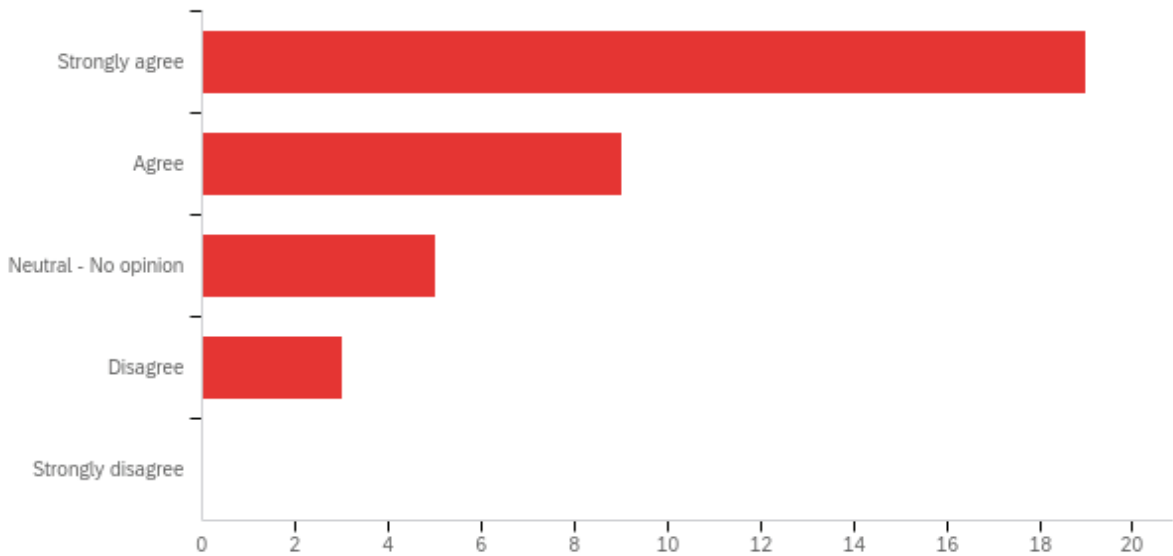
Views on family childcare services

Figure 6

Stakeholders with family childcare experiences' views of the quality of center-based and family childcare programs.

The quality of center-based and family childcare programs being comparable.

Figure 7

All stakeholders' opinions of the family childcare service approach being similar to "babysitting.

The family childcare's service approach is similar to "babysitting."