



Exploring workplace flexibility of early childhood development practitioners and managers within the Sedibeng District

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Graduation: May 2026

DECLARATION

I, Ryan Colin Bartlett hereby declare that this dissertation with the registered title:

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2. Sections with no citations are my own ideas, arguments, and conclusions.
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(Kindly see annexure J for a detailed explanation and evidence of use)

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Date 01 October 2025

I, the supervisor (Dr Werner Gresse) and co-supervisor (Prof Elsabé Keyser), confirm that the above declaration signed by the candidate is accurate to the best of our knowledge and that we have received a satisfactory similarity report from Turnitin (Annexure N) before allowing the candidate to submit for examination.

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AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS AND DECLARATIONS

The study was designed and carried out by three researchers of the North-West University at the Vanderbijlpark Campus. The table below shows the contributions of each researcher.

Ryan Bartlett	Master's student in Labour Relations Management, writing the research proposal and dissertation, co-conceptualiser, responsible for the literature review, systematic review, conducting the research process, interpretation of research findings and data analysis. Presenting the study at one conference and communicating, submitting article two for publication in journals.
Dr Werner Gresse - Supervisor	Chapters one to four: Critical reader and adviser Article 1: Responsible for screening, titles, and abstracts. The selection of research articles, were executed independently by two reviewers (researcher and the supervisor) according to the process of the inclusion and exclusion criteria.
Prof Elsabé Keyser – Co-supervisor	Chapters one to four: Critical reader and adviser. Controller of the systematic review.

Furthermore, with this statement, the author and co-authors declare and confirm their roles in this research study. This declaration also indicates that all authors agree that the appropriate format was used for the submission of this dissertation at the North-West University. All authors agree that the contents of this research study and any modified version thereof may be used and published by an author in peer-reviewed academic journals and/or presented at academic conferences.

Mr Ryan Bartlett, Student

Dr Werner Gresse, Supervisor

Prof Elsabé Keyser, Co-Supervisor

DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to the early childhood sector – the people whose voices are often missing from conversations about workplace flexibility and work-life balance. To the practitioners who give so much, usually for very little, this is for you. I hope these pages carry your stories, make your struggles visible, and help your voices finally be heard.

I also dedicate this to North-West University who gave me the opportunity to do my Masters and to further research in this area of work. The North-West University also provided funding for my studies and for that I am truly grateful.

PREFACE

The reader is reminded of the following:

1. The editorial style of this dissertation's chapters follows the format prescribed by the School of Industrial Psychology and Human Resource Management of the North-West University.
2. The references and page numbers in this dissertation follow the format prescribed by the North-West University, APA referencing style and MS Word postgraduate and proposal template for creating this dissertation. I did make use of a language editor, Grammarly, and Microsoft Word Editor.
3. The dissertation is submitted in the form of article format Chapter 1 (Introduction and Background); Chapter 2 Article 1: (Systematic Review: Synthesizing Current Research); Chapter 3 Article 2: (Qualitative Analysis: Key Themes from Interviews); Chapter 4 (Findings, Recommendations and Conclusion).
4. References at the end of the study and appendices.

Two articles (Chapter 2 and Chapter 3) that comprise this research have been submitted to the following conferences, magazines, and peer-reviewed journals for publication.

Article 1: Bartlett, R., Gresse, W. & Keyser, E. (2025, May 29). *Workplace flexibility, practitioner well-being and work-life balance of early childhood development practitioners and managers: A systematic review* [Global People Practice Conference – North-West University]. Conference in Parys, South Africa.

Article 1: Acta Universitatis Danubius oeconomica (article was accepted for publication Vol., 21 issue no.6, 2025) (see Annexure M)

Article 2: African Journal of Employee Relations (under review, submission date: 25 March 2025, see annexure I, submission reference number:19204)

Article 2: Bartlett, R., Gresse, W. & Keyser, E. (2025, Aug 01). South African Board of People Practices, The People Factor Magazine August 2025 issue, Title: Workplace Flexibility in a Forgotten Sector (<https://sabpp.co.za/wp-content/uploads/2025/08/PF-Aug.pdf>).

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Finally, I wish to acknowledge all those who contributed to this research in various ways—whether through intellectual discussions, emotional support, or practical assistance. Your contributions, big and small, have been invaluable in the completion of this thesis.

ABSTRACT

This dissertation aimed to explore workplace flexibility within the Early Childhood Development (ECD) sector through the lens of both the manager and practitioner to identify the importance that it has within this specific sector. The dissertation in article 1 further investigated the importance of the phenomenon for both employee (practitioner) and employer (manager/owner) and to assess its impact on job satisfaction, work-life balance, retention, professional development, and well-being. The dissertation through article 2 further explored the perceived perceptions of workplace flexibility among managers and practitioners with a specific focus on the Sedibeng District.

The first article presents a systematic review, utilising Amstar 2 for quality control purposes and the research was guided by the Preferred reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) framework whilst being supported by a PEOs table (Participants, Exposure, Outcomes, Studies), synthesising existing literature on Flexible Work Arrangements (FWAs) in the ECD sector. Once all the data had been filtered through a thematic analysis ensued to further refine the data and provide a clearer understanding of the research. The findings highlighted that the ECD sector should consider adopting more FWAs to enhance practitioner satisfaction and retention however they need to be tailor made to the specific needs of the ECD sector.

The second article adopts a qualitative approach, utilising semi-structured interviews and framed by Social Exchange Theory (SET), to explore the lived experiences of ECD practitioners and managers regarding workplace flexibility. Findings from this article show that while FWAs contribute significantly to improving practitioner satisfaction and organisational sustainability, their success hinges on leadership support, clear policies, and targeted investment. It was also important to note that participants in the data collection in article two also viewed government's support as inadequate and hindered the sectors potential in many ways, thus rendering them unable to achieve workplace flexibility due to lack of financial support, amongst other issues.

The findings of article 2 support the need for policy changes that address the burnout, mental health concerns, staffing shortages, and financial strain the ECD sector faces. SET further suggests that policies like FWAs will result in more committed and satisfied staff. Staggered shifts and part-time options may also further assist with the financial strains the ECD sector faces.

Key terms: Workplace flexibility, well-being, education sector, job satisfaction, retention

OPSOMMING

Hierdie verhandeling het ten doel gehad om werksplekbuigsaamheid binne die Vroeë Kinderontwikkeling (VKO)-sektor te verken deur die lens van beide die bestuurder en praktisyn, om die belangrikheid daarvan binne hierdie spesifieke sektor te bepaal. Artikel 1 van die verhandeling het verder die belang van hierdie verskynsel vir beide werknemer (praktisyn) en werkgever (bestuurder/eienaar) ondersoek en die impak daarvan op werkstevredenheid, werk-lewe-balans, behoud, professionele ontwikkeling en welstand geëvalueer. Artikel 2 van die verhandeling het verder die persepsies van werksplekbuigsaamheid onder bestuurders en praktisyne ondersoek met spesifieke fokus op die Sedibeng-distrik.

Die eerste artikel bied 'n sistematiese oorsig aan, gebruik Amstar 2 vir gehaltebeheer, en volg die PRISMA-raamwerk met ondersteuning van 'n PEOS-tabel (Deelnemers, Blootstelling, Uitkomst, Studies) om literatuur oor Buigsame Werkreëlings (BWR's) in die VKO-sektor te sintetiseer. Nadat data gefiltreer is, is tematiese ontleding gebruik om 'n duideliker begrip te bied, en bevindings beklemtoon dat BWR's praktisyntevredenheid en -behoud kan verbeter mits dit op maat van die sektor gemaak word.

Die tweede artikel volg 'n kwalitatiewe benadering met semi-gestruktureerde onderhoude, gegrond op die Sosiale Uitruilteorie (SUT), om VKO-praktisyne en bestuurders se ervarings van werksplekbuigsaamheid te verken. Bevindings toon dat BWR's bydra tot tevredenheid en volhoubaarheid, maar sukses vereis leierskapsondersteuning, duidelike beleide en geteikende beleggings, terwyl deelnemers die regering se ondersteuning as onvoldoende beskou wat finansiële beperkings skep. Dit beklemtoon die noodsaaklikheid van beleidsveranderinge wat uitbranding, geestesgesondheid, personeeltekorte en finansiële druk aanspreek, en dat beleide soos geskakeerde skofte en deeltydse opsies toegewyde en tevrede personeel bevorder.

Sleuteltermes: Werkplek buigsaamheid, welstand, onderwysers, opvoeders, bestuurders, skoolhoofde

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

NWU	North-West University
SET	Social Exchange Theory
ECD	Early Childhood Development
ECDPs	Early Childhood Development Practitioners
DBE	Department of Basic Education
FWAs	Flexible Work Arrangements
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
HEI	Higher Education Institution

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND PROBLEM STATEMENT

The purpose of this dissertation is to explore workplace flexibility of early childhood practitioners and managers within the early childhood sector in the Sedibeng District. Chapter 1 focuses on the background of the study, the problem statement, research objectives, specific problems and research questions, research methodology, and lastly, the layout of the chapters that follow.

Background problem and statement

The early childhood development (ECD) sector in South Africa is confronted with significant challenges, particularly in terms of workplace flexibility. Early childhood development practitioners (ECDPs), who are crucial in fostering child cognitive, emotional, social, and physical development from birth to seven years of age. ECDPs tend to work under demanding conditions such as long working hours and limited support (Rao & Karumuri, 2019; Wang, 2021). These practitioners often operate from Monday to Friday from 07:00 to 17:00, facing high levels of stress and limited support from the government. This is despite the Department of Basic Education's (DBE) recognition of the important role that ECD plays in a child's early development and education (SADTU, 2019). The sector's operational hours frequently exceed the maximum allowed under the Basic Condition of Employment Act, 1997, leading to stress, fatigue, burnout, and other health-related issues among ECDPs (Jeon et al., 2017).

Workplace flexibility, which includes options such as changing work locations, hours, and time off, has been identified in recent studies as a key factor in improving practitioner well-being, productivity, and job satisfaction (Koon & Chong, 2018). Job satisfaction refers to the level of contentment practitioners may feel about their work, which may influence and affect their performance and overall well-being. Intrinsic factors, such as personal as well as career growth, and extrinsic factors, such as working conditions, may impact practitioner job satisfaction (Rao & Karumuri, 2019). The well-being of practitioners is key to practitioners being satisfied in their workplace, and well-being refers to the holistic state of an individual encompassing physical, mental, and emotional health. This can be identified through staff having access to healthcare, stress management programmes, supportive leaders, and improved work-life integration (Bautista et al., 2023).

Flexible work arrangements can take various forms, including remote work, flexible working hours (such as flexitime, where practitioners can choose their start and end times within a given range), compressed workweeks (where practitioners work longer hours over fewer days), job sharing, and increased autonomy over scheduling time off (Azar et al., 2018; Choi, 2017; Giannikis & Mihail, 2011). These arrangements allow practitioners to balance their work and personal lives

more effectively, reducing stress, and enhancing overall job satisfaction (Kossek & Lautsch, 2015; Weideman & Hofmeyr, 2020). Work-life balance refers to finding an equilibrium between professional responsibilities and personal life, ensuring that neither is neglected. This can be identified through improved time management, workplace flexibility and support from the workplace. Work-life balance may improve practitioners' perceptions of the workplace and their job satisfaction while also improving practitioner retention (Brough et al., 2020).

A recent study by Bal and Izak (2021) found that practitioners increasingly demand more workplace flexibility, and organisations are beginning to provide to attract and retain top talent. Despite the global trend towards flexible work arrangements, South African practitioners, particularly in the ECD sector, have seen little implementation of such practices (Griffiths, 2020). There is evidence from current and previous studies that indicates the potential benefits of workplace flexibility through research done by Kossek et al. (2015) and Ray and Pana-Cryan (2021), which highlight that flexible work arrangements may positively impact management, practitioners, their families, and society. Flexible work arrangements help meet manager and practitioner needs by promoting work-life balance, improving professional development and reducing stress (Doyle, 2022). Professional development refers to the life-long learning journey by people acquiring new skills and knowledge for career advancement. This can be seen through professionals participating in training programmes, career advancement, mentoring and coaching. Professional development not only increases competency but may also improve job satisfaction (Peterson-Ahmad et al., 2018).

The ECD sector in South Africa remains largely rigid, with long operational hours and minimal flexibility, which may hamper the well-being of ECDPs and the quality of education they provide (Zulu et al., 2022). The COVID-19 pandemic has further emphasised the importance of workplace flexibility. Organisations globally had to adopt flexible work practices to comply with lockdown regulations, shifting the focus from mere work-life balance to broader flexibility needs (Haque, 2023). Atiku and Ganiyu (2022) emphasise that flexible job options extend beyond remote work and can include varied work hours and reduced workweeks, which are crucial for sectors like ECD, where remote work may not be feasible.

Systemic issues compound the lack of workplace flexibility in the ECD sector. This was emphasised in a study conducted in 2020 by Harrison (2020) that identified several challenges within South Africa's early childhood care and education landscape, including uneven geographic distribution of services, inadequate training, difficulties in obtaining quality qualifications, dysfunctional accreditation bodies, misalignment between the National Qualifications Framework

(NQF) and higher education institution (HEI) entrance requirements, and poor remuneration for teachers.

These challenges, as mentioned above, create a landscape where ECDPs are overworked, underpaid, and undervalued, all issues that affect their ability to deliver high-quality education. To address these issues, this research aims to explore the potential benefits of workplace flexibility within the ECD sector in South Africa. By investigating both the organisational and practitioner perspectives on flexibility, this study seeks to provide a well-rounded understanding of how flexible work arrangements may improve working conditions for ECDPs. The goal is to inform policy development that supports flexible work practices, ultimately enhancing the well-being of ECDPs and the quality of early childhood education. This research will contribute to the growing body of knowledge on workplace flexibility and offer practical recommendations for implementing flexible work policies in the ECD sector.

In the South African context, the ECD private sector is usually characterised by significant inequality in terms of access to financial resources, and other resources such as educational equipment including but not limited to books, posters, and toys. Some ECD centres are fully registered with the DBE, equipped with ample resources, and meet the stringent requirements set by the government. On the other hand, many centres struggle to attain full registration due to limited resources, making it difficult for them to meet the necessary compliance standards. This disparity between those ECD centres that have the capital to meet requirements and those centres with none-to-limited funding often leaves the less-resourced centres in precarious positions, further ostracising them from access to government support or funding (Blose & Muteweri, 2021). Additionally, as explained by Do More Foundation (2023) most ECD centres in the private sector are female-run, with the owners' "managers" often taking on multiple roles as director, manager, and principal. For the sake of simplicity and clarity, this research will continue to refer to these individuals as managers, despite their various roles within the centres.

Specific problems and research questions

During the last decade, research on workplace flexibility has taken a central role in the social sciences, and scientists and policymakers' traditional workplace systems are no longer efficient in the changing work environment (Kashefi, 2007). As Harland et al. (2023) mentioned, there is a lack of robust evidence regarding the impact of flexible working on educators. However, evidence has been found on the benefits of flexible work arrangements, such as higher retention, workforce stability, and improved recruitment of teachers. Furthermore, it could contribute positively to diversity, reduce the gender pay gap, and promote career progression, well-being, and job

satisfaction. Subsequently, flexible working opportunities could encourage ECDPs to stay in the classroom and assist in the battle against teacher shortages (Patience & Rose, 2022).

Workplace flexibility allows managers and practitioners to find more suitable work arrangements that benefit both parties (Doyle, 2022). According to Hastwell (2022), workplace flexibility acknowledges practitioners' needs and supports a work-life balance and practitioner well-being rather than having a rigid work schedule which increases stressors. Workplace flexibility acknowledges that practitioner flexibility and work-life balance are two separate concepts; however, they are intertwined and complement each other (Sangarandeniya & Ranasingha, 2020). Hill et al. (2008) describe workplace flexibility as the degree to which practitioners can choose to satisfy their personal needs, particularly regarding where, when, and how long they will work. Therefore, workplace flexibility concerns the degree to which workers can choose to arrange core aspects of their professional lives.

Noonan and Glass (2012) state that workplace flexibility motivates educators to concentrate more on their jobs, improving the organisation's productivity and practitioner job satisfaction. Perpetual Guardian conducted a study on a workplace flexibility program. It showed that among 240 workforces, stress levels were down by 7% to 38%, and work-life balance scores increased by 24% to 78% (The Guardian, 2019). A recent study conducted at Microsoft in Japan and Unilever in New Zealand showed a positive impact on the well-being of staff and the overall business due to the changes to standard working hours. Regarding the research in Japan, Microsoft found that productivity had increased by almost 40%, which is at the backbone of staff working fewer hours than normal (Paul, 2022).

From the above, limited studies show the importance or even benefits of a workplace flexibility program in their respective sector which could possibly also result in a similar benefit for the ECD sector. Griffiths (2020) states that there is a lack of research on the ECD sector to guide policymaking in South Africa. This further advocates for the need for research in this sector to promote well-being amongst teachers, especially those within the ECD sector. The Sedibeng District presents an ideal setting for this study for several reasons. Firstly, the ECD sector in the Sedibeng District reflects broader national challenges ECDPs and centres face in terms of limited government support, insufficient standardisation, and demanding working conditions.

This allows for a focused examination of workplace flexibility within the ECD sector and its implications for ECDPs and centres. Additionally, the Sedibeng District falls within the provinces outlined by UNESCO (2015) and Zulu et al. (2022) as areas of concern regarding long working

hours, averaging around 10 hours a day; this underscores the urgent need to address issues related to working conditions and workplace flexibility.

The primary research question guided both articles 1 and 2, ensuring a study that advances knowledge and is thoroughly researched: How does workplace flexibility affect educators and managers in the ECD sector in the Sedibeng District, in terms of retention, work-life balance, job satisfaction, well-being, and professional development?

The following secondary research questions arose:

- How does the literature on workplace flexibility explain the perception of educators/practitioners and managers on workplace flexibility? (Article 1)
- What knowledge and perceptions do educators and managers have about workplace flexibility? (Article 2)
- What are the experiences and perspectives of early childhood educators regarding workplace flexibility arrangements, and how do these arrangements influence, work-life balance, job satisfaction, well-being, professional development, and retention? (Articles 1 & 2)
- What key factors contribute to or hinder the implementation of workplace flexibility policies in ECD settings? (Articles 1 & 2)
- What are the challenges and benefits of workplace flexibility in the ECD sector? (Articles 1 & 2)

Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework for this study was guided by the Social Exchange Theory (SET), which provided a comprehensive perspective for examining workplace flexibility and its impact on job satisfaction, practitioner well-being, job, and organisational outcomes such as professional development, increased productivity and increased retention. The founding fathers of SET are namely Homans, Blau, and Emerson, who suggested that social behaviour is the result of an exchange process which aimed to maximise benefits and minimise costs (Cook, 2015). This theory is key to understanding the dynamics between practitioners and managers within flexible work arrangements.

Social Exchange Theory (SET) and workplace flexibility

SET suggests that relationships are maintained through a reciprocal exchange of resources, which may be economic, social, or emotional (Homans, 1974; Blau, 1964; Emerson, 1976). In the

workplace, this may translate to the exchange of effort and commitment from practitioners for tangible and intangible rewards from managers, such as salaries and benefits (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). SET highlights that when practitioners perceive that their contributions are valued and reciprocated by their managers through supportive work policies like flexibility, they are more likely to experience job satisfaction, commitment, and motivation (Blau, 1964; Emerson, 1976).

Application of SET in the ECD Sector

In the context of the ECD sector, SET may highlight how flexible work arrangements might influence the work experiences of ECDPs. Given the demanding nature of ECD work, which is characterised by long hours and high stress levels, flexible work policies may serve as a valuable resource exchanged for the dedication and hard work of ECDPs (Rao & Karumuri, 2019; SADTU, 2019). By applying SET, this research will explore whether workplace flexibility may lead to positive outcomes such as increased job satisfaction, reduced burnout, and improved retention rates among ECDPs.

The framework will also explore the connection between SET and social capital, particularly within social networks, norms, and trust in the ECD sector (Cook, 2015). Social capital, which encompasses the relationships and connections facilitating collective action, is key in educational settings. Flexible work arrangements may strengthen social capital by fostering a more supportive and collaborative work environment, possibly enhancing social cohesion and solidarity among ECDPs (Coleman, 1988).

Research aims and objectives

This study aimed to explore workplace flexibility within the ECD sector through the lens of the manager and practitioner, and to identify its importance within the specific sector.

The objectives of this study were:

- To investigate the importance of workplace flexibility for both practitioners (ECDPs) and managers of ECD centres and to assess its impact on outcomes such as workplace flexibility, job satisfaction, work-life balance, professional development, well-being and retention.
- To explore the perceived perceptions of workplace flexibility among managers and practitioners of the ECD sector in the Sedibeng District.

The findings from this study have contributed to valuable insights into the broader discourse on workplace flexibility and its perceived impacts on practitioner well-being, particularly within the

ECD sector. By concentrating on a specific geographical area, such as the Sedibeng District, the study can offer nuanced insights that are contextually relevant and actionable for policymakers, practitioners, and stakeholders within the district and beyond.

Research methodology

The section will explain the methods and techniques that were used by the researcher in articles 1 and 2 of the study.

Study 1: Article 1 (Systematic review: Synthesising current research)

In study 1, the researcher explored a systematic review of the literature on how workplace flexibility may impact job satisfaction, work-life balance, professional development, the well-being, and retention of early childhood educators and managers.

This research followed the stages Tranfield et al. (2003) outlined for a systematic review. The stages are illustrated in Figure 1 below.



Figure 1. *Stages of a systematic review adapted from Tranfield et al. (2003)*

The above illustration in Figure 1 reveals three stages, each following through different phases (ten phases in total) to conduct a successful systematic review. Stage one is the planning stage, which seeks to identify the need for a systematic review. Thereafter, the proposal and review protocol are enacted. Stage two follows through on the review, identifying possible studies,

selecting studies based on the inclusion criteria, conducting a quality assessment, and synthesising the data. In the third and final stage, the reporting is conducted, ensuring that the findings are distributed and applied (Tranfield et al., 2003).

Research design

In phase 1 (Article 1), a comprehensive review regarding workplace flexibility was conducted. The sources that were consulted included academic journals, books, and scientific online sources. The review will cover research published over the past decade (2013-2023), focusing on gathering a wide range of insights and perspectives. This research will focus on data collected during this time frame to ensure that the findings are relevant to the current trends, challenges, and developments in workplace flexibility. The keywords to be used in the search will encompass terms related to "workplace flexibility," "professional development", "workplace conditions," "practitioner well-being," "work-life balance," and "educational sector." These keywords are deliberately broad which ensured a comprehensive examination of the topic.

The literature review served two key purposes within the qualitative investigation. Firstly, it was conducted prior to the primary study to guide and contextualise the research by providing a strong theoretical foundation. Secondly, it was revisited after the qualitative investigation to aid in interpreting and making sense of the results. This two-phase approach to the literature review will help ensure that the study is well-informed and that the findings are appropriately contextualised and understood.

To ensure a well-rounded and thorough investigation of the available literature was undertaken in this study, various sources, including peer-reviewed articles from local and international journals, specialist textbooks, chapters, and relevant scientific subject matter content was used. These sources elaborated and expanded on the workplace flexibility of educators/teachers and managers. The various sources were put through PRISMA guidelines (see Appendix A) to ensure that the research holds validity, and the reviews will follow AMSTAR 2 guidelines (see Appendix B). The researcher and supervisor selected relevant research titles and abstracts against the proposed inclusion and exclusion criteria. The researcher reviewed the abstracts and completed research sources. During the systematic review, the following key questions was examined:

- What are the factors that affect practitioner well-being within the workplace?
- What are the implications of workplace flexibility in the workplace?
- Do the views of practitioners and managers on workplace flexibility differ?
- What impact does workplace flexibility have on professional development?
- What are the views of the manager on workplace flexibility?

Literature exploration

The following databases was utilised in a computer search: EBSCOhost, Oxford Journals Online, Open Access Journals, Research Gate, Mendeley, Google Scholar, ScienceDirect, ProQuest dissertations and theses global, and SA ePublications. The systematic review focused on research done in the last ten years (2013 - 2023), as this allowed for more relevant information and a more up-to-date view of workplace flexibility. The references of the relevant research articles were studied to determine the keywords used in the literature search. Cross-searching was done using the following key terms: “workplace flexibility”, OR “Flexi work”, AND “practitioner”, AND “educators” AND “teachers”, AND “manager” AND “well-being”, AND “Compressed work week” AND “job satisfaction” AND “professional development”. To ensure all eligible research was uncovered, the search filter was set to find these key terms in the titles and abstracts of the relevant sources.

To determine the eligibility of each research article, a list was generated based on the questions above and put through the inclusion and exclusion criteria. No limitations were applied to the geographical settings. All systematic reviews that have been published and were available relating to workplace flexibility were considered. Published studies with aggregated data was included only if it adhered to the following criteria: empirical and peer-reviewed study; abstract should be in English with estimates and/or complete results published; examination of the link between workplace flexibility and practitioner wellbeing was included in the search. Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-method studies were included in the search for relevant sources. Research not relatable to this systematic review was excluded from the review.

Data analysis

The systematic review of the eligible studies followed the guidelines of AMSTAR 2’s evaluation tool. AMSTAR 2 was chosen as it allows for reviewing various studies, including systematic reviews and randomised trials, and the possible risk of prejudice to be considered by providing extensive, critical evaluations of the relevant studies. The AMSTAR 2 evaluation tool further enabled the researcher to identify the best quality research for this systematic review for Chapter 2 (Article 1), (Shea et al., 2017). Once credible data had been selected from the previously mentioned process, it was put through PRISMA to further filter the data, which allows for a more transparent, structured, and reproducible method in reporting for the systematic review study (Page et al., 2021). A thematic synthesis followed once all data had been processed using the

relevant tools. The themes were identified whilst using the research questions as the backbone to guide the identification of themes herein as per Tranfield et al. (2003) as seen in Figure 1.

Study 2: Article 2 (Qualitative analysis: Key themes from interviews)

The researcher followed a qualitative approach, conducting interviews to gather data in Chapter 3 (Article 2).

Research design

A post-positivist paradigm informed the research. This paradigm encompasses the following philosophical elements:

- **Ontology:** The research acknowledged that multiple social realities regarding workplace flexibility exist within the ECD sector. It recognised that various stakeholders, including ECDPs and centre managers, construct and maintain these realities.
- **Epistemology:** The study adopted an interpretivist epistemological approach to understand how these diverse social realities are created and sustained within the ECD sector. It acknowledged that the participants' perceptions and experiences are central to understanding workplace flexibility.
- **Axiology:** This research valued subjectivity, cultural context, and multiple perspectives. It respected the unique experiences and voices of ECDPs and centre managers, aimed to give them a platform to express their views and contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of workplace flexibility.
- **Approach to qualitative investigation:** This study's qualitative investigation was primarily exploratory. It aimed to explore the multifaceted aspects of workplace flexibility within the ECD sector and gain an in-depth understanding of how this concept is perceived and experienced by different stakeholders.

Qualitative research is a suitable method for addressing the aim of this research due to several key reasons:

- **Depth and richness:** Qualitative research allows for an in-depth exploration of workplace flexibility, uncovering the rich and nuanced experiences, perceptions, and voices of ECDPs and centre managers. It provides a platform for participants to express their views in their own words, enabling a comprehensive understanding of their experiences.

- Contextual understanding: Qualitative research is well-suited to capture the contextual factors influencing workplace flexibility within the ECD sector. It considers the unique challenges, constraints, and opportunities specific to this sector and the South African context.
- Multiple perspectives: Given the diversity of stakeholders in the ECD sector, including ECDPs and managers, qualitative research allowed for the inclusion of multiple perspectives. It acknowledges that workplace flexibility is not a one-size-fits-all concept and allows for exploring varying viewpoints.
- Subjective experiences: The focus on individual and collective experiences aligns with understanding the impact of workplace flexibility on job satisfaction, work-life balance, and well-being. Qualitative research captures participants' subjective experiences and narratives.
- Theory building: While the primary approach was exploratory, qualitative research also offers the potential for theory building. By examining the ECD sector from various angles, this study may have contributed to a theoretical framework that addresses explicitly workplace flexibility in this context.

A qualitative approach allowed the researcher to use a small but focused sample to gain a richly detailed understanding of the importance of workplace flexibility in the ECD sector. Qualitative data is more concerned with depth than quantity of findings as it is more subjective than objective. This allowed the researcher to close any gaps the systematic review could not cover. The systematic review will be used to ensure that the study is up to date with international standards and is a comprehensive study which will consider all relevant data for the final chapter.

Participants

The research focused solely on ECD practitioners and ECD managers. The study was conducted in the Sedibeng District of the Gauteng Province.

The research population for this study comprised ECDPs of any age. However, all participants had to be of legal age, so a cut-off year was applied which stipulated that no participant could be born after the said cut-off year. The cut-off year was 2005, and this was done to ensure that all participants were 18 years of age as of 2024 and above to ensure an ethical study. The managers of ECD centres all had to be above 18 years of age as of 2024. All participants had to work within an ECD centre/school classified as an independent school/centre as this study did not include government practitioners, and these centres had to be in the Sedibeng District of the Gauteng province.

Non-probability sampling was used, and interviews were conducted with ECDPs and ECD managers within the Sedibeng District of the Gauteng province. Not every manager and ECD practitioner had an equal opportunity to be included in the sample as there are limitations on locations, sectors and ages. There is also no sampling data list available from which a sample could have been drawn randomly to ensure an equal opportunity. For the above reasons, the researcher had chosen to use a non-probability sampling method, and in the light of these limitations, it was the most rational choice (Saunders et al., 2012).

This research study utilised a non-probability sampling method which includes the following characteristics (Saunders et al., 2012):

- Participants who met the criteria could participate, which meant that any adolescent ECD practitioner and ECD managers within the Sedibeng District of the Gauteng Province could participate.
- The researcher utilised his judgment to select individuals who met the criteria for the study.
- Random sampling was more complicated and costly compared to non-probability sampling.

This study should have identified ten ECD managers to participate in the study and twenty ECD practitioners. The study utilised a small sample due to the predicted low workplace flexibility programmes in the ECD sector. The prediction was based on limited studies on workplace flexibility in the sector. However, the small sample allowed for a deep and case-oriented analysis. It was also found that most qualitative researchers using a specific set of research questions in interview-based studies generate very little new information after interviewing about 20 people. To allow adequate time to analyse data and locate participants, the researcher refrained from interviewing an excessive number of participants (Vasileiou et al., 2018).

Inclusion criteria used characteristics or attributes that prospective study participants needed to have to be included in the study (Garg, 2016). This study required the following to participate:

- ECDPs above 18 years of age.
- ECD managers had to be above the age of 18 years.
- Participants had to work at a centre in the Sedibeng District of the Gauteng Province in the Republic of South Africa.

Exclusion criteria used characteristics to identify potential participants that could not be included in the study (Garg, 2016). The following factors excluded participants from the study:

- ECDPs who were not legally allowed to work in the Republic of South Africa (those without work permits/visas).
- Staff members who had less than one year of experience within the ECD sector.
- Staff who were occupying a temporary position or role within the ECD sector.
- Staff who were on extended leave (e.g., maternity leave, medical leave) and not actively working at the centre.
- Staff who were facing any disciplinary or legal charges against them.
- Government practitioners or managers.

The researcher identified ECD centres/schools in the Sedibeng District of the Gauteng Province who were eligible to join the study. This was done after presenting potential centres/schools with information about the study to elicit interest and to identify the eagerness of potential participants to partake in the research process. The researcher also partnered with a registered social worker from the Gauteng Department of Education who deals with the ECD sector to aid in narrowing down schools/centres. The recruitment process of participants was done in accordance with the ethical considerations of this study.

Data collection

This study used a qualitative approach, so the researcher focused on gathering contextual information. The researcher focused on collecting nominal data which had qualitative characteristics and no inherent order or rank. It allowed the researcher to categorise responses and have all responses equally valued. Nominal-level data was helpful to assess differences between groups as the study looked at participants with exposure to workplace flexibility and those who do not have exposure (Taylor, 2023). The researcher further utilised thematic analysis to identify and analyse patterns (themes) within the qualitative data collected. This approach provided a rich and detailed understanding of participants' experiences and perceptions related to workplace flexibility (Naeem et al., 2023). The researcher utilised one-on-one interviews, which allowed him to collect information directly from the source through one-on-one meetings. This allowed participants to share their opinions, experiences, and beliefs, and they were more likely to express themselves in a one-on-one interview than in group settings due to the sensitivity of some questions. The researcher utilised a semi-structured interview which allowed him to be guided by several questions (see "Annexure C"). However, it also accorded both the researcher and participant an opportunity to elaborate on certain questions to create a more in-depth interview (Gill et al., 2008).

Data analysis

Due to the qualitative research, the researcher transcribed all the one-on-one interviews that were recorded into a Word document. The researcher utilised a thematic analysis guided by Naeem et al. (2023), as seen in Figure 2, to help identify, analyse, and interpret any patterns in the data. This helped the researcher allocate answers from participants by identifying keywords and placing them into themes so that the researcher could identify important information from raw data. Microsoft Excel was used to capture all the themes identified irrespective of their relevance into a table. Each answer from the participant was placed into a theme and then given a point. These points were captured into a table on Microsoft Excel and was used to calculate percentages which was presented in the findings chapter.

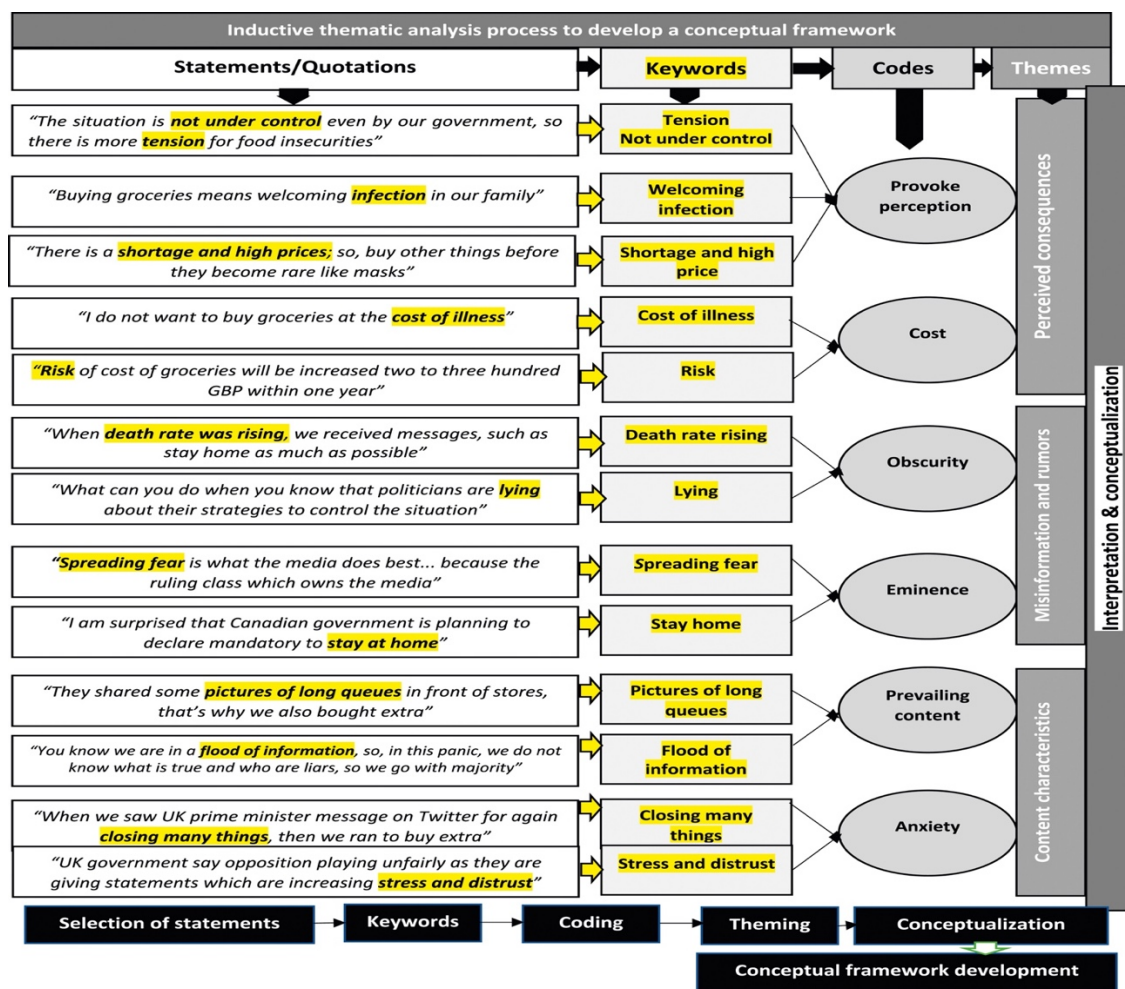


Figure 2. Thematic approach used in exemplar study (Naeem and Ozuem, 2023).

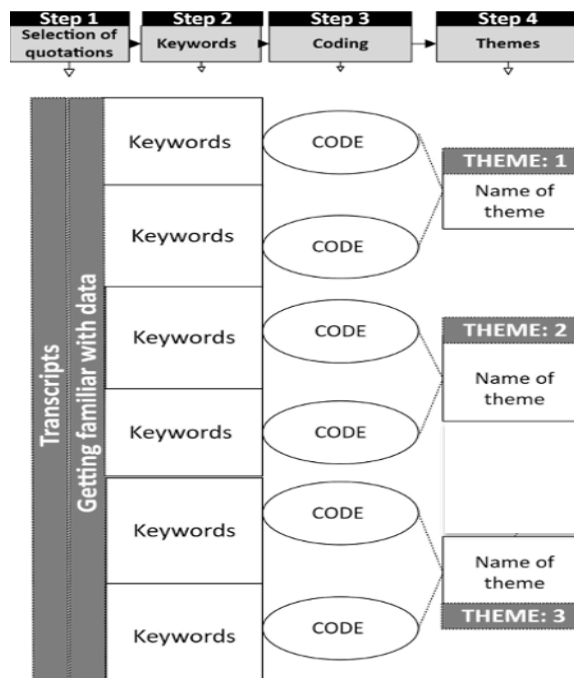


Figure 3. A systematic thematic analysis as adapted from Naeem et al. (2023)

This systematic analysis process was adapted to comply with this dissertation; however, it followed Naeem et al. (2023). Systematic thematic analysis allowed the researcher to follow a clear process involving 4 steps to extract data and process it in a clear and systematic manner to allow for interpretation. Step 5 was not performed as conceptual framework development was not part of the research objectives.

Rigour

To ensure that the study had rigour the researcher ensured trustworthiness. The trustworthiness of this research study was strengthened by utilising five key factors, which are as follows:

- **Credibility.** Credibility looks at how congruent the research findings are to reality. The researcher will utilise triangulation to ensure that the research is credible. Data source triangulation was used as it involves multiple sources to ensure consistency in the data. Using individual perspectives allowed the researcher to remove biased sources to ensure a credible and unbiased outcome (Bryant-Lukosius et al., 2014; Shenton, 2004).
- **Conformability.** Conformability looks at the fairness of the researcher and looks at the ability to demonstrate quality research. The utilisation of data triangulation ensures conformability, and the researcher ensured that there was a well-kept record of all sources used. All steps in the research process were recorded transparently and uploaded to the researcher's hard drive and shared with the supervisors for safe keeping (Mandal, 2018).

- **Dependability.** Dependability looks at how dependable the research was by having a well-documented research process in which a third party could easily follow and critique it. The researcher ensured dependability by using an audit trail available on his hard drive and via the supervisor's D-Drive (Moon et al., 2016).
- **Transferability.** Transferability considers how the description of the research relates to other parts of the research. To ensure consistency between all parts/chapters of this study, the researcher utilised a well-documented and descriptive description of the research (Shenton, 2004).
- **Reflexivity.** In this study, the researcher used reflexivity, using his personal subjective experience to distinguish knowledge from data. The researcher remained honest and transparent regarding any bias, which might improve public opinion and trust in the research study (Delve, 2022).

Ethical considerations

The researcher obtained an ethical clearance from the Ethics Committee of the North-West University with ethics clearance number NWU-01821-24-A4 (see page IV). To obtain the same, the researcher applied for an ethics clearance, and once consent had been received from the ethics committee, the researcher proceeded with the study. All other ethical considerations towards plagiarism had been adhered to by following the North-West University rules and regulations. Therefore, all work and literature used in this study by other authors had been cited to avoid any plagiarism.

Permission and informed consent

The researcher provided all potential participants with a copy of the ethical clearance from the Ethics Committee of the North-West University. The researcher further provided potential participants with a consent form, which is attached hereto as "Annexure C", which provided the potential participant with all the necessary details needed to acquire consent.

Consent for participation in this research study required the researcher to utilise an informed consent process. This allowed the researcher and potential participant to have an ongoing form of communication that allowed both parties to feel safe and protected throughout the research process. The first phase of consent was in an informal way where the researcher informed the participant of the research to gauge the participant's willingness to join and if the participant was eager to partake in the research. The next step was to have an effective consent process which included the following (UCSF, 2023):

- Discussing the potential involvement of the research participant in a private location/venue to protect their privacy.
- Giving the potential participant adequate information about the study in a language that was understandable to the potential participant.
- Providing answers to any question the potential participant might have regarding the research or the research process.
- Providing consent forms to potential participants and obtaining their signed and documented approval before the interview process began.
- Providing copies of the consent to the participants for their record keeping. Giving the potential participant the freedom to stop the process at any time before and during the interview.
- Giving participants seven days' grace after the interview to withdraw from the research. After seven days, the participants could no longer withdraw from the research process as they had had ample time to do so.

Anonymity and confidentiality

The researcher did not utilise participants' biographical data, including names, dates of birth, ethnicity, and gender. Rather, each participant was assigned a number or letter, which was 1 to 20 for practitioners and A to J for managers. All answers by participants will remain confidential to the researcher, and only the study results will be published. The researcher will further ensure that all participants' rights in the Personal Protection of Information Act, 2013, will be upheld. This is being done by ensuring that all interview answer sheets and other data regarding participants are protected by a security code on the researcher's laptop, and only the researcher and the supervisors will have access to the data.

Delimitation / Scope of the study

The purpose of this study was to explore workplace flexibility in the ECD sector and to determine the importance of workplace flexibility within the ECD sector. The research looked at showcasing centres/schools with workplace flexibility and schools/centres that do not have workplace flexibility. This allowed the researcher to gain a well-rounded view of the topic, provide credible results, and investigate certain research questions. The delimitation of the study was information/data that the study did not cover, including certain research questions or objectives about workplace flexibility that do not answer the research questions.

Value of the study

This study may contribute to the existing literature about workplace flexibility in the ECD sector and establish its importance. It may help answer certain research questions and provide insight as to whether workplace flexibility has a future in the ECD sector. This study could further help ECD centres/schools understand workplace flexibility's potential benefits or failures in the sector. Lastly, it may possibly highlight the future of work within the ECD sector and help schools/centres prepare for the future world of work.

Outline of dissertation

Chapter 1 – Introduction, Problem Statement, and Background

Chapter 2 – Article 1: Workplace flexibility, practitioner well-being and work-life balance of early childhood practitioners and managers: A systematic review

Chapter 3 – Article 2: Workplace flexibility, practitioner well-being and work-life balance of early childhood development practitioners and managers in the Sedibeng District

Chapter 4 – Findings, Recommendations and Conclusion

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CHAPTER 2: ARTICLE 1

WORKPLACE FLEXIBILITY, PRACTITIONER WELL-BEING, SATISFACTION, RETENTION, PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT, AND WORK-LIFE BALANCE OF EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT PRACTITIONERS AND MANAGERS: A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW

This working research was presented at the Global People Practice Conference 2025 (Bartlett, Gresse, & Keyser, 2025)(See Appendix K).

Abstract

Orientation: Workplace flexibility is a critical factor in promoting job satisfaction, well-being, and retention among Early Childhood Development (ECD) practitioners. Given the demanding nature of ECD roles, flexible work arrangements (FWAs) support educators and managers by improving work-life balance and professional development.

Research purpose: The systematic review focuses on investigating the importance of workplace flexibility for both practitioners (ECDPs) and managers of ECD centres and to assess its impact on outcomes such as job satisfaction, work-life balance, retention, professional development, and well-being.

Research Design, Approach and Method: Analysis of workplace flexibility was performed from 2013 to 2023. Using a systematic review guided by the PRISMA framework, this study synthesises existing literature on workplace flexibility. Searches were done using online scientific sources such as journals, and then research articles that were eligible were incorporated into the review, based on the inclusion and exclusion criteria. A Measurement Tool to Assess Systematic Review (AMSTAR 2) and Quality Critical Checklist (QCC) was used to enable the eligibility of the studies.

Main findings of the study: The findings indicate that FWAs may improve retention, enhance well-being, and support professional development, however financial constraints, logistical challenges, and institutional resistance may impact widespread adoption of FWAs. Key enablers include strong management support, policy clarity, and investment in digital infrastructure. The study highlights the importance of integrating FWAs into ECD settings to enhance adaptability and sustainability in the workforce.

Practical recommendations and managerial implications: Managers need to develop context-specific flexible work policies, fostering leadership buy-in, and addressing financial barriers. These provide valuable guidance for policymakers and ECD institutions seeking to create supportive work environments that balance organisational needs with practitioner well-being.

Keywords: Flexi work, practitioner, educators, well-being, managers, job satisfaction

Introduction

The early education sector (ECD) within the South African context faces a range of issues ranging from lack of funding to poor workplace flexibility policies. Early childhood practitioners (ECDPs) are key in fostering a positive and supportive environment for students who are from three weeks until seven years who often face very demanding work environments (Rao & Karumuri, 2019; Wang, 2021). These practitioners often operate from Monday to Friday from 07:00 to 17:00, facing high levels of stress and receiving limited support from the government. The Department of Basic Education's (DBE) has however recognised the important role that the ECD sector plays in a child's early development and education (SADTU, 2019). The sector's operational hours frequently exceed the maximum allowed under the Basic Condition of Employment Act, 1997, which often lead to stress, fatigue, burnout, and other health-related issues among ECDPs (Jeon et al., 2017). Governments around the world desire more flexible labour markets to promote a better work-life balance of practitioners (Cunat & Melitz, 2012).

It is emphasised by researchers Way et al. (2018) and Bal and Izak (2021) that workplace flexibility is in the spotlight and within the contemporary economy that focuses on organisations. Different researchers, such as Rousseau (2005), Hill et al. (2015) and Spreitzer et al. (2017) mention that practitioners are increasingly demanding flexibility in the work environment and negotiating flexible working hours.

During the last 10 years or so, several international studies and systematic reviews of workplace flexibility focused on practitioners and organisations. Bal and Jansen (2016) research on workplace flexibility separately focused on practitioners and management of organisation with regards to workplace flexibility. Studies that focus on organisation and management used the term "flexibility". Studies that focus on the organisation and workplace flexibility mainly focus on investigating the benefits that flexibility holds for the manager and studies that focus on practitioners mainly focus on the benefits for the practitioner (Bal & Izak, 2021).

Workplace flexibility, which includes adjustments to work location, hours, and time off, is increasingly seen to improve well-being, productivity, and job satisfaction (Wang, 2021). Intrinsic factors such as personal and career growth, alongside extrinsic factors like working conditions, impact job satisfaction (Rao & Karumuri, 2019). Therefore, research on workplace flexibility can enable practitioner and organisation performance (Way et al., 2018) and practitioner well-being (Bautista et al., 2023). Practitioner well-being, encompassing physical, mental, and emotional health, is crucial for satisfaction and can be supported through healthcare access, stress management programmes, and work-life integration (Bautista et al., 2023). Flexible work arrangements, including remote work, flexitime, compressed workweeks, job sharing, and

increased autonomy, enable practitioners to balance work and personal responsibilities, reducing stress and enhancing job satisfaction (Azar et al., 2018; Choi, 2017; Giannikis & Mihail, 2011; Kossek et al., 2015; Weideman & Hofmeyr, 2020). Work-life balance improves workplace perceptions, practitioner retention, and overall job satisfaction (Brough et al., 2020). Organisations are increasingly adopting flexibility to attract and retain talent, yet the ECD sector in South Africa remains largely rigid (Bal & Izak, 2021; Griffiths, 2020).

Kossek et al. (2015) and Ray and Pana-Cryan (2021) highlight the broader benefits of workplace flexibility for practitioners, managers, and society, supporting work-life balance, professional development, and stress reduction (Doyle, 2022). However, systemic challenges persist in South Africa's ECD sector, including limited resources, inadequate training, accreditation difficulties, and poor remuneration (Harrison, 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic underscored the necessity of workplace flexibility (Haque, 2023), with Atiku and Ganiyu (2022) emphasising that flexible job options extend beyond remote work to varied hours and reduced workweeks, which are particularly relevant for ECD. This study aims to explore workplace flexibility within the ECD sector through the lens of both managers (managers) and practitioners (practitioners), identifying its significance in the schooling sector.

By investigating organisational and practitioner perspectives and management perspectives, this research seeks to provide insights into how flexible work arrangements may enhance working conditions for ECDPs and inform policy development supporting flexibility. This study contributes to the growing discourse on workplace flexibility and aims to offer practical recommendations for the ECD sector.

Conceptualising workplace flexibility

Workplace flexibility can be defined as having the ability to decide about how, when, and where work is done, in ways that help managers better manage their business needs with practitioners' personal lives (Cañibano, 2019). It is increasingly viewed as a strategic way to improve practitioner well-being, organisational performance, as well as work-life integration (Moen & Sweet, 2004).

Cañibano (2019) defines workplace flexibility as an organisational practice that reshapes the boundaries of work, enabling more adaptive and individualised work arrangements without compromising on productivity. Thus, flexibility can be implemented through a variety of mechanisms that enable practitioners to have more control over their working conditions.

The four main types of workplace flexibility are firstly:

- Temporal flexibility (time flexibility)

That mainly refers to flexibility in when work is done. It may include arrangements such as flexi-time, compressed workweeks, and flexible starting and ending times (Moen & Sweet, 2004). Temporal flexibility allows practitioners to further adjust their schedules to meet their personal and/or family needs whilst improving work-life balance.

- Spatial flexibility (location flexibility)

This relates to where work is done. Practitioners can work from home, coworking spaces, or other remote locations. This form of flexibility became increasingly popular during the COVID-19 pandemic and is often associated with telecommuting or hybrid work models (Allen et al., 2013).

- Numerical flexibility (contractual flexibility)

Numerical flexibility refers to changes in the number of practitioners or working hours based on demand. This includes part-time work, temporary contracts, job-sharing, and seasonal work. From the manager's perspective, it helps manage costs and respond to market fluctuations much easier. However, as Tomlinson et al. (2018) pointed out, this may sometimes come at the cost of job security and consistent income for workers.

- Functional flexibility (task/role flexibility)

Functional flexibility involves being able to perform various tasks or take on different roles within an organisation. It requires multi-skilling and adaptability, allowing practitioners to move between tasks based on changing business needs (Cañibano, 2019). This further helps organisations remain agile in the ever-changing economic and technological world.

Hassard and Wolfram-Cox (2013) argue that workplace flexibility should not be viewed as a single, unified concept. Instead, they identified multiple paradigms through which workplace flexibility is understood and implement namely: A Managerial Paradigm which focuses on efficiency, cost reduction, and organisational control, a Human Relations Paradigm which focuses on work-life balance, practitioner satisfaction, and well-being, a Critical Paradigm which focuses on power dynamics, control, and inequality in flexible work arrangements, and lastly, a Postmodern Paradigm which focuses on complexity, ambiguity, and fragmented work identities.

SET highlights that when practitioners perceive that their contributions are valued and reciprocated by their managers through supportive work policies like flexibility, they are more likely to experience job satisfaction, commitment, and motivation (Blau, 1964; Emerson, 1976).

In the context of the ECD sector, SET may showcase how flexible work arrangements might influence the work experiences of ECD practitioners (ECDPs). Given the demanding nature of ECD work, which is characterised by long hours and high stress levels, flexible work policies may serve as a valuable resource exchanged for the dedication and hard work of ECDPs (Rao & Karumuri, 2019; SADTU, 2019). By applying SET, this research will explore whether workplace flexibility may lead to positive outcomes such as increased job satisfaction, reduced burnout, and improved retention rates among ECDPs.

Literature review and theoretical basis of the study

Fournier (2012) highlights the global shift toward workplace flexibility due to evolving labour markets. While not a new concept, Bird (2010) traces early adoption to the 1940s when firms trialled four-week truck driver schedules. However, Santovec (2014) notes that W.K Kellogg Co. experimented even earlier with six-hour shifts before reverting due to wartime demands. Despite labour unions advocating flexibility in the 1950s, Whaples (1991) examined historical workplace flexibility and compiled data showing reduced working hours globally from the 1960s-1980s. Newer research into workplace flexibility by Santovec (2014) asserts that reduced hours align with flexible work trends. This however has not transitioned into the education sector, research on workplace flexibility remains limited, particularly in schooling. Due to diverse roles, a universal approach is unfeasible. Yale, for example, has a standard 37.5-hour workweek, though schedules vary. COVID-19 increased flexibility adoption, albeit temporarily (Finnegan, 2022; Wills & van der Berg, 2022). Further research by Sello, De Wet-Billings, Mabethe, and Makuapane (2024) highlighted the severe constraints like lack of funding and infrastructural deficiencies which may also further hamper centre's ability to adopt FWAs and healthy and safe environments of work.

IFF Research (2023) and Department for Education (2019) emphasise benefits, including staff retention and improved work-life balance. Flexible work enhances instructional methods. IFF Research (2023) also links flexibility to better student outcomes. Challenges include financial/logistical constraints (IFF Research, 2023), career progression concerns (Department of Education, 2019), and productivity monitoring gaps (Brouge, 2023). IFF Research (2023) notes logistical burdens on leaders and fairness concerns among teachers. Parents also cite difficulties (Molloy, 2024). Overcoming these barriers requires strategic planning and stakeholder collaboration to balance flexibility with operational efficiency.

Research objectives

The objectives of this study are:

- To explore the importance of workplace flexibility for both practitioners (ECDPs) and managers of ECD centres and to assess its impact on outcomes such as job satisfaction, work-life balance, retention, professional development, and well-being.
- To explore the impact of workplace flexibility among managers and practitioners of the ECD sector in the Sedibeng District.

The primary research question guides this study in ensuring that this study advances knowledge and is thoroughly researched which is: How does workplace flexibility affect educators and managers in the ECD sector in the Sedibeng District, in terms of retention, work-life balance, job satisfaction, well-being, and professional development?

The following secondary research questions arise:

- What are the factors that affect practitioner well-being within the workplace?
- What are the implications of workplace flexibility in the workplace?
- Do the views of practitioners and managers on workplace flexibility differ?
- What impact does workplace flexibility have on professional development?
- What are the views of the manager on workplace flexibility?

Research Objective and Design

The researcher conducted a systematic review of the literature on the perceptions of workplace flexibility that have an on impact job satisfaction, work-life balance, retention, professional development, and the well-being of early childhood educators and managers. This research

followed the stages Tranfield et al. (2003) outlined for a systematic review. The stages are illustrated in Figure 3:

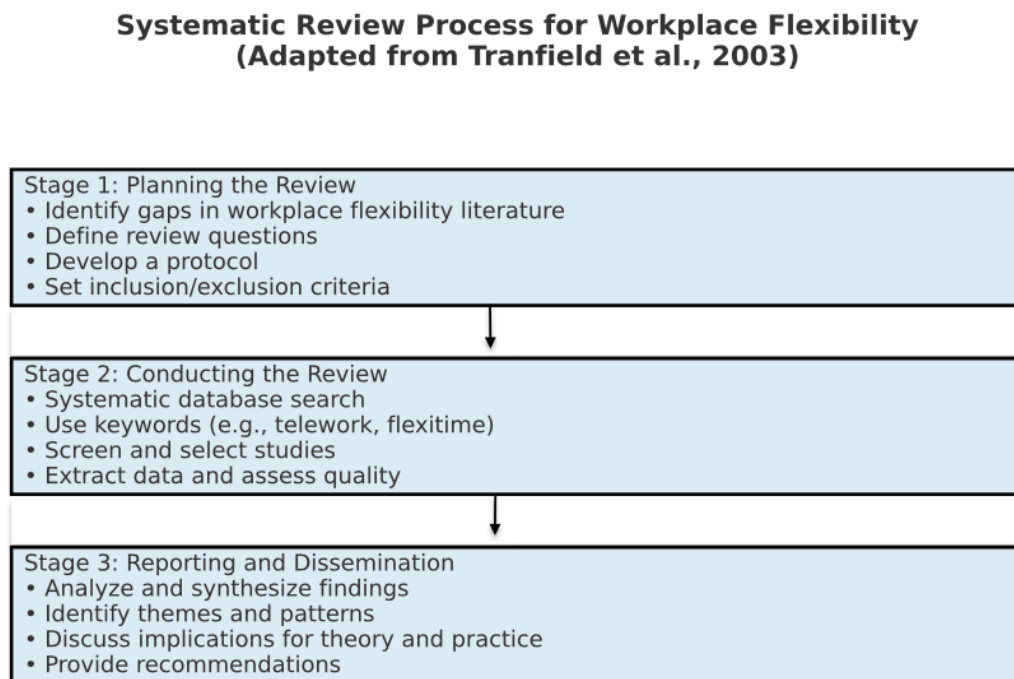


Figure 4 Systematic review process for workplace flexibility (adapted from Tranfield et al., 2003)

The above illustration in Figure 3 reveals three stages, each progressing through different phases (ten phases in total) to conduct a successful systematic review. Stage one is the planning stage, which seeks to identify the need for a systematic review. Thereafter, the proposal and review protocol are enacted. Stage two follows through on the review, identifying possible studies, selecting studies based on the inclusion criteria, conducting a quality assessment, and synthesising the data. In the third and final stage, the reporting is conducted, ensuring that the findings are distributed and applied (Tranfield et al., 2003).

A comprehensive review regarding workplace flexibility was conducted. The sources that were consulted include academic journals, books, and scientific online sources. The review covered research published from 2013 to 2023, focusing on gathering a wide range of insights and perspectives. This research will focus on the last decade to ensure that the findings are relevant to the current trends, challenges, and developments in workplace flexibility. The keywords used in the search encompassed terms related to "workplace flexibility," "workplace conditions," "practitioner well-being," "work-life balance," and "educational sector." These keywords are deliberately broad to ensure a comprehensive examination of the topic.

The literature review served two key purposes in this qualitative investigation. First, it was conducted before the primary study to provide a strong theoretical foundation and contextualise the research. Second, it was revisited after data collection to aid in interpreting the findings. This two-phase approach ensured that the study was well-informed, and the results were appropriately contextualised. A thorough investigation of the literature was undertaken, including peer-reviewed articles from local and international journals, specialist textbooks, and scientific content on workplace flexibility for educators, teachers, and managers.

PRISMA was applied to ensure research validity, and AMSTAR 2 guidelines were followed. The researcher chose relevant research titles based on inclusion and exclusion criteria. The systematic review examined key questions, including factors affecting practitioner well-being, workplace flexibility implications, differences in practitioner and manager perspectives, its impact on professional development, and manager views on flexibility.

Literature exploration

The following databases were used in the computer search: EBSCOhost, Oxford Journals Online, Open Access Journals, ResearchGate, Mendeley, Google Scholar, ScienceDirect, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global, and SA ePublications. The systematic review focused on research from the year 2013 to 2023 to ensure relevance. References from selected articles were analysed to identify keywords for the search. Cross-searching included terms such as “workplace flexibility,” “Flexi work,” “practitioner,” “educators,” “teachers,” “manager,” “manager,” “well-being,” and “Compressed workweek.” The search filter targeted these terms in titles and abstracts. A list of eligible studies was generated based on the research questions and evaluated against inclusion and exclusion criteria.

Data analysis

The systematic review of the eligible studies follows the guidelines of AMSTAR 2’s evaluation tool. AMSTAR 2 was chosen as it allows for reviewing various studies, including systematic reviews and randomised trials, and the possible risk of prejudice to be considered by providing extensive, critical evaluations of the relevant studies. The AMSTAR 2 evaluation tool further enables the researcher to identify the best quality research for this systematic review for Article 1 (Shea et al., 2017).

Population and sample

The population in this study consisted of previously conducted research that looked at explored literature on the perceptions and views of workplace flexibility impacting job satisfaction, work-life

balance, retention, professional development, and the well-being of early childhood educators and managers which proved to be relevant to the research question. The focus of this research mainly looked at providing the views of both the organisation (manager/manager) and the practitioner (practitioner) whilst highlighting the benefits of workplace flexibility and addressing the challenges. The samples for this research were selected from sources provided in previous literature using a systematic review.

Data processing

A critical appraisal was conducted using the principles of Tranfield et al. (2003) and the PRISMA checklist of Page et al. (2021). The literature was evaluated with key questions, including the relevance of the research, its contribution, study design suitability, potential biases, adherence to protocols, hypothesis assessment, statistical analysis, and conflicts of interest (Young & Solomon, 2009). Only studies meeting quality evaluation criteria were included in the final review, assessed using AMSTAR 2. This process ensured that the selected sources were rigorous, credible, and aligned with the research objectives.

Inclusion and exclusion criteria

This study included literature that addressed the research questions outlined in the sampling method. No geographical limitations were applied. All available systematic reviews on workplace flexibility were considered. Published studies with aggregated data were included if they met specific criteria: empirical, peer-reviewed, with an English abstract, published results, and an examination of workplace flexibility's impact on practitioner well-being. Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-method studies were included. To identify relevant literature, PEOS (Participants, Exposure, Outcomes, and Studies) as seen in Table 2 below which is based on the PRISMA framework was used. The study's inclusion criteria were structured accordingly to ensure comprehensive analysis.

Table 1 PEOS Table, adapted from Page et al. (2021)

1	Participants	Educators/teachers, principals/owners, practitioners, and managers that have implemented or partake in flexible work practices.
2	Exposure	Educators and corporate practitioners as well as managers in flexible work environments.
3	Outcomes	Improved well-being in the workplace, implications of workplace flexibility, various generational views on workplace flexibility, international and national trends on workplace flexibility, and the managers' perspectives on workplace flexibility.
4	Studies	Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-method studies

Exclusion criteria

The following requirements led to the exclusion of sources:

- Irrelevant, unreliable, or duplicated literature
- Lack of complete results or estimates
- Journal or scholarly articles that were not fully accessible (incomplete texts)
- Sources in languages other than English
- Research that was not peer-reviewed
- Studies lacking empirical evidence

Rigour

This study followed five fundamental principles to ensure the trustworthiness of the systematic review. Credibility addressed the alignment of findings with reality through triangulation to eliminate bias (Andre, 2004). Confirmability ensured objectivity in data collection and analysis (Mandal, 2018), with transparency maintained by storing research records on the supervisor's and co-supervisor's D-Droves at the North-West University. Dependability emphasised reliability through a well-documented process (Moon et al., 2016). Transferability ensured coherence with detailed descriptions (Andre, 2004). Reflexivity acknowledged researcher biases, enhancing trust (Delve, 2022). These principles strengthened the study's credibility, ensuring replicability and robust findings.

Data-handling process

Guided by the stages of Tranfield et al. (2003) and the PRISMA framework of Page et al. (2021) the following steps were followed in this study:

1. The research topic was defined, and the research title was established.
2. The aims and objectives of the study were distinguished.
3. The research question/s were formulated based on the evaluation process.
4. The PRISMA methods of Page et al. (2021) were then expanded due to the following:
 - a. Protocol had to be followed procedurally in which data had to be filtered and handled.
 - b. Eligibility criteria of the study were specified and taken into consideration such as the years of the study and the language/s used.
 - c. Information sources were described (e.g., databases) in the search.
 - d. A search strategy was conducted to create a controlled and well-structured search to ensure the study did not deviate from its aims and objectives. A completed electronic search strategy for the database/s was provided.
 - e. Literature selection was outlined and presented on what approach was taken for selecting the various studies/literature such as the screening and eligibility.
 - f. Data collection procedure was listed and explained.
 - g. Data items of all properties for which information was collected, were listed, and explained.
 - h. Risk of bias in individual studies and across studies was explained and presented.
 - i. Summary measures were outlined which allowed the information to be simplified
 - j. The data-processing strategies and research outcomes were explained and presented.
 - k. Additional analyses methods and strategies were clearly described and presented.
5. Results were determined by means of the data gathering process of this study.
6. A discussion of the reporting and dissemination took place.

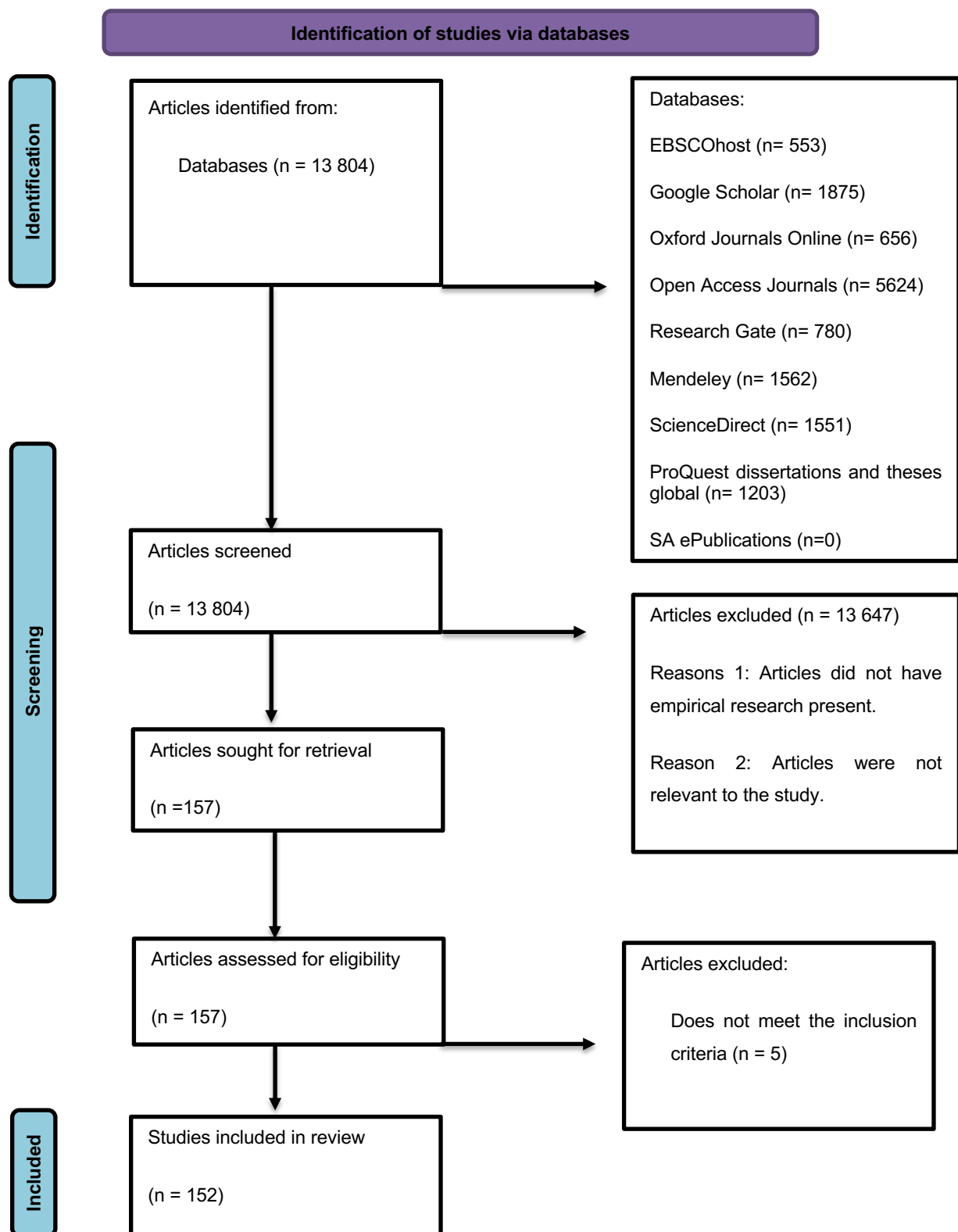
Ethical considerations

The researcher obtained ethical clearance from the Ethics Committee of the North-West University with ethics clearance number: NWU-01821-24-A4 (see page IV). All other ethical considerations towards plagiarism had been adhered to following the North-West University rules and regulations. Therefore, all work and literature used in this study by other authors have been cited to avoid any plagiarism.

Findings

A total of 13,804 studies were identified through electronic databases using specific keywords. After exclusions based on inclusion criteria, relevance, duplication, empirical basis, and access restrictions, 13,648 studies were removed. Filters such as date and language limitations refined the search. The PRISMA Flow Diagram (Page et al., 2021) illustrates this process as seen below. Of the sources reviewed, 44.51% examined workplace flexibility and flexible work arrangements, 8.54% focused on practitioner and educator perspectives, and 4.88% explored manager views and well-being. Additionally, 29.26% addressed teacher well-being, while 12.80% investigated the concept of compressed workweek and its implications for workplace flexibility.

PRISMA Flow Diagram as adopted from Page et al. (2021)



For further clarification on which studies were included, and reasons for exclusion see Annexure E.

This study identified three main themes related to workplace flexibility (For detailed information on articles screened and that were relevant see Appendix E). The *first theme* focused on perceptions and views on workplace flexibility. This included examining the perspectives of educators and managers on workplace flexibility, as well as understanding its impact on job satisfaction and well-being. The *second theme* explored implementation and variations in workplace flexibility. It investigated the most effective flexible work arrangements, the barriers to their implementation, and role of enablers and facilitators in supporting workplace flexibility. The *third theme* examined outcomes and the impact on retention and development. This included analysing how workplace flexibility influenced practitioner retention rates, its effect on professional development, and its overall impact on work-life balance and well-being.

The findings of the systematic review indicated that workplace flexibility significantly influenced practitioner well-being and job satisfaction across sectors. This review synthesized research to provide a comprehensive understanding of FWAs and their impact on educators, managers, and practitioners. Studies consistently showed that FWAs positively affected practitioner attitudes and organisational outcomes. Sturman and Walsh (2014) found that aligning work hours with practitioner preferences enhanced job satisfaction and reduced turnover. Chia-Lin and Wei-Wen (2017) highlighted the well-being benefits of flexible scheduling among Taiwanese educators, while Wörtler et al. (2020) emphasised that tailoring FWAs to individual autonomy needs improved outcomes. Educators perceived workplace flexibility as essential for managing work-life balance and noted that supportive leadership improved well-being through FWAs (Press et al., 2015). Additionally, Van der Lippe et al. (2024) noted that socio-economic disparities in FWA access influenced job satisfaction.

From a managerial perspective, Koreshi and Alpass (2023) noted that FWAs played a role in enhancing practitioner well-being and organisational effectiveness and that FWAs benefited older workers managing caregiving duties, while Ahmad et al. (2018) reported that FWAs reduced turnover intentions among Malaysian practitioners. However, FWAs had mixed outcomes, as Gu, Wang, and You (2020) found that effective personal time recovery reduced stress, while Kaduk et al. (2019) linked involuntary FWAs to work-family conflict. Within the education sector, FWAs helped manage stress and improve job satisfaction. Orlanda-Ventayen and Ventayen (2022) found that stress management policies reduced depression among educators and demonstrated that a flexible work environment contributed to well-being and autonomy, while Turner et al. (2017) found that a four-day school week improved staff morale.

Discussion

This section presents a discussion of the themes identified in the systematic review, as outlined in the findings section. The analysis of the research findings was structured around the research questions. The study's objectives were met through a comprehensive review of existing literature, leading to the identification of three key themes. The articles that guided each theme and their respective codes are displayed in Table 2 for a more in-depth exploration of how the themes connect with the literature

Theme 1: Perception and views on workplace flexibility

Intrinsic factors such as personal as well as career growth and extrinsic factors such as working conditions may impact practitioner job satisfaction (Rao, 2019). Sturman and Walsh (2014) highlighted the importance of aligning work hours with practitioner preferences, demonstrating that workhours fit may enhance job satisfaction and influence the reduction of turnover. Similarly, Chia-Lin and Wei-Wen (2017) emphasised the well-being benefits that substitute educators in Taiwan enjoyed when flexibility was introduced to mitigate job stress and administrative burdens. Well-being refers to the holistic state of an individual encompassing physical, mental, and emotional health. Wörtler et al. (2020) examined blended working arrangements (BWAs), showing that practitioners' preferences for such flexibility vary based on individual differences like autonomy orientation. This research highlights the importance of tailoring flexible work policies to meet diverse practitioner needs, thereby improving organisational attractiveness and citizenship behaviour.

Theme 1a: What are the views of educators and managers on workplace flexibility?

Research into the views of educators and managers on workplace flexibility revealed a complex and diversified backdrop. Educators often perceive flexibility as an important component to managing the demands of teaching as well as personal commitments (Wörtler et al., 2020). Press et al. (2015), through surveys and policy analysis, highlighted the importance of evidence-based policies in early childhood education and care, whilst further suggesting that flexibility within the workplace may alleviate staffing shortages and improve retention rates as educators find flexibility helpful in managing work-life balance whilst improving job satisfaction. This perspective underscores the necessity of adaptable work environments to support educational staff effectively. Van der Lippe, den Dulk, and Begall (2024) explored the availability, use, and consequences of flexible work arrangements (FWAs) among practitioners of different socio-economic statuses (SES) in nine European countries. The study investigates how practitioners perceive the availability and accessibility of FWAs, revealing significant disparities in their usage

based on SES. Additionally, it showcased that effectiveness and impact of FWAs vary according to management's commitment to FWAs and therefore having either a negative or positive impact on FWAs. Turner et al. (2017) used a combination of surveys and performance metrics which further supports the above notion that educators value flexible work environments. Their study suggests that a four-day school week improves staff morale and academic quality, indicating a strong support for further relaxation on work schedules among educators in favour of more flexible work arrangements.

Theme 1b: What is the impact that workplace flexibility has on job satisfaction and well-being?

Gu, Wang, and You (2020) utilised a quantitative approach to explore how recovery experiences, such as psychological detachment and relaxation may mitigate the negative effects of work stressors on preschool teachers' well-being. Their study demonstrated that effective recovery during personal time off has significantly reduced negative outcomes such as job dissatisfaction, vigour loss, and insomnia symptoms. This further aligns with the findings of Mulholland, McKinlay, and Sproule (2017), who used a mixed methods approach to investigate secondary school teachers' stress levels and found that high stress due to workload and evolving job demands could possibly be alleviated using non-teaching time and sabbaticals. They further investigated how gender and tenure influence work and well-being perceptions among secondary teachers in Scotland and their findings revealed high stress levels among middle managers, particularly due to workload and job demands. Kaduk et al. (2019) utilised a quantitative method to examine the impacts of voluntary and involuntary FWAs in a Fortune 500 company. Their study highlighted that involuntary variable schedules led to higher work-family conflict, stress, burnout, and turnover intentions Choi et al. (2017) study further highlighted the fact that inclusive leadership, coupled with flexible work, may further boost work engagements and creativity.

Theme 2: Implementation and variations in workplace flexibility

Work-life balance and scheduling flexibility are significant predictors of job satisfaction across different cultural contexts which Andrade, Westover, and Kupka (2019) highlighted these challenges of different cultural contexts in multinational companies which face difficulties due to varying practitioner responses to work scenarios, highlighting a need for tailored human resource practices to optimise performance and reduce turnover. Their study utilised non-panel longitudinal data from the International Social Survey Programme, which emphasised the importance of adapting strategies to local conditions to overcome barriers to implementing flexible work arrangements globally. The mediator role of psychological contacts in the relationship between workplace flexibility and organisational commitment is pivotal. Lu, Wang and Olsen (2023) delve

into the “flexibility paradox”, exploring whether flexible schedules lead to improved work-life balance or longer working hours. Their study, which examined different types of flexible schedules across gender and occupational groups, reveals that the benefits of flexibility are not uniformly experienced, indicating the potential disparities and the need for targeted policy interventions. This paradox highlights the complexity of implementing flexible work arrangements that may enhance practitioner well-being. FWAs in specific sectors, such as early childhood education and telecommuting, present unique challenges and opportunities.

Theme 2a: What are the Most Effective Flexible Work Arrangements?

Andrade et al. (2019) used a quantitative method to show that work-from-home opportunities significantly enhanced job satisfaction, reinforcing the positive impact of remote work on practitioner well-being. Wheatley (2017) also used quantitative methods but had a specific focus on the UK, examining the impact of FWAs on job and leisure satisfaction. The study noted significant gender differences, with men benefiting more from FWAs in terms of job satisfaction and managing household responsibilities than their female counterparts. An et al. (2021) study utilised a mixed-methods approach, combining online surveys with follow-up interviews, to examine the experiences of K-12 teachers who were transitioning to online teaching during the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic. The study highlighted the critical role that professional development, access to technology, and effective communication has in ensuring FWAs are successful within educational spaces. The comparative analysis reveals that the most effective flexible work arrangements include telecommuting, flexitime, compressed work weeks, and supportive workplace environments. These arrangements have been shown to enhance practitioner well-being, job satisfaction, and work-life balance across a variety of contexts.

Theme 2b: What are the barriers to implementation of flexible work arrangements?

Warmate et al. (2021) indicated that there is a lack of flexible opportunities for practitioners with mental disabilities, suggesting that financial implications and manager policies need adjustment to accommodate these workers. This study used case studies and surveys to examine the availability and impact of flexible work arrangements for individuals with mental disabilities. The economic vulnerability of these practitioners makes them less likely to seek flexible work options, the findings highlighted a need for policies that ensure financial security alongside flexibility. Managerial and organisational challenges also pose significant barriers to the implementation of FWAs. Kossek et al. (2015) discussed the traps that may emerge during the implementation of workplace flexibility, such as altered work-life dynamics, reduced fairness perceptions, and weakened organisational culture. The study emphasised the importance of understanding these potential barriers and provided strategies for managers to implement flexibility as a systematic

organisational change. This study alluded to having managers/organisations identify barriers to FWAs and allowing for policy interventions to eliminate them and ensure certainty simultaneously. These studies collectively emphasise the multifaceted nature of barriers to implementing FWAs. Addressing these barriers require a nuanced understanding of not only cultural, social, financial, managerial, but also technological factors, which should be driven and guided by robust empirical evidence from diverse organisational, national, and international trends as well as their contexts.

Theme 2c: What are the enablers and facilitators of flexible work arrangements?

One significant enabler of FWAs is organisational culture and management support. Wörtler, Van Yperen and Barelds (2020) found that organisations with a strong culture of trust and support from management are more likely to successfully implement FWAs. Their study used a mixed methods approach, utilising a combination of surveys and interviews to assess how managerial attitudes and organisational culture influence the uptake of FWAs. The findings underscore the importance of leadership commitment in fostering a supportive environment for flexible working. Yadav, Rangnekar, and Bamel (2016) explored the role of leadership styles in facilitating FWAs. Their quantitative study, which included surveys across multiple organisations, demonstrated that transformational leadership is particularly effective in promoting flexible work practices. Leaders who inspire, motivate their practitioners, and act as agents of change are key enablers of successful FWAs.

Theme 3: Outcomes and impact on retention and development

Workplace flexibility is a modern organisational practice designed to balance practitioners' work and personal life and it has been widely studied for its effects on practitioner retention and development. The literature presented in this theme presents a nuanced view, highlighting both the benefits and potential drawbacks of FWAs in various professional contexts. Despite the benefits, FWAs are not without its challenges. One critical issue is the potential for increased work-life conflict, particularly when the boundaries between work and personal life become blurred. Laurijssen et al. (2024) argued that while flexible schedules may improve family time quality, they may also trap practitioners in a cycle where work intrudes into personal time, potentially leading to burnout. This paradox highlights the need for clear boundaries and effective management of FWAs to prevent negative outcomes.

Theme 3a: How does workplace flexibility impact retention rates?

The well-being of practitioners is a pivotal element affected by workplace flexibility. For instance. Bigras et al. (2021) emphasised the heightened stress that was experienced by early childhood

educators during the COVID-19 pandemic, which underscores the need for supporting their psychological well-being through flexible working conditions. Eadie et al. conducted a survey to gather their data on stress levels and well-being among educators, while Bigras et al. utilised qualitative methods such as interviews to explore the experiences of early childhood educators during the pandemic. These studies revealed that remote working and other flexible arrangements may possibly alleviate stress and improve well-being, which are essential for retaining staff in high stress professions like early childhood education. Berkery et al. (2020) link flexitime to reduced practitioner turnover and increased organisational profitability through a quantitative analysis of organisational data, highlighting the economic advantages that may be associated with implementing flexible working policies. This aligns with the notion that flexible working conditions may create a positive social exchange between practitioners and managers, fostering more commitment and a stable workforce.

Theme 3b: How does workplace flexibility impact retention rates?

Kwon et al. (2024) investigated the working conditions and well-being of early childhood teachers, comparing outcomes based on child age group and teachers' educational attainment. Their findings advocate for policies and programmes that improve working conditions, suggesting that workplace flexibility may support professional development by enhancing overall teacher well-being. This study used comprehensive surveys to gather data, emphasising the importance of flexible work environments in fostering professional growth. Workplace flexibility is an ever-evolving paradigm in modern organisational structures, which may significantly influence professional development, particularly within the education sector. This sub-theme explores how FWAs impact the professional growth of educators, drawing insights from a range of studies across a variety of contexts and methodologies. A study conducted by Royer and Moreau (2016) on early childhood educators in Canada highlighted the crucial role of psychological well-being in professional growth and long-term career development. Their research underscores the varying levels of well-being of educators throughout different career stages, emphasising the need for ongoing support and development opportunities. This study used surveys to assess the psychological well-being of the respondents, the study revealed that workplace flexibility may enhance career development by providing the necessary support throughout various career stages.

Theme 3c: What impact does workplace flexibility have on work-life balance and well-being?

Farewell et al. (2022) applied the Job Demands-Resources Model (JD-R) to examine the personal and external demands impacting the job satisfaction and well-being of early childhood education

staff. The study found higher levels of personal demands, such as depression and perceived stress, and external demands, such as workload and staffing concerns, which are crucial for understanding the work-life balance challenges faced by ECD staff. FWAs may alleviate these demands by providing more control over work schedules and environments, thereby enhancing job satisfaction and well-being. Geraci et al. (2023) investigated the impact of remote teaching during the COVID-19 lockdown on teachers' psychological well-being, the study indicated an increased burnout and decreased self-esteem among teachers due to various challenges. The study highlighted the role emotional intelligence has in mitigating these challenges, indicating its importance for maintain well-being during stressful periods. FWAs that promote emotional intelligence training and support may help teachers cope better with stress, reducing burnout and improving well-being. Kwon et al. (2022) examined the working conditions and physical, psychological, and professional well-being of early childhood teachers in the early care and education (ECE) workforce. The study highlighted the disparities in physical and psychological well-being and working conditions faced by the majority of ECE teachers, which is often a neglected issue in this workforce. Highlighting a need to improve the working conditions of the ECE workforce.

Limitations and recommendation for future research

The study is not without limitations. The scope of the review was confined to literature published within a specific timeframe, and restricted to studies conducted in English, which may have excluded relevant findings from earlier or more recent studies as well as in other languages. Additionally, the reliance on secondary data sources also means that the study's conclusions are contingent on the quality and reliability of the existing literature. This article also could not include all articles due to limitations on word count and citation numbers. This article was written to conform to the framework of the *African Journal of Practitioner Relations*.

Based on the findings, the study recommends that organisations, particularly within the ECD sector, should consider adopting more flexible work arrangements to enhance practitioner satisfaction and retention. It suggests that policymakers develop supportive frameworks that facilitate the implementation of FWAs, ensuring that these arrangements are tailored to the specific needs of the sector. Furthermore, organisations should invest in the necessary infrastructure and training to support effective remote work and other flexible arrangements, thereby addressing potential logistical and technological challenges. Further research should be conducted and apply longitudinal methods to understand the long-term impact of FWAs and gain a more in-depth and comprehensive overview of its effectiveness.

Practical implications

The study's findings suggest that FWAs impact job satisfaction, well-being and retention. Leadership support and a results-oriented culture are crucial for success. However, challenges include isolation, management resistance, and logistical barriers. In the ECD sector, hybrid models and staggered schedules offer potential solutions. Tailored approaches are essential. SET suggests that when practitioners perceive that their efforts are reciprocated through supportive policies like FWAs, they are more likely to remain committed and satisfied in their roles (Blau, 1964; Emerson, 1976). Participants emphasised that flexibility helps manage workload pressures, leading to improved retention and job satisfaction. This aligns with research indicating that FWAs contribute to well-being, job satisfaction, and practitioner retention (Sturman & Walsh, 2014; Chia-Lin & Wei-Wen, 2017).

Contribution and value add of the study

This study offers valuable insights into the complex dynamics of workplace flexibility, particularly in the ECD sector. It highlights the importance of FWAs in enhancing practitioner satisfaction and well-being, which are crucial for retaining skilled and talented staff in this sector. Furthermore, it provides a comprehensive understanding of the factors that facilitate or hinder the successful implementation of FWAs, offering a useful reference for policymakers and organisational leaders aiming to improve workplace conditions. This study further contributes to the existing body of knowledge by providing a detailed analysis of the impact of workplace flexibility on various aspects of practitioner experience. It identifies possible benefits, such as improved job satisfaction and well-being, and outlines significant challenges, including financial implications and logistical issues. Additionally, it underpins the importance of addressing misconceptions about the feasibility of FWAs and promotes a more nuanced understanding of their implementation in different contexts.

In conclusion, this systematic review provides a comprehensive examination of workplace flexibility within the ECD sector, highlighting both the benefits and challenges of implementing FWAs. It highlights the potential of FWAs in significantly enhancing practitioner well-being and job satisfaction, thereby contributing to better retention rates and professional development. By addressing the identified challenges and misconceptions, and through careful and context-specific implementation, organisations may leverage FWAs to create a more supportive and productive work environment. This study serves as a valuable resource for both researchers, policy makers, and practitioners interested in the dynamics of workplace flexibility. It also serves as the foundation for the interviews in article 2 which will enhance the South African perspective on the topic.

Themes Identified for Chapter 2 – Article 1

Table 2 *Themes identified for Chapter 2 - Article 1*

Main Themes	Sub-Themes
Theme 1: Perception and views on workplace flexibility	Theme 1a: What are the views of educators and managers on workplace flexibility? Theme 1b: What is the impact that workplace flexibility has on job satisfaction and well-being?
Theme 2: Implementation and variations in workplace flexibility.	Theme 2a: What are the most effective flexible work arrangements? Theme 2b: What are the barriers to implementation of flexible work arrangements? Theme 2c: Who are the enablers and facilitators of flexible work arrangements?
Theme 3: Outcomes and impact on retention and development.	Theme 3a: How does workplace flexibility impact retention rates? Theme 3b: How does workplace flexibility affect professional development? Theme 3c: What impact does workplace flexibility have on work-life balance and well-being?

Theme	Sub-theme	Source	Explanation
2	2b	Williams, J. C., Blair, L. M., & Berdahl, J. L. (2013). Cultural Schemas, Social Class, and the Flexibility Stigma. <i>Journal of Social Issues</i> , 69(2), 209–234. https://doi-org.nwulib.idm.oclc.org/10.1111/josi.12012	The text discusses the widespread availability of workplace flexibility programmes but highlights the low usage rates, indicating a gap between policy and practice. It addresses the reasons behind this gap, such as fears of negative career repercussions, wage penalties, and lower performance evaluations associated with using these policies. The text mentions cultural and informal practices that stigmatize the use of flexibility policies, despite formal policies being in place, which reflects the challenges in changing workplace norms and attitudes.
3	3b	Royer, N., & Moreau, C. (2016). A Survey of Canadian Early Childhood Educators' Psychological Wellbeing at Work. <i>Early Childhood Education Journal</i> , 44(2), 135–146. https://doi-org.nwulib.idm.oclc.org/10.1007/s10643-015-0696-3	The study examines early childhood educators' psychological well-being, which is crucial for their professional growth and long-term career development. It highlights how well-being varies throughout different career stages, indicating the importance of ongoing support and development opportunities at various points in an educator's career.
2	2c	Alan, Ü. (2021). Distance Education During the COVID-19 Pandemic in Turkey: Identifying the Needs of Early Childhood Educators. <i>Early Childhood Education Journal</i> , 49(5), 987–994. https://doi-org.nwulib.idm.oclc.org/10.1007/s10643-021-01197-y	The study identifies specific needs of early childhood educators to improve distance education, which aligns with enabling and facilitating effective workplace flexibility during the COVID-19 pandemic. The focus on improving technological competencies, providing interactive resources, and creating user-friendly educational platforms addresses the tools and support necessary for effective remote work and distance education. The need for resources to serve families and support for psychological well-being highlights the comprehensive support required to implement flexible working conditions successfully.
3	3a	Eadie, P., Levickis, P., Murray, L., Page, J., Elek, C., & Church, A. (2021). Early Childhood Educators' Wellbeing During the COVID-19 Pandemic. <i>Early Childhood Education Journal</i> , 49(5), 903–913. https://doi-org.nwulib.idm.oclc.org/10.1007/s10643-021-01203-3	The study examines the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the well-being of early childhood educators, emphasizing the increased stressors and the need for supporting their psychological health. It uses the Early Childhood Professional Wellbeing scale (ECPW) to measure professional well-being, which is critical for understanding the overall work-life balance of educators.
3	3a	Bigras, N., Lemay, L., Lehrer, J., Charron, A., Duval, S., Robert-Mazaye, C., & Laurin, et I. (2021). Early Childhood Educators' Perceptions of Their Emotional State, Relationships with Parents, Challenges, and Opportunities	The study examines the emotional state and well-being of early childhood educators during the COVID-19 pandemic, noting increased stress levels and decreased well-being for many educators. It highlights factors that affected well-being, such as the mode of working (remote vs. in-person) and the challenges faced during the pandemic.

		During the Early Stage of the Pandemic. <i>Early Childhood Education Journal</i> , 49(5), 775–787. https://doi-org.nwulib.idm.oclc.org/10.1007/s10643-021-01224-y	
3	3c	Cancio, E. J., Larsen, R., Mathur, S. R., Estes, M. B., Mei Chang, & Johns, B. (2018). Special Education Teacher Stress: Coping Strategies. <i>Education & Treatment of Children (West Virginia University Press)</i> , 41(4), 457–481. https://doi-org.nwulib.idm.oclc.org/10.1353/etc.2018.0025	The study focuses on stress perception and coping mechanisms among special educators, addressing how work-related stress affects their quality of work and overall well-being. It identifies specific stressors such as increased caseloads, multiple roles, and pressures for student achievement, which are directly related to work-life balance challenges.
1	1a	Press, F., Wong, S., & Gibson, M. (2015). Understanding who cares creating the evidence to address the long-standing policy problem of staff shortages in early childhood education and care. <i>Journal of Family Studies</i> , 21(1), 87–100. https://doi-org.nwulib.idm.oclc.org/10.1080/13229400.2015.1020990	The paper discusses the need for evidence-based policy in early childhood education and care (ECEC) workforce policy, emphasizing the importance of both quantitative and qualitative data to inform policy decisions. It highlights the critical shortage of qualified staff in ECEC, indicating a need for policy to address managerial and educational perspectives on workforce issues.
3	3c	Farewell, C. V., Quinlan, J., Melnick, E., Powers, J., & Puma, J. (2022). Job Demands and Resources Experienced by the Early Childhood Education Workforce Serving High-Need Populations. <i>Early Childhood Education Journal</i> , 50(2), 197–206. https://doi-org.nwulib.idm.oclc.org/10.1007/s10643-020-01143-4	The study applies the Job Demands-Resources Model (JD-R) to examine how personal and external demands impact the job satisfaction and well-being of early childhood education (ECE) staff. It highlights the higher levels of personal demands, such as depression and perceived stress, and external demands, such as workload and staffing concerns, which are crucial for understanding the work-life balance challenges faced by ECE staff.
3	3c	Carroll, A., Flynn, L., O'Connor, E. S., Forrest, K., Bower, J., Fynes-Clinton, S., York, A., & Ziaei, M. (2021). In their words: listening to teachers' perceptions about stress in the workplace and how to address it. <i>Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education</i> , 49(4), 420–434. https://doi-org.nwulib.idm.oclc.org/10.1080/1359866X.2020.1789914	The study focuses on understanding the main contributors to teacher stress, which is a key aspect of work-life balance and overall well-being. It identifies various sources of stress, including systemic, organizational, relational, and intrapersonal factors, which are essential for understanding the comprehensive challenges teachers face in maintaining well-being.

3	3c	Geraci, A., Di Domenico, L., Inguglia, C., & D'Amico, A. (2023). Teachers' Emotional Intelligence, Burnout, Work Engagement, and Self-Efficacy during COVID-19 Lockdown. <i>Behavioral Sciences (2076-328X)</i> , 13(4), 296. https://doi-org.nwulib.idm.oclc.org/10.3390/bs13040296	The study investigates how remote teaching during the COVID-19 lockdown affected teachers' psychological well-being, emphasizing increased burnout and decreased self-esteem due to various challenges. It highlights the role of emotional intelligence in mitigating the negative effects of these challenges, indicating its importance for maintaining well-being during stressful periods.
3	3c	You Li, & Ren-Cheng Zhang. (2019). Kindergarten teachers' work stress and work-related well-being: A moderated mediation model. <i>Social Behavior & Personality: An International Journal</i> , 47(11), 1–11. https://doi-org.nwulib.idm.oclc.org/10.2224/sbp.8409	The study explores the relationship between teacher work stress, psychological capital, social support, and work-related well-being. It demonstrates how work stress affects teachers' overall well-being and the moderating role of social support, highlighting the importance of maintaining a positive work-life balance.
3	3c	Dreer, B., & Gouasé, N. (2022). Interventions fostering well-being of schoolteachers: a review of research. <i>Oxford Review of Education</i> , 48(5), 587–605. https://doi-org.nwulib.idm.oclc.org/10.1080/03054985.2021.2002290	The abstract discusses the importance of teacher well-being for the functioning of school systems and highlights the benefits of tailor-made intervention programmes aimed at improving teacher well-being. It emphasizes the need for scientifically tested well-being programmes to support individual teachers' mental and emotional health, which is a critical aspect of their work-life balance.
3	3c	Hall-Kenyon, K., Bullough, R., MacKay, K., & Marshall, E. (2014). Preschool Teacher Well-Being: A Review of the Literature. <i>Early Childhood Education Journal</i> , 42(3), 153–162. https://doi-org.nwulib.idm.oclc.org/10.1007/s10643-013-0595-4	The review focuses on the well-being of preschool teachers, which includes aspects such as self-efficacy, life satisfaction, emotional and physical health, and autonomy. It highlights the impact of current educational reforms on teachers' well-being, emphasizing the need for a broader understanding and more comprehensive research in this area.
3	3c	Kim, L. E., Oxley, L., & Asbury, K. (2022). "My brain feels like a browser with 100 tabs open": A longitudinal study of teachers' mental health and well-being during the COVID-19 pandemic. <i>British Journal of Educational Psychology</i> , 92(1), 299–318. https://doi-org.nwulib.idm.oclc.org/10.1111/bjep.12450	The study explores the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the mental health and well-being of primary and secondary school teachers. It identifies various job demands (such as workload, uncertainty, and health struggles) and job resources (such as social support and work autonomy) that influence teachers' mental health and well-being throughout the pandemic.
3	3c	Jerrim, J., Sims, S., Taylor, H., & Allen, R. (2021). Has the mental health and wellbeing of teachers in England changed	The study examines long-term trends in teacher mental health and well-being in England, revealing that although reports of mental health issues among teachers have recently increased, this pattern mirrors trends seen in other professions. Overall, teacher well-being has remained relatively stable over the past

		over time? New evidence from three datasets. <i>Oxford Review of Education</i> , 47(6), 805–825. https://doi-org.nwulib.idm.oclc.org/10.1080/03054985.2021.1902795	20 years, though teachers may now be more open to reporting such concerns. These findings highlight the importance for policymakers and education leaders to use this understanding to create effective strategies that promote teacher well-being and improve retention in the sector.
3	3c	Poormahmood, A., Moayedi, F., & Alizadeh, K. H. (2017). Relationships between psychological well-being, happiness and perceived occupational stress among primary school teachers. <i>Archives of Hellenic Medicine / Arheia Ellenikes Iatrikes</i> , 34(4), 504–510.	The study examines the relationships between psychological well-being, happiness, and perceived occupational stress among primary school teachers in Iran. It highlights the negative correlation between occupational stress and various aspects of well-being, including life satisfaction, spirituality, joy and optimism, individual development, positive relationships with others, autonomy, and overall psychological well-being. The findings suggest that occupational stress in teaching can lead to poor psychological well-being and reduced happiness among primary school teachers. Understanding these correlations is crucial for addressing occupational stress and promoting the well-being of teachers, which ultimately impacts retention and job satisfaction in the education sector.
3	3a	Byun, S., & Jeon, L. (2023). Early Childhood Teachers' Work Environment, Perceived Personal Stress, and Professional Commitment in South Korea. <i>Child & Youth Care Forum</i> , 52(5), 1019–1039. https://doi-org.nwulib.idm.oclc.org/10.1007/s10566-022-09722-9	The study investigates how personal stress and work environment influence teachers' professional commitment in early care and education (ECE) settings in South Korea. It finds that while both factors are important, a positive work environment plays an additional and significant role in strengthening professional commitment beyond the effects of personal stress. These results highlight the need for supportive programmes and policies that enhance teachers' well-being and satisfaction in their work environment to promote long-term retention and stronger professional commitment in the ECE sector.
3	3c	Kwon, K.-A., Ford, T. G., Salvatore, A. L., Randall, K., Jeon, L., Malek-Lasater, A., Ellis, N., Kile, M. S., Horm, D. M., Kim, S. G., & Han, M. (2022). Neglected Elements of a High-Quality Early Childhood Workforce: Whole Teacher Well-Being and Working Conditions. <i>Early Childhood Education Journal</i> , 50(1), 157–168. https://doi-org.nwulib.idm.oclc.org/10.1007/s10643-020-01124-7	The study explores the working conditions and overall well-being—physical, psychological, and professional—of early childhood teachers in the ECE workforce. It finds notable disparities in well-being and work environments, often overlooked within the sector. Differences emerged based on the age groups teachers work with and their educational levels. Teachers with higher qualifications tended to have more work resources and deliver higher-quality care but reported poorer physical and professional well-being than those with lower education levels. The study calls for targeted policies and programmes to enhance working conditions and health outcomes for ECE teachers, tailored to their diverse roles and educational backgrounds.
3	3a	Toropova, A., Myrberg, E., & Johansson, S. (2021). Teacher job satisfaction: the importance of school working conditions and teacher characteristics. <i>Educational Review</i> , 73(1), 71–97. https://doi-org.nwulib.idm.oclc.org/10.1080/00131911.2019.1705247	The study explores how school working conditions and teacher characteristics influence job satisfaction among eighth-grade mathematics teachers in Sweden, using TIMSS 2015 data. It finds that positive working conditions—such as manageable workloads, strong teacher cooperation, and good student discipline—are strongly linked to higher job satisfaction. Teacher characteristics like gender, professional development participation, and self-efficacy also play key roles. Notably, the impact of cooperation and student discipline on job satisfaction varies by gender and self-efficacy levels. The study emphasizes that improving school environments and supporting professional growth are crucial for enhancing teacher satisfaction, well-being, and long-term retention.
2	2a	An, Y., Kaplan-Rakowski, R., Yang, J., Conan, J., Kinard, W., & Daughrity, L. (2021). Examining K-12 teachers'	The study examines K–12 teachers' experiences and perceptions of online teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic in the United States. Using survey and interview data from teachers across 25 states, it identifies key challenges such as low student engagement, limited technology access, concerns for student

		feelings, experiences, and perspectives regarding online teaching during the early stage of the COVID-19 pandemic. <i>Educational Technology Research & Development</i> , 69(5), 2589–2613. https://doi-org.nwulib.idm.oclc.org/10.1007/s11423-021-10008-5	well-being, and the loss of in-person interaction. Four major themes emerge for improving future preparedness: enhancing professional development for online teaching, ensuring equitable technology access and training, and developing clear action and communication plans. Teachers also reflect on the “new normal” in education, anticipating lasting shifts toward blended learning, revised school structures, health measures, and ongoing uncertainty about the future of teaching.
1	1b	Gu, Y., Wang, R., & You, X. (2020). Recovery Experiences Moderate the Impact of Work Stressors on Well-Being: A Two-Wave Study of Preschool Teachers. <i>Early Childhood Education Journal</i> , 48(2), 189–202. https://doi-org.nwulib.idm.oclc.org/10.1007/s10643-019-00994-w	The study investigates how recovery experiences—specifically psychological detachment and relaxation—affect the relationship between work stressors and well-being among preschool teachers in China. Drawing on the effort-recovery model and conservation of resources theory, it tracks 298 teachers over a year. The findings show that prolonged exposure to stressors such as workload, emotional dissonance, and work-home conflict reduces teachers’ well-being, leading to lower vigor, decreased job satisfaction, and increased insomnia. However, recovery experiences like mental detachment from work and relaxation during off-job time serve as protective factors, helping to buffer these negative effects. The study underscores the critical role of recovery in sustaining preschool teachers’ well-being amid ongoing work-related stress.
1	1b	Mulholland, R., McKinlay, A., & Sproule, J. (2017). Teachers in need of space: the content and changing context of work. <i>Educational Review</i> , 69(2), 181–200. https://doi-org.nwulib.idm.oclc.org/10.1080/00131911.2016.1184131	The study explores how gender and years in the current role (YCR) affect secondary school teachers’ perceptions of work and well-being in Scotland. Based on responses from 399 teachers, it finds that middle managers experience the highest stress levels, with 66% viewing their work as very stressful and 63% reporting notable declines in well-being. Although gender differences are not significant, workload pressures and evolving job demands emerge as key stressors—especially for class teachers and middle managers with over 10 years in their roles. Low staff morale, linked to constant change and lack of time, is also a concern. The study recommends measures such as increasing non-teaching time, restructuring the school day, and offering sabbaticals to give teachers time for reflection and professional growth, recognizing the potential financial implications of these interventions.
2	2a	Brown, M., & Pitt-Catsoupes, M. (2016). A mediational model of workplace flexibility, work–family conflict, and perceived stress among caregivers of older adults. <i>Community, Work & Family</i> , 19(4), 379–395. https://doi-org.nwulib.idm.oclc.org/10.1080/13668803.2015.1034656	The study examines how workplace flexibility influences caregiver stress among U.S. employees, using data from 211 caregivers in the 2008 National Study of the Changing Workforce. Workplace flexibility—defined as employees having control over when and where they work—is identified as an important resource for reducing caregiver stress. The findings show that work-to-family conflict mediates the relationship between perceived or accessible flexibility and caregiver stress, suggesting that flexible work arrangements can ease stress by reducing conflict between work and family demands. However, this effect does not hold when flexibility is measured by actual use of formal flexible options. The study concludes with implications for employers and recommendations for future research on how flexible policies can better support caregivers.
2	2a	Bray, J. W., Hinde, J. M., Kaiser, D. J., Mills, M. J., Karuntzos, G. T., Genadek, K. R., Kelly, E. L., Kossek, E. E., & Hurtado, D. A. (2018). Effects of a Flexibility/Support Intervention on Work Performance: Evidence From the	The study reports on a group-randomized multisite controlled trial in an IT firm, evaluating the “Start. Transform. Achieve. Results.” intervention designed to enhance employee control over work time, increase supervisor support, and focus on results. Among 693 participants, the intervention’s impact was assessed across nine self-reported performance measures, including hours worked, absenteeism, and presenteeism, using a difference-in-differences approach. Results showed minimal effects on most performance outcomes, except a modest reduction of about 1 hour in expected weekly work time. After statistical adjustments,

		Work, Family, and Health Network. <i>American Journal of Health Promotion</i> , 32(4), 963–970. https://doi-org.nwulib.idm.oclc.org/10.1177/0890117117696244	effects were marginally insignificant at 6 months and marginally significant at 12 and 18 months. The study concludes that while performance largely remained unchanged, the intervention may enhance employees' sense of personal time and wellness, challenging negative perceptions of flexible work initiatives.
2	2a	Holmes, E. K., Petts, R. J., Thomas, C. R., Robbins, N. L., & Henry, T. (2020). Do workplace characteristics moderate the effects of attitudes on father warmth and engagement? <i>Journal of Family Psychology</i> , 34(7), 867–878. https://doi-org.nwulib.idm.oclc.org/10.1037/fam0000672	The study examines how fathers' attitudes and workplace conditions influence their engagement and warmth with children aged 2–8. Fathers embracing the “new fatherhood ideal” show more involvement, while those favouring traditional roles show less warmth. Family-supportive workplaces and flexible work arrangements boost father–child engagement, particularly helping fathers who are less aligned with the new fatherhood ideal. The findings highlight the importance of workplace flexibility and support in promoting active father involvement.
1	1b	McAlpine, K. L. (2015). The ‘ripple effect’ of schedule control: a social network approach. <i>Community, Work & Family</i> , 18(4), 377–394. https://doi-org.nwulib.idm.oclc.org/10.1080/13668803.2015.1080662	The study examines how coworkers' schedule control influences individual job attitudes within a workplace, using network data from 337 employees. Results show that employees whose peers have greater schedule control report lower job satisfaction and organizational commitment, highlighting that social context and coworker experiences with flexibility affect individual attitudes. The study underscores the need to consider workplace social dynamics when implementing flexible work arrangements.
1	1b	Kaduk, A., Genadek, K., Kelly, E. L., & Moen, P. (2019). Involuntary vs. voluntary flexible work: insights for scholars and stakeholders. <i>Community, Work & Family</i> , 22(4), 412–442. https://doi-org.nwulib.idm.oclc.org/10.1080/13668803.2019.1616532	The study examines the effects of voluntary versus involuntary schedule variability and remote work among U.S. white-collar IT employees. Involuntary schedule changes and mandatory remote work are linked to higher stress, burnout, work-to-family conflict, turnover intentions, and lower job satisfaction. In contrast, voluntary remote work—with choice over where to work—reduces stress and turnover intentions. The findings highlight the importance of distinguishing between voluntary and involuntary flexibility, even in a professional workforce.
1	1b	Cech, E. A., & O'Connor, L. T. (2017). ‘Like second-hand smoke’: the toxic effect of workplace flexibility bias for workers' health. <i>Community, Work & Family</i> , 20(5), 543–572. https://doi-org.nwulib.idm.oclc.org/10.1080/13668803.2017.1371673	The study investigates how workplace flexibility bias—employees' perception of career penalties for adjusting schedules—affects health. Using 2008 survey data, it finds that flexibility bias is linked to poorer self-rated health, sleep issues, minor health problems, depression symptoms, and increased sick leave. These effects are partly driven by stress and negative work-life spillover and indirectly affect behaviors like alcohol use, exercise, and seeking medical or mental health treatment. The findings show that flexibility bias impacts a wide range of workers, highlighting the need for organizations to reshape workplace culture to protect employee health and well-being.

1	1b	Rhee, M., Park, S. K., & Lee, C. (2020). Pathways from workplace flexibility to turnover intention: Role of work–family conflict, family–work conflict, and job satisfaction. <i>International Journal of Social Welfare</i> , 29(1), 51–61. https://doi-org.nwulib.idm.oclc.org/10.1111/ijsw.12382	The study explores how workplace flexibility affects turnover intentions among low-wage workers in South Korea. It finds that flexibility reduces work–family conflict and boosts job satisfaction, emphasizing the importance of policies that promote flexible work for this workforce.
2	2a	Ramsey, L. R. (2021). A Strong Teacher Identity May Buffer Woman-Scientist Identity Interference: Preliminary Evidence from a Teaching-Intensive University. <i>Gender Issues</i> , 38(1), 65–78. https://doi-org.nwulib.idm.oclc.org/10.1007/s12147-020-09254-3	The study examines how women in STEM at teaching-focused institutions navigate conflicts between their identities as women and scientists. It finds that a strong teacher identity helps integrate these roles, reducing identity interference, and that greater workplace flexibility further lessens conflicts. The findings suggest that emphasizing teaching roles can help mitigate identity tensions and support women’s representation in STEM.
2	2a	Kim, J. (2020). Workplace Flexibility and Parent–Child Interactions Among Working Parents in the U.S. <i>Social Indicators Research</i> , 151(2), 427–469. https://doi-org.nwulib.idm.oclc.org/10.1007/s11205-018-2032-y	The study examines how various forms of workplace flexibility—flexible schedules, remote work, and part-time employment—affect parent–child interactions among working parents of young children. It finds that the impact of these arrangements varies depending on factors like gender, household structure, and income.
2	2c	Wörtler, B., Van Yperen, N. W., & Barelds, D. P. H. (2022). The link between empowering leadership and employees’ perceptions of the effectiveness of blended working. <i>Scandinavian Journal of Psychology</i> , 63(3), 208–218. https://doi-org.nwulib.idm.oclc.org/10.1111/sjop.12796	The study explores how empowering leadership affects the effectiveness of blended working, where employees have flexibility in time and location. It finds that an empowering leadership style enhances employees’ perceptions of blended work effectiveness by creating a supportive work environment.
1	1b	Kim, J., Henly, J. R., Golden, L. M., & Lambert, S. J. (2020). Workplace Flexibility and Worker Well-Being by Gender. <i>Journal of Marriage & Family</i> , 82(3), 892–910. https://doi-org.nwulib.idm.oclc.org/10.1111/jomf.12633	The study examines how flexible schedules and working from home relate to employee well-being. Flexible schedules are linked to improved work-related well-being, while working at home—especially to catch up on work—consistently increases work-to-family conflict and stress, with stronger negative effects for female workers.

1	1a	Milner, K., Greyling, M., Goetzel, R., Da Silva, R., Kolbe-Alexander, T., Patel, D., Nossel, C., & Beckowski, M. (2013). The relationship between leadership support, workplace health promotion and employee wellbeing in South Africa. <i>Health Promotion International</i> , 30(3), 514–522. https://doi.org/10.1093/heapro/dat064	The study highlights the importance of leadership support in workplace health promotion (WHP) programmes for employee well-being. It finds that leadership support enhances well-being primarily when paired with WHP facilities, with employees' perceptions of the company's commitment mediating this effect, indicating that support alone is insufficient.
1	1b	Corbett, L., Phongsavan, P., Okely, A. D., Peralta, L. R., & Bauman, A. (2024). A cross-sectional study of Australian teachers' health: are work-related factors associated with lifestyle behaviours? <i>Health Promotion International</i> , 39(1), 1–12. https://doi.org/10.1093/heapro/daad192	The study examines how work-related factors—such as hours, teaching load, and role—affect teachers' lifestyle behaviours and well-being. High workloads are linked to poorer physical activity, diet, and sleep, highlighting the impact of workplace conditions on health. The findings suggest that improving work conditions and support can enhance teachers' well-being and job satisfaction.
1	1b	Saaranen, T., Tossavainen, K., Turunen, H., Kiviniemi, V., & Vertio, H. (2006). Occupational well-being of school staff members: a structural equation model. <i>Health Education Research</i> , 22(2), 248–260. https://doi.org/10.1093/her/cyl073	The study identifies four key factors—working conditions, worker and work, working community, and professional competence—that influence occupational well-being. Testing the model with school staff shows that improving conditions and offering flexible work arrangements enhances well-being and job satisfaction. The resulting OWSS Model offers a framework for planning and evaluating strategies to support school staff, emphasizing the importance of flexibility and supportive work environments.
1	1b	Wong, Y. P. (2015). Development of a work environment rating scale for kindergarten teachers. <i>Occupational Medicine</i> , 65(6), 489–495. https://doi.org/10.1093/occmed/kqv070	The study examines how kindergarten teachers' perceived work environment affects their well-being. Factors like social space, staffing, and work hours are linked to higher job satisfaction, while ergonomics predicts fewer mental health complaints. Using the TPWE scale, the study highlights that supportive and flexible work environments enhance teachers' overall well-being, including self-esteem and mental health.
1	1b	Phillips, S. J., Sen, D., & McNamee, R. (2008). Risk factors for work-related stress and health in head teachers. <i>Occupational Medicine</i> , 58(8), 584–586. https://doi.org/10.1093/occmed/kqn112	The study examines head teachers' well-being, highlighting high stress levels and poor physical and mental health. Female head teachers report worse psychological well-being than males. Factors like teaching fewer than five hours per week and gender predict stress, suggesting that tailored flexible work arrangements could help reduce stress and improve job satisfaction.
1	1b	Rinne, J., Leino-Kilpi, H., Saaranen, T., Pasanen, M., & Salminen, L. (2022). Educators' occupational well-being in health and social care education. <i>Occupational Medicine</i> , 72(5), 289–297. https://doi.org/10.1093/occmed/kqac024	The study finds that educators have poor resources for managing mental workload and insufficient workplace support, negatively affecting job satisfaction and well-being. It emphasizes that investing in work resources and enabling well-being actions during working hours—through greater workplace flexibility—can improve occupational well-being and mental health.

3	3c	Bonde, E. H., Fjorback, L. O., Frydenberg, M., & Juul, L. (2022). The effectiveness of mindfulness-based stress reduction for school teachers: a cluster-randomized controlled trial. <i>European Journal of Public Health</i> , 32(2), 246–253. https://doi.org/10.1093/eurpub/ckab223	The study shows that Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) significantly reduces stress among lower secondary teachers, with benefits persisting for at least six months. This suggests that integrating MBSR into teacher programmes can enhance well-being, work-life balance, and overall workplace flexibility.
3	3c	Giulia Sulis, Mairitsch, A., Babic, S., Mercer, S., & Resnik, P. (2023). ELT teachers' agency for wellbeing. <i>ELT Journal</i> , 78(2), 198–206. https://doi.org/10.1093/elt/ccad050	The study finds that language teachers' well-being improves when they feel empowered and have a sense of agency, which is supported by workplace flexibility. Personal and professional triggers prompt reflection and action, and understanding ecological determinants highlights the importance of flexible work structures that enhance autonomy and work-life balance.
1	1b	Mérida-López, S., Extremera, N., & Rey, L. (2017). Emotion-regulation ability, role stress and teachers' mental health. <i>Occupational Medicine</i> , 67(7), 540–545. https://doi.org/10.1093/occmed/kqx125	The study shows that work-related stressors, such as role ambiguity and conflict, negatively affect teachers' mental health. Personal resources like emotion-regulation ability (ERA) help protect well-being, and flexible work environments that support ERA can reduce stress, prevent mental health issues, and enhance job satisfaction.
1	1b	Vanajan, A., Bültmann, U., & Henkens, K. (2019). Health-related Work Limitations Among Older Workers—the Role of Flexible Work Arrangements and Organizational Climate. <i>The Gerontologist</i> , 60(3), 450–459. https://doi.org/10.1093/geront/gnz073	The study finds that flexible work arrangements and supportive organizational climates help older workers with chronic health conditions reduce work limitations. A psychologically safe environment encourages them to share their needs, and access to flexible hours is linked to better job satisfaction and overall well-being.
2	2b	Abrams, L. R., Harknett, K., & Schneider, D. (2022). Older Workers with Unpredictable Schedules: Implications for Well-Being and Job Retention. <i>Gerontologist</i> , 62(10), 1443–1453. https://doi.org/10.1093/geront/gnac067	The study examines work schedule quality for service-sector workers aged 50–80, finding that unpredictable schedules harm well-being through increased stress, poor sleep, work–family conflict, and job dissatisfaction. Improving schedule stability and flexibility is crucial for supporting older workers and promoting longer, healthier working lives.
1	1a	Shanika Yoshini Koreshi, & Alpass, F. (2023). Reconciling paid work and informal caregiving among older adults: Implications for work interference with family. <i>Innovation in Aging</i> , 7(9), 1–11. https://doi.org/10.1093/geroni/igad115	The study investigates how older adults' work status preferences affect work–family interference (WIF) while balancing paid work and caregiving. It finds that flexible work arrangements (FWAs) moderate this relationship, but not all FWAs are equally effective. The findings emphasize the need for tailored flexible work policies to support older workers' well-being and caregiving responsibilities.
2	2a	Anttila, T., Oinas, T., Tammelin, M., & Nätti, J. (2015). Working-Time Regimes and Work-Life Balance in Europe. <i>European Sociological Review</i> , 31(6), 713–724. https://doi.org/10.1093/esr/jcv070	The study analyzes temporal (hours, timing, intensity, autonomy) and spatial flexibility across 25 EU countries, identifying different flexibility regimes. It finds that these regimes influence employees' work–life balance, highlighting regional variations in how workplace flexibility affects well-being.

1	1a	Mayer, C.-H., & Boness, C. (2011). Concepts of health and well-being in managers: An organizational study. <i>International Journal of Qualitative Studies on Health and Well-Being</i> , 6(4), 1–12. https://doi.org/10.3402/qhw.v6i4.7143	The study explores managers' perceptions of health and well-being, highlighting a holistic approach that values physical, mental, and spiritual health. Adopting a salutogenetic perspective, it suggests that workplace flexibility can support overall well-being and enhance managers' work–life balance.
1	1a	Dreer, B. (2022). Teacher well-being: Investigating the contributions of school climate and job crafting. <i>Cogent Education</i> , 9(1), 1–13. https://doi.org/10.1080/2331186x.2022.2044583	The study shows that teacher well-being is influenced by both school climate and individual job crafting. Teachers report the highest well-being when supported by a positive school environment and able to shape their work, highlighting the importance of combining external support with personal agency in workplace flexibility.
1	1a	Levkovich, I., & Shinan-Altman, S. (2024). Well-being among Arab teachers in Israel during the COVID-19 pandemic: a mixed-methods study. <i>Multicultural Education Review</i> , 16(1), 1–18. https://doi.org/10.1080/2005615x.2024.2338981	The study finds that Arab teachers' well-being during COVID-19 was strongly influenced by workplace support, resilience, digital literacy, and gender. Emotional and professional support, along with adaptation to digital demands, were key to well-being. Qualitative insights highlight the role of cultural and religious support, indicating that teachers perceive workplace flexibility broadly, encompassing both professional and personal support systems.
1	1a	Ahmad, A., Shaw, N. E., Bown, N. J., Gardiner, J., & Omar, K. (2016). The Impact of Negative Work Home Interface on Intention to Leave and the Role of Flexible Working Arrangements in Malaysia. <i>The Journal of Developing Areas</i> , 50(5), 507–515. https://www.jstor.org/stable/26415615	The study examines how flexible work arrangements (FWAs) influence work–life balance and intention to leave among Malaysian educators and managers. FWAs help mitigate the negative effects of work–home conflict on retention, supporting job satisfaction and commitment. Although flexible working is still emerging in Malaysia, managers view FWAs as a long-term strategy to enhance employee well-being, retention, and overall work–life balance.
1	1a	Stavrou, E. T. (2005). Flexible Work Bundles and Organizational Competitiveness: A Cross-National Study of the European Work Context. <i>Journal of Organizational Behavior</i> , 26(8), 923–947. https://www.jstor.org/stable/4093864	The study examines how temporal (hours, timing, intensity, autonomy) and spatial (work location) flexibility affect work–life balance across European countries. Work-hour fit is highlighted as crucial for balancing professional and personal life, while cultural and national contexts shape flexibility regimes. Overall, both educators and managers view flexible arrangements as improving employee satisfaction, reducing stress, and supporting well-being.
1	1a	Chandola, T., Booker, C. L., Kumari, M., & Benzeval, M. (2019). Are Flexible Work Arrangements Associated with Lower Levels of Chronic Stress-Related Biomarkers? A Study of 6025 Employees in the UK Household Longitudinal Study. <i>Sociology</i> , 53(4), 779–799. https://doi.org/10.1177/0038038519826014	The study shows that reduced work hours lower stress (allostatic load), highlighting the value of flexible hours for employee well-being. Flexible arrangements are especially beneficial for women with caregiving responsibilities, and their effectiveness depends on both availability and employees feeling empowered to use them. These findings provide evidence for educators and managers to support and design flexible work policies that improve well-being and reduce chronic stress.

1	1a	Sturman, M. C., & Walsh, K. (2014). Strengthening the employment relationship: The effects of work-hours fit on key employee attitudes. <i>Journal of Organizational Behavior</i> , 35(6), 762–784. https://www.jstor.org/stable/26610929	The study highlights the importance of work-hours fit in shaping employee attitudes, life satisfaction, and turnover intentions. Aligning schedules with employees' preferences reduces stress and work–family conflict, while mismatches—working too many or too few hours—have distinct negative effects. Managers and educators recognize that flexible scheduling helps balance time and income needs, supporting well-being, work–family facilitation, and positive employment relationships.
1	1a	Martens, M. F. J., Nijhuis, F. J. N., van Boxtel, M. P. J., & Knottnerus, J. A. (1999). Flexible Work Schedules and Mental and Physical Health. A Study of a Working Population with Non-Traditional Working Hours. <i>Journal of Organizational Behavior</i> , 20(1), 35–46. https://www.jstor.org/stable/3100202	The study finds that rotating shifts, irregular hours, and temporary contracts increase health complaints and psychological issues. It emphasizes the need to balance workplace flexibility with employee well-being and implement supportive policies to protect health while maintaining flexible schedules.
2	2a	Wheatley, D. (2017). Employee satisfaction and use of flexible working arrangements. <i>Work, Employment and Society</i> , 31(4), 567–585. sagepub. https://doi.org/10.1177/0950017016631447	The study finds that homeworking and flexi-time improve job and leisure satisfaction, but gender differences exist. Men benefit more, maintaining full-time work while managing household tasks, whereas women often face reduced hours, negatively affecting job, leisure, and life satisfaction. The key factor is choice: men use flexible arrangements voluntarily, while women often experience constraints.
2	2b	Mercer, D., Russell, E., & Arnold, K. A. (2014). Flexible Working Arrangements in Healthcare: A Comparison Between Managers of Shift Workers and 9-to-5 Employees. <i>The Journal of Nursing Administration</i> , 44(7/8), 411–416. https://www.jstor.org/stable/26811759	The study examines healthcare managers' perceptions of flexible work arrangements and their impact on job satisfaction and well-being. It identifies barriers to implementation, noting differences between shift-based and desk-based roles, and highlights the unique challenges of introducing flexibility in the healthcare sector, particularly in Atlantic Canada.
2	2a	Zafari, S., Hartner-Tiefenthaler, M., & Koeszegi, S. T. (2019). Flexible Work and Work-related Outcomes: The Role of Perceived Organizational Alignment. <i>Management Revue</i> , 30(1), 63–92. https://www.jstor.org/stable/26869686	The study emphasizes identifying the most effective flexible work arrangements to guide organizations in improving job satisfaction, work engagement, and organizational identification. Researching these arrangements helps tailor flexibility strategies to employee needs, enhancing well-being and productivity.
1	1b	O'Connor, L. T., & Cech, E. A. (2018). Not Just a Mothers' Problem: The Consequences of Perceived Workplace Flexibility Bias for All Workers. <i>Sociological Perspectives</i> , 61(5), 808–829. https://doi.org/10.1177/0731121418768235	The study examines how perceived flexibility bias affects job attitudes, work-life spillover, and employee well-being. Understanding its impact on satisfaction, engagement, and turnover highlights challenges for all workers, not just working mothers, and underscores the importance of creating inclusive, supportive work environments that enhance well-being and productivity.

2	2b	Cano, M. R., Espelt, R., & Morell, M. F. (2021). Flexibility and freedom for whom? Precarity, freedom and flexibility in on-demand food delivery. <i>Work Organisation, Labour & Globalisation</i> , 15(1), 46–68. https://doi.org/10.13169/workorglaboglob.15.1.0046	The study examines Deliveroo's "free login" system to highlight challenges of flexible work in the gig economy. Analysis shows that hiring practices, payment structures, and algorithmic management can exacerbate precarious work, especially during COVID-19. The findings underscore the need for policy interventions to protect workers' rights and ensure fair, equitable conditions in gig work.
2	2a	Eldridge, D., & Nisar, T. M. (2011). Employee and Organizational Impacts of Flexitime Work Arrangements. <i>Relations Industrielles / Industrial Relations</i> , 66(2), 213–234. https://www.jstor.org/stable/23078428	The study examines flexitime programmes in Britain, exploring organizational motivations for adoption. Using survey data, it finds a weak link between flexitime and job control and a negative association with job security, challenging assumptions that flexible arrangements inherently enhance employee well-being.
2	2a	Zeytinoglu, I. U., Cooke, G. B., & Mann, S. L. (2009). Flexibility: Whose Choice Is It Anyway? <i>Relations Industrielles / Industrial Relations</i> , 64(4), 555–574. https://www.jstor.org/stable/23079022	The study examines flexible work schedules in Canada, including flexitime, compressed, and variable workweeks, using 2003 survey data. Over half of workers have at least one type of flexible schedule, with adoption linked to employment status, unionization, occupation, and sector. Personal factors like marital status or childcare needs were not significant, indicating that business needs primarily drive flexible work arrangements.
2	2a	Ama, J., Opoku, O. A., Mensah, A., Wahah, A. W., & Kelvin, D. P. (2024). Assessing the Dynamics of Employee Benefits for Virtual and Flexible Work Arrangements of Obapack Company Limited, Ghana. <i>Journal of Production, Operations Management and Economics</i> , 04(03), 21–29. https://doi.org/10.55529/jpome.43.21.29	The study examines how flexible working arrangements (FWAs) at Obapack Company Limited—such as flexi-time, annualized hours, and homeworking—affect job satisfaction, work-life balance, employee performance, and organizational commitment. Using a survey of 70 virtual workers, results show that FWAs positively influence satisfaction, balance, and performance, though they may slightly affect organizational commitment. The study recommends promoting FWAs, particularly job-sharing, to enhance employee outcomes.
3	3c	Fináncz, J., Nyitrai, Á., Podráczky, J., & Csima, M. (2020). Connections between Professional Well-Being and Mental Health of Early Childhood Educators. <i>International Journal of Instruction</i> , 13(4), 731–746. https://doi.org/10.29333/iji.2020.13445a	The study assesses professional well-being and mental health among 1,010 Hungarian early childhood educators, kindergarten teachers, teaching assistants, and nurses. It finds nursery staff experience less favorable workplace climates than kindergarten staff. While burnout levels are low, three-quarters report mild depressive symptoms, which increase with teaching experience. Job satisfaction and workplace social appreciation are negatively correlated with depression, highlighting the need for interventions to support educators' well-being.
1	1a	Chia-Lin, K., & Wei-Wen, C. (2017). The Relationship between Job Stress Risk Factors and Workplace Well-Being with the Moderating Effects of Job Burnout: A Study of Substitute Educators for Early Childhood Education in Taiwan. <i>European Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies</i> , 5(1), 392–400. https://doi.org/10.26417/ejms.v5i1.p392-401	The study examines the well-being of preschool substitute teachers in Taiwan, highlighting the stress caused by job instability, extra administrative tasks, and workplace marginalization. It finds that supportive factors—like control, managerial and colleague support, and clear roles—enhance well-being, while high demands and poor relationships reduce it. Job burnout moderates these effects, underscoring the need to address burnout to improve substitute teachers' well-being.

1	1a	Keshmiri, F. (2024). Exploring workplace mental health: educator perspectives and factors in the medical education system – a mixed method study. <i>BMC Medical Education</i> , 24(1), 1–11. https://doi.org/10.1186/s12909-024-05095-w	The study evaluates workplace mental health among 205 educators at Shahid Sadoughi University of Medical Sciences. Quantitative data show moderate mental health levels, with variation across control and social contact opportunities. Interviews reveal a gap between preferences and realities, highlighting demotivation, limited promotion, job stress, lack of managerial support, and insufficient recognition. Cultural and interpersonal factors, including lack of respect and justice, contribute to discrepancies between current and desired occupational mental health.
1	1b	Orlanda-Ventayen, C., & Ventayen, R. J. (2022). Stress and Depression in the Workplace of Educators in the Philippines. <i>International Journal of Occupational Safety and Health</i> , 12(4), 325–335. https://doi.org/10.3126/ijosh.v12i4.43226	The study examines workplace stress and depression among 407 educators in the Philippines during 2019–2020. Findings show generally low levels of stress and depression, with vocational and college-level educators reporting the lowest. The study emphasizes the need for stress management and depression prevention strategies and calls for interventions by administrators and policymakers to support educators' well-being and job satisfaction.
3	3b	LI, Y., & Jongnam, B. (2023). A Study on the relationship among social support, occupational well-being and play activity support ability of early childhood pre-service teachers in China. <i>Region - Educational Research and Reviews</i> , 5(2), 24–28. https://doi.org/10.32629/rerr.v5i2.1192	The study of 542 early childhood pre-service teachers finds that social support directly enhances their professional well-being, which in turn improves their ability to support play activities. Professional well-being also mediates the relationship between social support and play activity support, highlighting its central role in teacher development.
1	1b	O'Hara-Gregan, J. (2023). Supporting early childhood teacher well-being through the practice of mindful self-compassion. <i>Australian Journal of Early Childhood</i> , 48(4), 1–13. https://doi.org/10.1177/18369391231202833	The study explores mindful self-compassion practice to support early childhood teachers' well-being. Interviews with 12 teachers in Aotearoa New Zealand reveal that such practices enhance self-awareness, self-kindness, and recognition of shared challenges. The findings suggest incorporating mindful self-compassion into teacher education and policy to promote well-being in the early childhood sector.
3	3b	Tomé, G., Gomes, P., Camacho, I., & de Matos, M. G. (2024). Training Teachers to Become Mental Health Promoters: Impact on Their Well-Being. <i>Open Peer Review on Qeios</i> , 1–10. https://doi.org/10.32388/m8xodt	The study examines the impact of training teachers as mental health promoters on their own well-being. Among 276 Portuguese teachers participating in the ES'COOL program, evaluations before and after training show improvements in both targeted skills and teachers' mental health. Initial positive affect and life satisfaction were the strongest contributors to enhanced well-being.
3	3c	Salavera, C., Urbón, E., Usán, P., Franco, V., Paterna, A., & Aguilar, J. M. (2024). Psychological wellbeing in teachers. Study in teachers of early childhood and primary education. <i>Heliyon</i> , 10(7), 1–8. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2024.e28868	The study examines psychological well-being among 236 early childhood (0–6 years) and primary (6–12 years) school teachers, finding higher well-being scores among early childhood educators. Factors such as gender, age, job tenure, contract type, and educational stage were analysed, with network analysis revealing different associations across education levels. The findings highlight the need to address stage-specific well-being challenges and encourage further research.
2	2b	Cigala, A., Venturelli, E., & Bassetti, M. (2019). Reflective Practice: A Method to Improve Teachers' Well-Being. A Longitudinal Training in Early Childhood Education and	The study examines a 10-month longitudinal training program for eight early childhood teachers and one coordinator in multi-age classrooms. Using observations and reflective practice, teachers' perceived well-being was assessed, focusing on sense of belonging, self-efficacy, and agency. By the program's

		Care Centres. <i>Frontiers in Psychology</i> , 10, 1–11. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.02574	end, teachers reported enhanced belonging, increased self-efficacy, and a more active role in teaching. The study underscores the value of professional development in improving teacher well-being and effectiveness in multi-age settings.
1	1b	Etchebehere, G., Crego, A., & Martínez-Íñigo, D. (2023). Do the Behaviors of Early Childhood Education Teachers Promote Children's Progressive Autonomy? The Role of Interpersonal Emotional Regulation and its Consequences for Teachers' Occupational Well-Being. <i>International Journal of Early Childhood</i> . https://doi.org/10.1007/s13158-023-00363-0	The study examines early childhood teachers' promotion of progressive autonomy and its relationship with strategies for regulating children's emotions and teacher well-being. Findings reveal a positive feedback loop: using strategies to support children's emotions enhances teachers' promotion of autonomy and job well-being, which in turn encourages further use of these strategies. The study highlights that supporting teachers in fostering autonomy benefits both child development and teacher satisfaction.
2	2a	Yan, Z., Wang, Z., Meng, Q., Wang, Y., & Liu, Y. (2022). Sustainable Development Mechanism in Rural Kindergartens: The Relationships among Enabling Organizational Structure, Kindergarten Directors' Leadership and Early Childhood Teachers' Well-Being. <i>Sustainability</i> , 14(21), 2–14. https://doi.org/10.3390/su142114414	The study examines how director leadership and enabling organizational structures influence teacher well-being in rural kindergartens. Findings highlight the mediating role of organizational structures, showing that tailored arrangements support effective leadership, enhance well-being, and promote sustainable development. The study underscores the importance of context-specific flexible work arrangements for maximizing teacher support.
1	1b	Costa, C. N., Chandaris, E., & Park, N. (2024). Examining Teacher Well-Being: An Analysis of Resources Needs. <i>International Journal of Changes in Education</i> , 1–12. https://doi.org/10.47852/bonviewijce42022564	The study investigates teacher well-being using the Job-Demands Resources (JD-R) model, highlighting how workplace flexibility and supportive environments enhance job satisfaction and overall well-being. It identifies teachers' specific needs and strengths, emphasizing resilience, positivity, and the ways flexible arrangements help teachers thrive rather than merely cope with stress or burnout.
1	1b	Ren, T., & Li, X. (2023). The effect of emotional labour on professional well-being among early childhood teachers based on structural equation modelling. <i>Applied Mathematics and Nonlinear Sciences</i> , 9(1). https://doi.org/10.2478/amns.2023.2.01052	The study explores how emotional labour and teacher behaviours affect the occupational well-being of early childhood educators. It highlights the mediating role of psychological capital in enhancing emotional and professional well-being, showing how workplace conditions—including flexibility—can influence job satisfaction. The findings emphasize that specific behaviours, such as engaging in deep play, predict different aspects of teacher well-being.
2	2b	Kwon, K.-A., Ford, T. G., Tsotsoros, J., Randall, K., Malek-Lasater, A., & Kim, S. G. (2022). Challenges in Working Conditions and Well-Being of Early Childhood Teachers by Teaching Modality during the COVID-19 Pandemic.	The study examines early childhood teachers' well-being during the COVID-19 pandemic, assessing how in-person, online, and school closures affected their physical, psychological, and professional health. Using quantitative and qualitative methods, it highlights the influence of working conditions on well-being and considers racial differences, providing nuanced insights into diverse teacher experiences and informing targeted interventions and policies.

		<i>International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health</i> , 19(8), 1–21. https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph19084919	
2	2a	Cui, X. (2023). The Relationship between Transformational Leadership and Early Childhood Teachers' Occupational Well-being: A Moderated Mediation Model. <i>BCP Education & Psychology</i> , 10, 166–172. https://doi.org/10.54691/bcpep.v10i.5220	The study investigates how transformational leadership enhances early childhood teachers' occupational well-being, highlighting the mediating role of psychological empowerment and the moderating influence of social support. Findings emphasize that empowering teachers and providing strong workplace support can significantly improve well-being, offering practical strategies for strengthening leadership and workplace conditions.
3	3c	Rastogi, M., Rangnekar, S., & Rastogi, R. (2018). Enhancing quality of work life in India: the role of workplace flexibility. <i>Industrial and Commercial Training</i> , 50(5), 234–249. https://doi.org/10.1108/ict-10-2017-0086	The study examines the impact of training and working conditions on early childhood teachers' mental health and well-being during the COVID-19 pandemic. It compares in-person, online, and school-closure teaching modalities, highlighting how these conditions affect physical, psychological, and professional well-being, and provides insights into the challenges and stressors educators faced.
2	2a	Lee, S. H., Chong, C. W., & Ojo, A. O. (2024). Influence of workplace flexibility on employee engagement among young generation. <i>Cogent Business & Management</i> , 11(1), 1–15. https://doi.org/10.1080/23311975.2024.2309705	The study examines how different forms of workplace flexibility, including workspace and operational flexibility, influence employee engagement. Findings highlight which flexible work arrangements are most effective, providing insights into optimizing flexibility to enhance employee engagement and overall workplace effectiveness.
2	2b	Su, X., Li, X., & Curry, E. (2016). Understanding Workplace Flexibility in State Agencies: What Facilitates Employee Access? <i>The American Review of Public Administration</i> , 47(8), 1–19. https://doi.org/10.1177/0275074016642014	The study investigates factors that enable or constrain employee access to workplace flexibility in governmental agencies. It highlights how agency strategies, resources, organizational structure, and stakeholder involvement shape access to flexible work arrangements, emphasizing the barriers that can limit employees' ability to utilize flexibility.
2	2b	Kossek, E. E., Thompson, R. J., & Lautsch, B. A. (2015). Balanced Workplace Flexibility: Avoiding the Traps. <i>California Management Review</i> , 57(4), 5–25. https://doi.org/10.1525/cmr.2015.57.4.5	The article identifies three types of traps—altered work-life dynamics, reduced fairness perceptions, and weakened organizational culture—that can impede the effective implementation of workplace flexibility. It emphasizes that managers must understand variations in flexibility practices, treat flexibility as a systemic organizational change, and account for multiple stakeholder interests to overcome these barriers.
2	2a	Jones, B. L., Scoville, D. P., Hill, E. J., Childs, G., Leishman, J. M., & Nally, K. S. (2008). Perceived versus used workplace flexibility in Singapore: Predicting work-family fit. <i>Journal of Family Psychology</i> , 22(5), 774–783. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0013181	The study explores how workplace flexibility relates to work-family fit and broader outcomes, including work, personal, and marriage-family domains. By distinguishing between perceived and used flexibility, it finds that perceived flexibility predicts better work-family fit, which in turn positively influences multiple life domains. The findings underscore the importance of fostering work-family fit to enhance employee satisfaction and well-being both at work and at home.
2	2b	Subramaniam, G., Tan, P.-L., Maniam, B., & Ali, E. (2013). Workplace Flexibility, Empowerment and Quality of Life. <i>Procedia - Social and</i>	The study examines how workplace flexibility affects women's empowerment and quality of life, highlighting gender-specific outcomes of flexible work arrangements. Using a mixed-method approach with 400 female employees in the services sector, it combines quantitative analysis and structured interviews. Findings show that workplace flexibility positively impacts both

		<i>Behavioral Sciences</i> , 105, 885–893. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2013.11.090	empowerment and quality of life, suggesting that implementing flexible arrangements can significantly benefit women in the workplace.
3	3c	ter Hoeven, C. L., & van Zoonen, W. (2020). Helping Others and Feeling Engaged in the Context of Workplace Flexibility: The Importance of Communication Control. <i>International Journal of Business Communication</i> , 60(1), 1–22. https://doi.org/10.1177/2329488419898799	The study explores the impact of workplace flexibility on employee engagement and helping behaviour, emphasizing its role in supporting work-life balance and overall well-being. Findings indicate that flexible work arrangements positively influence employees' ability to manage work-life demands, providing valuable insights into the outcomes of workplace flexibility for employee well-being, which aligns with the objectives of Theme 3c.
2	2c	Haynes, B. P., Suckley, L., & Nunnington, N. (2019). Workplace alignment: An evaluation of office worker flexibility and workplace provision. <i>Facilities</i> , 37(13/14), 1082–1103. https://doi.org/10.1108/f-07-2018-0082	The study examines how location flexibility influences employees' perceptions of productivity, highlighting a key aspect of workplace flexibility (Theme 2). By analysing how different task types affect perceived productivity at various desk locations, the research provides insights into designing office environments that support flexible work arrangements. The findings enhance understanding of how variations in workplace flexibility impact employee needs and productivity, directly informing strategies for effective workplace alignment.
3	3c	Hill, E. J., Erickson, J. J., Holmes, E. K., & Ferris, M. E. (2010). Workplace flexibility, work hours, and work-life conflict: Finding an extra day or two. <i>Journal of Family Psychology</i> , 24(3), 349–358. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0019282	The study investigates the impact of workplace flexibility on work-life conflict using a global sample of 24,436 workers across 75 countries. Focusing on work-at-home arrangements and perceived schedule flexibility, the findings show that both types of flexibility reduce work-life conflict and allow employees to work longer hours before experiencing strain. Combining work-at-home with schedule flexibility offers the greatest benefits, though effectiveness varies across cultural contexts, with collectivist cultures deriving less advantage from remote work. Overall, workplace flexibility supports employees' work-life balance while benefiting organizational productivity.
1	1b	J, J. V., & Meti, N. (2023). A study on impact of flexible working conditions towards job satisfaction at Himatsingka Seide limited in doddaballapura . <i>Indian Scientific Journal of Research in Engineering and Management</i> , 07(10), 1–11. https://doi.org/10.55041/ijrem26627	The study examines the relationship between flexible working arrangements and job happiness, highlighting their positive impact on job satisfaction. Benefits such as improved work-life balance, increased autonomy, and reduced commuting stress are emphasized. The research also underscores the importance of organizational support and effective communication in maximizing the advantages of flexible work arrangements. Overall, the findings demonstrate that workplace flexibility enhances employee well-being and job satisfaction, reinforcing its role in contemporary workplace dynamics.
2	2c	Alias, E. S., Abd Razak, A. Z. A., Samsudin, N., Abas, B., Abdul Wahab, N. N., & Darmawan, A. (2020). The Moderating Effect of Supervisor Support on Flexible Working Arrangement and Work-Family Conflict Relationship: A Conceptual Paper. <i>International Business</i>	The study explores the moderating role of supervisor support in facilitating flexible work arrangements, emphasizing supervisors as key enablers of workplace flexibility. It examines specific practices such as flexible working time, compressed workweeks, and remote work within Malaysian organizations. By analyzing how organizational and managerial support influences the success of these arrangements, the study highlights the importance of leadership and HR involvement in reducing work-family conflict and employee turnover. Overall, the findings contribute to understanding the critical role of facilitators in effectively implementing flexible work practices.

		<i>Education Journal</i> , 13, 51-63. https://doi.org/10.37134/ibej.vol13.sp.5.2020	
2	2a	Spicer, Z., & Lyons, J. (2022). Small Town, Short Work Week: Evaluating the Effects of a Compressed Work Week Pilot in Zorra, Ontario, Canada. <i>State and Local Government Review</i> , 55(1), 74–79. https://doi.org/10.1177/0160323x221115358	The study reports on a pilot project implementing a compressed work week, examining its design, implementation, and outcomes. Pre- and post-pilot surveys assessed employee attitudes, indicating how workers received the arrangement. Findings show the pilot successfully avoided common issues such as increased fatigue and staffing challenges, suggesting it was an effective flexible work arrangement. Additionally, insights on organizational scale highlight considerations for developing and designing workplace innovations, reinforcing lessons for successful implementation of flexible work practices.
1	1a	Turner, J. S., Finch, K., & Ximena, U.-Z. (2017). Staff Perspectives of the Four-Day School Week: A New Analysis of Compressed School Schedules. <i>Journal of Education and Training Studies</i> , 6(1), 52–59. https://doi.org/10.11114/jets.v6i1.2769	The study examines faculty and staff perceptions of transitioning to a four-day school week, highlighting educators' views on flexible work arrangements. Findings indicate improvements in staff morale and academic quality, reflecting positive impacts on the work environment and outcomes. Using both quantitative and qualitative analyses, the study captures comprehensive staff feedback, including support levels and suggestions. Results show strong support for the model across demographic groups, emphasizing widespread educator approval of the four-day school week.
1	1b	Vesely, C. K., Brown, E. L., Mehta, S., & Horner, C. G. (2022). "Staying Afloat": A Mixed Methods Study of the Financial and Psychological Well-being of Early Childhood Educators. <i>Early Childhood Education Journal</i> , 52(2024), 293–304. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10643-022-01429-9	The study examines the relationship between early childhood educators' financial and psychological well-being, emphasizing its impact on job satisfaction and the quality of educator–child interactions. Findings suggest that educators' mental health influences their capacity for high-quality engagement, underscoring the importance of well-being for professional effectiveness. Qualitative insights identify potential buffers for psychological well-being, and the study highlights implications for policy and practice aimed at supporting educators, including strategies that may involve workplace flexibility.
1	1b	Fináncz, J., Nyitrai, Á., Podráczky, J., & Csima, M. (2020). Connections between Professional Well-Being and Mental Health of Early Childhood Educators. <i>International Journal of Instruction</i> , 13(4), 731-746. https://doi.org/10.29333/iji.2020.13445a	The study investigates the professional well-being of early childhood educators, with a particular focus on mental health as a key aspect of job satisfaction. It identifies differences in workplace atmosphere between nurseries and kindergartens, showing how work environment factors influence well-being. Significant correlations between depression, job satisfaction, and social appreciation highlight the interplay of mental health and professional fulfillment. The findings underscore the need for interventions to address mild depressive symptoms, emphasizing the importance of supporting educators' well-being to enhance job satisfaction and overall professional quality of life.
2	2b	Warmate, Z., Eldaly, M. K., & Elamer, A. A. (2021). Offering flexible working opportunities to people with mental disabilities: The missing link between sustainable development goals and financial implications. <i>Business</i>	The study examines the barriers to implementing flexible work arrangements for people with mental disabilities (PWMDs), emphasizing the current lack of flexible opportunities as a major obstacle. By exploring what types of flexible arrangements could enable PWMDs to work effectively, the research highlights employment barriers and organizational challenges. Interviews with HR and financial managers provide insights into institutional perspectives and potential

		<i>Strategy and the Environment</i> , 30(4), 1563–1579. https://doi.org/10.1002/bse.2694	obstacles, while the discussion of policy and financial implications underscores the need for strategic interventions to support the inclusion of PWMDs in flexible work environments.
2	2a	Maresh, D. (2024). Remote Work: Challenges and strategies for Effective Management. <i>Shanlax International Journal of Management</i> , 11(1), 145–149. https://doi.org/10.34293/management.v11iis1-jan.7156	The study investigates the effective management of remote work as a form of flexible work arrangement, highlighting its inherent complexities. It proposes practical methods and tools, such as communication platforms (Slack, Skype), secure cloud solutions, and standardized hardware, to facilitate efficient implementation. Emphasizing the need to balance flexibility with structured routines, the research addresses how to maintain employee well-being and productivity. Additionally, it explores strategies for talent development, performance management, and promoting work-life balance within remote teams, providing insights into effective flexible work practices.
2	2a	Possenriede, D., Hassink, W. H. J., & Plantenga, J. (2016). Does temporal and locational flexibility of work increase the supply of working hours? Evidence from the Netherlands. <i>IZA Journal of Labor Policy</i> , 5(1), 2–32. https://doi.org/10.1186/s40173-016-0072-y	The study evaluates the effectiveness of flexi-time and telehomework as key types of flexible work arrangements. It examines their impact on actual, contracted, and preferred working hours, providing empirical evidence on how these arrangements influence work patterns. Findings indicate positive effects on job satisfaction and working-time fit, highlighting their relevance in assessing the overall effectiveness of flexible work arrangements. Additionally, the study discusses temporal and locational flexibility as policy instruments to optimize working hours, offering practical insights into their implementation and outcomes.
3	3c	Parmar, A. (2022). Flexi Work Arrangements Influence on Workplace Productivity: A Conceptual Study. <i>International Journal of Engineering Applied Sciences and Technology</i> , 7(5), 158–164. https://www.ijeast.com/papers/158-164.%20Tesma0705,IJEAST.pdf	The study examines the impact of flexible work arrangements (FWAs) on workplace dynamics, working patterns, and employee outcomes, emphasizing their role in enhancing job satisfaction and reducing stress. Findings indicate that organizations implementing FWAs experience increased productivity, improved employee performance, and greater retention, highlighting the importance of FWAs for work-life balance. Additionally, the study notes positive effects on gender equality and employee morale, underscoring the broader implications of FWAs for organizational culture, employee well-being, and sustainable workforce development.
3	3c	Jackson, L. T. B., & Fransman, E. I. (2018). Flexi work, Financial well-being, Work–life Balance and Their Effects on Subjective Experiences of Productivity and Job Satisfaction of Females in an Institution of Higher Learning. <i>South African Journal of Economic and Management Sciences</i> , 27(1), 1–13. https://doi.org/10.4102/sajems.v21i1.1487	The study examines the relationship between flexible work arrangements, such as flexitime, and work-life balance, highlighting their influence on employee well-being and job satisfaction. It underscores gender disparities in access to flexible work, showing that women, often primary caregivers, may experience greater work-life conflict when flexibility is limited. Additionally, the research explores the impact of flexible arrangements on financial well-being, emphasizing that both work-life balance and financial security play critical roles in shaping overall job satisfaction. These findings demonstrate the importance of implementing equitable flexible work policies to enhance employee satisfaction, well-being, and work-life integration.
3	3a	Choo, J. L. M., Desa, N. M., & Asaari, M. H. A. H. (2016). Flexible Working Arrangement toward Organizational Commitment and Work-Family Conflict. <i>Studies in Asian</i>	The study investigates the relationship between flexible working arrangements and organizational commitment, emphasizing their impact on employee retention. Empirical findings demonstrate a significant positive link, indicating that implementing flexible work policies can strengthen employees' commitment to the organization. The research also highlights the role of flexible arrangements in mitigating work-family conflict, underscoring their importance for overall

		<i>Social Science</i> , 3(1), 21–32. https://doi.org/10.5430/sass.v3n1p21	employee well-being. Practical implications suggest that manufacturing companies can enhance retention and support employees' work-life balance by adopting flexible working policies, illustrating the strategic value of workplace flexibility.
3	3c	Pramanik, R., Heng, P. H., & Tiatri, S. (2023). Parental Involvement: Teachers' Perceptions and Their Role in Teacher Well-being. <i>International Journal of Application on Social Science and Humanities</i> , 1(1), 306–316. https://doi.org/10.24912/ijassh.v1i1.25967	The study explores how Kindergarten teachers' perceptions of barriers to parental involvement affect their well-being, highlighting the influence of workplace-related factors on teacher satisfaction and mental health. It considers changes in collaboration patterns during online learning, emphasizing the importance of understanding how such shifts impact educators' professional and personal well-being. While not directly addressing workplace flexibility, the research indirectly relates to the theme by illustrating how evolving educational practices influence teachers' work-life balance. Practical implications underscore the need to address barriers to parental involvement to support teacher well-being in early childhood education settings.
3	3b	Hatton-Bowers, H., Clark, C., Parra, G. R., Calvi, J. L., Michael Yellow Bird, Avari, P., Jaclynn Foged, & Smith, J. P. (2022). Promising Findings that the Cultivating Healthy Intentional Mindful Educators' Program (CHIME) Strengthens Early Childhood Teachers' Emotional Resources: An Iterative Study. <i>Early Childhood Education Journal</i> , 2023(51), 1291–1304. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10643-022-01386-3	The study investigates the effectiveness of the CHIME mindfulness compassion-based program as a professional development intervention for early childhood (EC) teachers, linking it to workplace flexibility and professional growth. It examines how participation in CHIME supports emotion regulation, psychological well-being, and workplace well-being, highlighting the role of structured interventions in enhancing teacher outcomes. Evidence from teacher feedback and pilot survey data demonstrates the program's impact, emphasizing the practical benefits of integrating flexible professional development initiatives. The study also underscores the importance of collaborative engagement, illustrating how active participation from EC teachers contributes to refining professional development programmes that promote workplace flexibility and overall well-being.
3	3a	Cui, X. (2023). The Relationship between Transformational Leadership and Early Childhood Teachers' Occupational Well-being: A Moderated Mediation Model. <i>BCP Education & Psychology</i> , 10, 166–172. https://doi.org/10.54691/bcpep.v10i.5220	The study examines the impact of transformational leadership, psychological empowerment, and perceived social support on the occupational well-being of early childhood teachers, highlighting the role of workplace factors in retention. It shows that transformational leadership positively influences teacher well-being, with psychological empowerment acting as a mediator, emphasizing how leadership styles can support workforce stability. Additionally, perceived social support moderates the relationship between empowerment and well-being, indicating that a supportive work environment enhances retention by promoting occupational well-being. Overall, the findings underscore the importance of leadership, empowerment, and social support in maintaining a stable and satisfied teaching workforce.
3	3c	Mthiyane, N. P., Malema, D. & Madonda, N. (2023). Promoting the Well-Being of Supervisors for Sustainable Early Childhood Development in an Informal Settlement. <i>Educational Research for Social Change</i> , 12(1), 52-68 http://dx.doi.org/10.17159/2221-4070/2023/v12i1a5	The study investigates the well-being of early childhood development (ECD) supervisors in informal settlements, emphasizing how workplace factors influence their overall well-being. It highlights the psychosocial and contextual challenges faced by supervisors and the need to address these to enhance workplace outcomes. Using a participatory action learning and research approach, the study underscores collaborative, responsive strategies for promoting social change and supervisor well-being. Additionally, it emphasizes the value of interdisciplinary interventions and decentralized decision-making to strengthen relational interconnections, demonstrating the relevance of flexible and supportive workplace structures in improving well-being in ECD settings.

3	3a	Li, J.-B., Yang, A., Zhang, R., Leung, T. Y., & Li, Z. (2021). Occupational Well-Being in Beginning Early Childhood Educators of Hong Kong and the Prediction of Job-Related Factors: Variable-Centred and Person-Centred Approaches. <i>Frontiers in Psychology</i> , 12, 1–11. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.746123	The study examines the occupational well-being (OWB) of beginning early childhood educators (ECEs), emphasizing how workplace factors influence retention within the sector. It highlights the particular importance of addressing OWB during the early career stage, especially in the transition from training to teaching, to support long-term workforce stability. Using both variable-centred and person-centred approaches, the research provides comprehensive insights into the factors affecting OWB. By identifying key job demands and resources as predictors of OWB, the study points to leverage points that organizations can target to enhance well-being and improve retention rates among beginning ECEs.
3	3a	Yan, Z., Wang, Z., Meng, Q., Wang, Y., & Liu, Y. (2022). Sustainable Development Mechanism in Rural Kindergartens: The Relationships among Enabling Organizational Structure, Kindergarten Directors' Leadership and Early Childhood Teachers' Well-Being. <i>Sustainability</i> , 14(21), 1–14. https://doi.org/10.3390/su142114414	The study investigates the relationship between kindergarten directors' leadership, enabling organizational structure, and the well-being of early childhood teachers, with a focus on retention in rural kindergarten settings. It emphasizes the critical role of leadership and organizational components in promoting teacher well-being and supporting sustainable development. Using validated research instruments, the study ensures reliable measurement of leadership, organizational structure, and teacher well-being. By identifying key driving forces for sustainable development in rural kindergartens, the research provides actionable insights into strategies for enhancing teacher well-being, organizational effectiveness, and ultimately retention rates in these contexts.
3	3b	Qingen, Y., & Noraini Hj. Zainal Abidin. (2023). Influencing Factors and Improving Countermeasures of Career Happiness of Youth Kindergarten Teachers in Z Province. <i>International Journal of Social Science and Business Management</i> , 1(1). https://doi.org/10.59021/ijssbm.v1i1.26	The study investigates the well-being of young early childhood teachers, emphasizing the importance of both physical and mental health in supporting professional development and retention. It highlights the significance of teachers' happiness, alongside children's growth, as a key factor in kindergarten development, underscoring the impact of workplace factors such as job satisfaction and well-being. The research samples 35-year-old young teachers in Z province using a non-experimental quantitative approach, ensuring reliable and valid insights into the relationship between kindergarten characteristics and teacher well-being. Additionally, by analyzing career happiness across different age groups, the study identifies areas for improvement and proposes strategies to enhance professional development and retention among young teachers in the early childhood education sector.
2	2c	O'Hara-Gregan, J. (2023). Supporting early childhood teacher well-being through the practice of mindful self-compassion. <i>Australian Journal of Early Childhood</i> , 48(4), 319–331. https://doi.org/10.1177/18369391231202833	The study examines the well-being of early childhood teachers, highlighting workplace flexibility and mindful self-compassion as key enablers. Using a qualitative mindful inquiry approach, it explores how self-compassion practices support teacher well-being. Findings offer implications for teacher education, leadership, and policy, emphasizing strategies to promote well-being and optimize the use of flexible work arrangements.
2	2a	Andrade, M. S., Westover, J. H., & Cunningham, R. (2023). Work Flexibility and Job Satisfaction: Shifting Workplace Norms. <i>Journal of Management Policy and Practice</i> , 24(2), 15–37. https://doi.org/10.33423/jmpp.v24i2.6151	The study investigates various work flexibility variables to determine their impact on job satisfaction and organizational commitment, aligning with the sub-theme of identifying the most effective flexible work arrangements. It explores the relationship between work flexibility and job satisfaction, providing insights into how different flexible options shape employees' perceptions of their work experience. The findings indicate that opportunities to work frequently from home contribute most significantly to job satisfaction, highlighting the effectiveness of this arrangement in promoting positive outcomes. Additionally, the study

			considers the potential for flexible work options to create work-life imbalances, demonstrating a comprehensive approach to understanding the implications of workplace flexibility on both professional and personal well-being.
2	2b	Andrade, M. S., Westover, J. H., & Kupka, B. A. (2019). The Role of Work-Life Balance and Worker Scheduling Flexibility in Predicting Global Comparative Job Satisfaction. <i>International Journal of Human Resource Studies</i> , 9(2), 80–107. https://doi.org/10.5296/ijhrs.v9i2.14375	The study analyzes global workplace conditions, job characteristics, and employee attitudes, focusing on how work-life balance and scheduling flexibility affect job satisfaction. Using longitudinal data from the International Social Survey Program, it highlights cross-country differences in employee responses, revealing barriers for multinational companies implementing flexible work. Findings underscore the need for adaptive HR strategies to enhance performance, satisfaction, and retention in diverse cultural contexts
3	3a	Koreshi, S. Y., & Alpass, F. (2023). Understanding the use of Flexible Work Arrangements Among Older New Zealand Caregivers. <i>Journal of Applied Gerontology</i> , 42(5), 1045–1055. https://doi.org/10.1177/07334648231152153	The study examines workplace flexibility among older workers aged 55–70, highlighting its role in promoting prolonged employment within this demographic. By comparing the use of flexible work arrangements (FWAs) between caregivers and non-caregivers, it explores how caregiving responsibilities influence the utilization of FWAs, providing insight into factors affecting retention rates among older employees. Using hierarchical regression analysis, the study identifies caregiving as a significant predictor of FWA usage, even after controlling for demographic and work-related variables. Findings indicate that caregivers tend to use more FWAs than non-caregivers, emphasizing the importance of flexible work policies in supporting the reconciliation of care and work responsibilities and facilitating prolonged employment for older workers.
2	2a	Gede Agus Yogiana, & I Gede Riana. (2023). Work life balance mediate: Workplace flexibility on job satisfaction. <i>World Journal of Advanced Research and Reviews</i> , 19(2), 1039–1049. https://doi.org/10.30574/wjarr.2023.19.2.1691	The study investigates the relationship between workplace flexibility, work-life balance, and job satisfaction among Education Personnel at the Head Office of Udayana University, focusing on the effectiveness of flexible work arrangements in enhancing employee satisfaction. Using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) with a Partial Least Squares (PLS) approach, the research provides a robust analysis of how workplace flexibility impacts job satisfaction. Findings reveal that work-life balance serves as a mediating factor between workplace flexibility and job satisfaction, emphasizing the importance of integrating work-life balance initiatives into flexible work arrangements to maximize their effectiveness. This study underscores the value of tailored flexibility policies within educational institutions to promote employee well-being and job satisfaction.
3	3c	Yucel, D., & Fan, W. (2023). Workplace flexibility, work-family interface, and psychological distress: differences by family caregiving obligations and gender. <i>Applied Research in Quality of Life</i> , 18, 1825–1847. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11482-023-10164-1	The study examines how different types of workplace flexibility—flextime, flexplace, and a culture of flexibility—impact psychological distress, mediated by work-family conflict and enrichment. It considers gender and caregiving responsibilities, offering an intersectional perspective. Findings highlight that targeted flexibility interventions can reduce distress, support employees with caregiving duties, and improve overall well-being.

2	2c	Subramaniam, G., Tan, P.-L., Maniam, B., & Ali, E. (2018). Flexibility at the Workplace: Does it impact empowerment and Quality of Life? <i>Asian Journal of Behavioural Studies</i> , 3(11), 97–106. https://doi.org/10.21834/ajbes.v3i11.105	The study explores how workplace flexibility influences women's empowerment, economic participation, and overall well-being. Using a mixed-method approach with 400 female employees in the services sector, it finds that flexible work arrangements positively support women's professional and personal development, highlighting organizational flexibility as a key enabler of gender equality and empowerment.
2	2a	Maket, L. J., Lamaon, L. G., & Kwonyike, J. (2015). Managing Diversity through Workplace Flexibility for Organizational Performance. <i>International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences</i> , 5(4), 399–410. https://doi.org/10.6007/ijarbs/v5-i4/1581	The study explores how flexible working patterns can be leveraged to manage a diverse workforce effectively, highlighting the role of workplace flexibility in enhancing organizational performance. Grounded in Herzberg's two-factor theory, the research provides a theoretical framework for understanding how flexible arrangements impact employee satisfaction and motivation. Empirical findings reveal a significant relationship between workforce diversity, flexible work practices, and organizational outcomes, offering strong evidence for the effectiveness of such arrangements. The study concludes with practical recommendations for organizations to implement flexible work strategies that support diversity management and optimize overall performance.
2	2a	GP, H. (2022). Flexible Working as an Influencer of Employee Engagement Practices. <i>M S Ramaiah Management Review</i> , 12(01), 1–7. https://doi.org/10.52184/msrmr.v12i01.104	The study examines how workplace flexibility influences employee engagement, highlighting its importance for organizational development and maintaining motivation, especially during crises like COVID-19. Using data from 150 respondents in Bangalore, the research identifies work-family conflict, stress, and perceived risk as key factors affecting engagement, with flexibility acting as a mediating factor. Findings underscore the value of flexible policies and suggest avenues for further research to enhance employee well-being and engagement.
2	2b	ter Hoeven, C. L., & van Zoonen, W. (2020). Helping Others and Feeling Engaged in the Context of Workplace Flexibility: The Importance of Communication Control. <i>International Journal of Business Communication</i> , 60(1), 62–83. https://doi.org/10.1177/2329488419898799	The study investigates how workplace flexibility affects employee engagement, highlighting helping behavior as a key mechanism and communication control as a moderating factor. Using two-wave panel data from 329 employees, it differentiates between spatial and temporal flexibility, showing that while flexibility can enhance engagement, spatial flexibility may reduce coworker support. The findings emphasize the need for strategies that balance flexibility with social interaction to support well-being and a collaborative work environment.
3	3c	Aditya, J., Nabila Maulita Triana, Handria, A., Tiara Dwi Yasmine, & Kiky Dwi Hapsari. (2023). A Descriptive Study of Work-life Integration on Full-time Employees Implementing Flexible Working Arrangements. <i>Proceedings of International Conference on Psychological Studies</i> , 4, 287–298. https://doi.org/10.58959/icpsyche.v4i1.46	The study investigates the impact of flexible working arrangements (FWA) on work-life integration (WLI), emphasizing the role of workplace flexibility in shaping employees' work-life balance. It examines how employees manage the boundary between work and personal life, highlighting a key dimension of work-life balance. The research further evaluates the effects of factors such as age groups, duration of FWA implementation, and frequency of office attendance on WLI, providing nuanced insights into how different workplace flexibility practices influence employees' integration of work and personal life. The findings are intended to guide organizations in effectively implementing FWAs to enhance employees' work-life balance and overall well-being.
2	2b	Brega, C., Briones, S., Javornik, J., León, M., & Yerkes, M. A. (2023). Flexible work arrangements for work-life balance: a cross-national policy evaluation from a capabilities	The study evaluates the design and implementation of national-level flexible work arrangement (FWA) policies across different countries, with a focus on accessibility and availability as key factors influencing their effectiveness. It identifies barriers to policy implementation, including conditional access tied to care responsibilities, which can limit accessibility and perpetuate gender imbalances. By analyzing FWA policies within countries that have differing working time

		perspective. <i>International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy</i> , 43(13/14), 278–294. https://doi.org/10.1108/ijsssp-03-2023-0077	regimes and gender norms, the research provides insights into the challenges and obstacles encountered in implementing flexible work arrangements at the national level, highlighting the need for inclusive and equitable policy design.
1	1a	Krajčík, M., Schmidt, D. A., & Barath, M. (2023). Hybrid work model: An approach to work–life flexibility in a changing environment. <i>Administrative Sciences</i> , 13(6), 1–16. https://www.mdpi.com/2076-3387/13/6/150	The study investigates the preferences of employees from culturally diverse backgrounds regarding work location and time post-pandemic, providing insights into perceptions of workplace flexibility. Using a web-based quantitative survey, data were collected from employees in Slovakia and Kuwait to capture cross-cultural perspectives. The research highlights employees' preferences for flexible work arrangements, emphasizing the importance of accommodating diverse needs to enhance organizational resilience, competitiveness, and overall satisfaction.
2	2b	Çam Kahraman, F., & Tüzüner, V. L. (2022). Workplace flexibility and organizational commitment: The mediator role of psychological contract. <i>Istanbul Management Journal</i> , 92, 61-81. https://doi.org/10.26650/imj.2022.92.004	The study examines the mediating role of the psychological contract in the relationship between workplace flexibility and organizational commitment, shedding light on the implementation of flexible work arrangements. Using a sample of 112 participants from diverse sectors and positions in Istanbul, the research explores variations in flexibility practices across organizational contexts. Simple and hierarchical regression analyses are employed to investigate the relationships among workplace flexibility, psychological contracts, and organizational commitment. Findings highlight that managing employees' perceptions and expectations through the psychological contract is crucial for successful implementation of flexible work arrangements and enhancing organizational commitment.
1	1a	Wörtler, B., Van Yperen, N. W., & Barelds, D. P. H. (2020). Do blended working arrangements enhance organizational attractiveness and organizational citizenship behaviour intentions? An individual difference perspective. <i>European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology</i> , 30(4), 1–19. https://doi.org/10.1080/1359432x.2020.1844663	The study investigates employees' reactions to blended working arrangements (BWAs), a form of workplace flexibility, to understand their perceptions and preferences. Using experimental vignette studies, the research examines how employees respond to BWAs, highlighting factors such as individual autonomy orientation and personal need for structure that influence preferences. By identifying these factors, the study provides insights into tailoring flexible work policies to meet diverse employee needs, ultimately enhancing satisfaction and organizational effectiveness.
3	3a	Shi Hao Lee, Chin Wei Chong, & Adedapo Oluwaseyi Ojo. (2024). Influence of workplace flexibility on employee engagement among young generation. <i>Cogent Business & Management</i> , 11(1). https://doi.org/10.1080/23311975.2024.2309705	The study examines how workplace flexibility influences employee engagement and retention, focusing on young adults under 30. Using structural equation modeling, it finds that flexible work arrangements boost engagement, which can increase retention. The findings highlight the importance of flexible policies for retaining younger talent.

2	2a	Bath, J., & Markulin, V. (2024). Exploring the Impact of Work Arrangements on Employee Well-being in the Post-Pandemic Workplace: The Role of Perceived Flexibility, Work-Life Balance, and Managerial Support. <i>International Journal of Business and Applied Social Science</i> , 10(1), 1–17. https://doi.org/10.33642/ijbass.v10n1p1	The study explores how different work arrangements—remote, hybrid, and on-premise—affect employee well-being, focusing on workplace flexibility. It examines perceived flexibility as a mediator and managerial support as a moderator, revealing that location flexibility and work-life balance enhance well-being. The findings stress the critical role of managerial support and provide guidance for organizations redesigning flexible work policies.
1	1a	Schmoll, R., & Süß, S. (2019). Working Anywhere, Anytime: An Experimental Investigation of Workplace Flexibility's Influence on Organizational Attraction. <i>Management Revue</i> , 30(1), 40–62. https://doi.org/10.5771/0935-9915-2019-1-40	The study investigates how workplace flexibility affects organizational attraction, focusing on employee perceptions. It distinguishes between temporal and spatial flexibility and uses signaling theory to explore how these aspects influence job seekers' and employees' views. Through randomized vignette experiments, the research finds that both types of flexibility significantly enhance organizational attractiveness, with combined flexibility having an even stronger positive effect.
2	2a	Yildizhan, H., Hosouli, S., Yilmaz, S. E., Gomes, J., Pandey, C., & Alkharusi, T. (2023). Alternative work arrangements: Individual, organizational and environmental outcomes. <i>Heliyon</i> , 9(11), 1–16. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2023.e21899	The study compares flexible work models and the 4-day workweek to determine their impact on employee attitudes, well-being, and sustainability. It evaluates effects on socialization, happiness, stress, motivation, mental health, and work-life balance, while also analyzing reductions in commuting emissions. The findings offer practical guidance for HR and decision-makers on implementing effective and sustainable flexible work arrangements.
3	3a	Berkery, E., Morley, M. J., Tiernan, S., & Peretz, H. (2020). From start to finish: Flexi-time as a social exchange and its impact on organizational outcomes. <i>European Management Journal</i> , 38(4), 591–601. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.emj.2020.02.003	The study investigates how flexi-time affects employee turnover and organizational profitability across multiple countries. It finds that flexi-time significantly reduces turnover and enhances profitability, supporting its value in diverse contexts. Using social exchange theory, the research explains how flexible work arrangements foster positive employee behavior and contribute to overall organizational success.
1	1b	Han, E., Lee, Y., Lee, S., Kim, S., Ham, S., Lee, W., Choi, W.-J., & Kang, S. (2024). Association between Flexible work arrangement and Sleep problems among paid workers: Using 6th Korea Working Conditions Survey. <i>Safety and Health at Work</i> , 15(1), 53–58. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.shaw.2023.12.005	The study explores the link between flexible work schedules and sleep disorders, focusing on employee well-being. Using a large, representative sample of Korean workers and rigorous statistical analysis, it finds associations between flexibility and negative health outcomes like insomnia. The research also examines demographic and job-related differences, revealing how various worker groups experience the health impacts of flexible scheduling.
2	2a	Kiwanuka, F. N., Karadsheh, L., alqatawna, J., & Muhamad Amin, A. H. (2021). Modeling Employee Flexible Work Scheduling As A Classification Problem. <i>Procedia Computer</i>	The study introduces a machine learning approach to employee scheduling as a solution for managing flexible work arrangements. It compares this method with traditional optimization techniques, showing that machine learning more effectively handles complex scheduling constraints. Empirical results demonstrate its efficiency, offering practical insights for organizations seeking to optimize flexible work systems.

		<i>Science</i> , 192, 3281–3290. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.procs.2021.09.101	
3	3c	Bermejo, L., Hernández-Franco, V., & Prieto-Ursúa, M. (2013). Teacher Well-being: Personal and Job Resources and Demands. <i>Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences</i> , 84, 1321–1325. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2013.06.750	The study develops a machine learning–based scheduling system to improve flexible work management. By comparing it to traditional scheduling and optimization methods, it shows that machine learning better handles complex constraints. The empirical results confirm its effectiveness, providing actionable insights for organizations optimizing flexible work arrangements.
2	2c	Mohiya, M. (2024). An investigation into employees' factors of flexible working hours (FWH) for productivity in Saudi: a mixed qualitative triangulation. <i>Humanities and Social Sciences Communications</i> , 11(1), 1–10. https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-024-02929-2	The study investigates the factors influencing employees' requests for flexible working hours, such as midday breaks, traffic, schooling, and social life. Grounded in social exchange theory, it emphasizes the role of social and employee-related factors in shaping effective flexible work practices. The findings provide practical guidance for HR professionals—especially in Saudi organizations—on incorporating these factors to successfully implement flexible work policies.
1	1b	Jurníčková, P., Matulayová, N., Olecká, I., Šlechtová, H., Zatloukal, L., & Jurníček, L. (2024). Home-Office Managers Should Get Ready for the "New Normal." <i>Administrative Sciences</i> , 14(2), 1–18. https://doi.org/10.3390/admsci14020034	The study examines how employees' adaptation strategies influence their effectiveness and well-being while working from home. It highlights the importance of stress reduction and boundary setting in maintaining job satisfaction. Using semi-structured interviews, the research offers qualitative insights into employees' perceptions of flexibility and its impact on their overall well-being.
3	3b	Cheng, J., Sun, X., Zhong, Y., & Li, K. (2023). Flexible Work Arrangements and Employees' Knowledge Sharing in Post-Pandemic Era: The Roles of Workplace Loneliness and Task Interdependence. <i>Behavioral Sciences</i> , 13(2), 1–20. https://doi.org/10.3390/bs13020168	The study investigates how flexible work arrangements affect knowledge sharing and professional development. It finds that such arrangements can cause workplace loneliness, reducing collaboration and knowledge exchange. However, high task interdependence helps mitigate these effects, offering strategies to support professional growth in flexible work settings.
1	1a	van der Lippe, T., Laura den Dulk, & Begall, K. (2024). Flextime/Flexspace for All in the Organization? A Study of the Availability, Use, and Consequences of Flexible Work Arrangements for Low and High SES Employees in Nine European Countries. <i>Social Sciences</i> , 13(4), 200–200. https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci13040200	The study explores how employees of different socioeconomic statuses perceive and access flexible work arrangements. It identifies disparities in usage and examines the perceived effects on performance, commitment, and work-life conflict, providing insights into how flexibility is valued and experienced across diverse employee groups.

3	3c	Ray, T. K., & Pana-Cryan, R. (2021). Work Flexibility and Work-Related Well-Being. <i>International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health</i> , 18(6), 3254. NCBI. https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8004082/	The study examines the relationship between work flexibility and worker well-being, including job stress, satisfaction, healthy days, and activity limitations, using data from 2002 to 2018. Through regression analyses, it assesses the long-term impact of different types of flexibility and underscores the continued importance of flexible work arrangements for promoting employee well-being.
1	1b	de Klerk, J. J., Joubert, M., & Mosca, H. F. (2021). Is working from home the new workplace panacea? Lessons from the COVID-19 pandemic for the future world of work. <i>SA Journal of Industrial Psychology</i> , 47(0), 1–14. https://doi.org/10.4102/sajip.v47i0.1883	The study investigates the effects of exclusive remote work on employee engagement, experience, and well-being, identifying both beneficial and distracting factors. Using insights from the COVID-19 lockdown, it highlights the importance of balancing remote and office work and offers practical guidance for organizations designing supportive remote work policies.
2	2b	Lu, Z., Wang, S., & Olsen, W. (2023). Revisiting the “flexibility paradox”: degree of work schedule flexibility and time use patterns across gender and occupational groups. <i>Humanities and Social Sciences Communications</i> , 10(1), 1–10. https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-023-02205-9	The study examines the “flexibility paradox,” exploring whether flexible work schedules improve work-life balance or extend working hours. It analyzes different types of flexible schedules and considers variations across gender and occupational groups. The findings offer insights for policy design, emphasizing the need for targeted flexible work arrangements that account for socio-demographic differences.
3	3c	Ferdous, T., Ali, M., & French, E. (2021). Use of Flexible Work Practices and Employee outcomes: the Role of Work-life Balance and Employee Age. <i>Journal of Management & Organization</i> , 29(5), 1–21. https://doi.org/10.1017/jmo.2020.44	The study explores how flexible work practices (FWPs) affect employee work-life balance (WLB), well-being, and turnover intentions. Using a mediation model, it shows that WLB mediates the relationship between FWPs and employee outcomes. Grounded in boundary and role balance theories, and considering age as a moderator, the research provides nuanced insights into how flexibility impacts employees differently across life stages.
2	2a	Ray, T. K., & Pana-Cryan, R. (2021). Work Flexibility and Work-Related Well-Being. <i>International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health</i> , 18(6), 3254. NCBI. https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8004082/	The study examines different types of work flexibility—such as working from home, taking time off, and schedule changes—and their impact on worker well-being, including job stress, satisfaction, healthy days, and activity limitations. Using longitudinal data from 2002 to 2018 (GSS-QWL) and quantitative analyses, it assesses the prevalence, stability, and effectiveness of flexible work arrangements over time, providing a comprehensive understanding of their benefits.
2	2b	Rusilowati, U. (2021). An Analysis of Employee Views and The Effectiveness of Implementing Flexible Work Arrangements In Improving Work-Life Balance on Employees of Life Insurance Companies. <i>International Journal of Artificial Intelligence Research</i> , 6(1). https://doi.org/10.29099/ijair.v6i1.300	The study investigates obstacles to implementing flexible work arrangements and explores strategies to overcome these barriers. It examines practical applications and improvements of flexibility policies while considering employee experiences, emphasizing solutions to enhance the effectiveness of flexible work arrangements.

1	1b	Yucel, D., & Fan, W. (2023). Workplace flexibility, work–family interface, and psychological distress: differences by family caregiving obligations and gender. <i>Applied Research in Quality of Life</i> , 18, 1525–1547. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11482-023-10164-1	The study examines how flexible working arrangements affect psychological distress and employee well-being, considering the mediating roles of work–family conflict and enrichment. It highlights the influence of a workplace flexibility culture and explores how caregiving obligations shape these effects, offering a nuanced understanding of flexibility's impact on different employee groups.
3	3c	Ferdous, T., Ali, M., & French, E. (2021). Use of Flexible Work Practices and Employee outcomes: the Role of Work–life Balance and Employee Age. <i>Journal of Management & Organization</i> , 29(5), 1–21. https://doi.org/10.1017/jmo.2020.44	The study investigates how flexible work practices (FWPs) influence employee well-being and turnover intentions through the mediation of work-life balance (WLB). It also examines age as a moderating factor, providing insights into how different demographic groups experience the effects of FWPs on WLB, well-being, and retention.
3	3c	Wang, J. (2021). Work life balance of early childhood teachers: an investigation of the work early childhood teachers do outside of contracted hours. <i>Macquarie University. Thesis</i> . https://doi.org/10.25949/21293070.v1	The study examines early childhood teachers' work-life balance, focusing on hours worked beyond contracted time and the impact on personal well-being. It highlights the integration of professional and personal lives and the hidden costs of unpaid labor, emphasizing the need for improved workplace flexibility to support educators' overall well-being.
3	3c	Jeon, L., Buettner, C. K., & Grant, A. A. (2017). Early Childhood Teachers' Psychological Well-Being: Exploring Potential Predictors of Depression, Stress, and Emotional Exhaustion. <i>Early Education and Development</i> , 29(1), 53–69. https://doi.org/10.1080/10409289.2017.1341806	The study investigates the psychological well-being of early childhood teachers, identifying predictors such as work environment, teaching efficacy, and professional background. It offers practical and policy recommendations to support teachers in managing stress, enhancing competence, and fostering positive work climates, highlighting the role of workplace conditions and flexibility in promoting well-being.
2	2b	Rönkä, A., Turja, L., Malinen, K., Tammelin, M., & Kekkonen, M. (2017). Flexibly scheduled early childhood education and care: experiences of Finnish parents and educators. <i>Early Years</i> , 39(4), 1–16. https://doi.org/10.1080/09575146.2017.1387519	The study examines flexibly scheduled early childhood education and care (ECEC), focusing on its implementation and accessibility. It highlights that single-parent and lower-educated families are overrepresented among users and explores the challenges early educators face in delivering flexible schedules, revealing barriers to effective workplace flexibility in childcare settings.
3	3b	Kwon, K.-A., Ford, T. G., Salvatore, A. L., Randall, K., Jeon, L., Malek-Lasater, A., Ellis, N., Kile, M. S., Horm, D. M., Kim, S. G., & Han, M. (2020). Neglected Elements of a High-Quality Early Childhood Workforce: Whole Teacher Well-Being and Working Conditions. <i>Early Childhood Education Journal</i> , 50, 157–168. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10643-020-01124-7	The study investigates the working conditions and well-being of early childhood teachers, examining how factors like child age group and teachers' educational attainment influence professional development and retention. It highlights the importance of workplace flexibility and recommends policies and programmes to improve working conditions and support teachers' professional growth.

3	3c	Ford, T. G., Kwon, K.-A., Alyson Leah Lavigne, & McHugh, T. (2024). The Working Conditions and Well-being of Early Childhood Leaders in the United States. <i>Early Childhood Education Journal</i> . https://doi.org/10.1007/s10643-024-01677-x	The study examines the well-being of early childhood leaders, focusing on working conditions and their impact on physical, psychological, and professional health. Findings reveal high workloads, long hours, and poor physical health, highlighting the need for workplace flexibility to improve work-life balance and overall well-being for early childhood leadership roles.
3	3a	Gautam, K. P., Sharma, P., Dhakal, K. N., & Sharma, A. (2022). Job flexibility as a predictor of organizational commitment. <i>Journal of Educational and Management Studies</i> , 12(2), 25–38. https://doi.org/10.54203/jems.2022.4	The study examines how job flexibility—across time, location, workload, and continuity—affects organizational commitment. Using regression analysis, it explores the relationship between flexibility and affective, continuance, and normative commitment, providing insights into how different aspects of job flexibility influence employee attachment and retention.
2	2b	Golden, L. (2008). Limited Access: Disparities in Flexible Work Schedules and Work-at-home. <i>Journal of Family and Economic Issues</i> , 29(1), 86–109. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10834-007-9090-7	The study examines disparities in access to flexible work arrangements, such as varying work hours and working from home, across different demographic groups. It finds that women and African-Americans have less access, highlighting barriers to equitable implementation. The research provides policy recommendations to improve fairness and expand flexible work opportunities.
3	3c	Ferdous, T., Ali, M., & French, E. (2021). Use of Flexible Work Practices and Employee outcomes: the Role of Work–life Balance and Employee Age. <i>Journal of Management & Organization</i> , 29(5), 1–21. https://doi.org/10.1017/jmo.2020.44	The study investigates how flexible work practices (FWPs) affect employee outcomes, including well-being, work-life balance, and turnover intentions. It considers moderating factors such as gender, social support, and flexibility stigma, and draws on multiple theoretical frameworks—social exchange, signalling, gender role, and ecological systems theories—to explain how FWPs influence employee experiences and outcomes.
3	3b	Wong, K. P., Man, S. S., & Chan, A. H. S. (2022). Subjective Wellbeing and Work Performance among Teachers in Hong Kong during the COVID-19 Pandemic: Does Autonomy Support Moderate Their Relationship? <i>Sustainability</i> , 14(19), 12092. https://doi.org/10.3390/su141912092	The study examines how subjective well-being influences teachers' work performance during the transition to online teaching amid a pandemic. It highlights factors such as workload, organizational support, student interaction, and autonomy support, showing how they affect performance. The findings provide practical insights for educational management and professional development in supporting teacher well-being and effectiveness.
3	3c	Laurijssen, I., Verbeylen, J., Mullens, F., & Hélène Lemblé. (2024). The Trap of Flexibility in “family-friendly” Professions: Assessing Teachers' Quality of Family Time Through Temporal Indicators. <i>Journal of Child and Family Studies</i> , 1–13. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10826-024-02820-3	The study examines how schedule flexibility impacts teachers' work-life balance and the quality of family time, particularly for those in couple households with children. It evaluates how using flexible work arrangements affects family life and overall well-being, providing practical insights for enhancing work-life balance in educational settings.

2	2b	Kesternich, I., & Thimo De Schouwer. (2023). Telecommuting Nurses and Teachers with Flexible Schedules? The Meaning-Flexibility Tradeoff and the Gender Gap in Compensation. SSRN. https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.4419551	The study examines gender differences in valuing workplace flexibility and meaningful work, highlighting the paradox that women often value flexibility more but occupy less flexible jobs. It explores trade-offs between meaningful work and flexibility, identifies barriers for women, and offers policy insights—such as adjusted compensation—to address gender disparities in access to flexible work arrangements.
1	1b	Murabula, P. (2022). <i>The Worklife/Progression Trade-Off: How Flexible Work Arrangements Relate to Job Satisfaction and Career Success</i> . Openrepository.aut.ac.nz; Auckland University of Technology. https://hdl.handle.net/10292/14945	The study explores how flexible working arrangements (FWAs) affect job satisfaction, career progression, and work-life balance among employees in New Zealand. It examines both benefits, such as improved work-life balance, and drawbacks, like isolation and limited career visibility, providing insights into how FWAs influence employee well-being within the local context.
2	2c	Yadav, M., Rangnekar, S., & Bamel, U. (2016). Workplace Flexibility Dimensions as Enablers of Organizational Citizenship Behavior. <i>Global Journal of Flexible Systems Management</i> , 17(1), 41–56. https://doi.org/10.1007/s40171-015-0117-x	The study examines workplace flexibility as an enabler of Organizational Citizenship Behaviour (OCB), identifying key facilitators through HR expert input and Total Interpretive Structural Modeling (TISM). Using a driver-dependence matrix, it classifies enablers into categories and provides a framework with practical implications for management and employees to enhance OCB through effective implementation of flexible work arrangements.
3	3c	Koon, V. Y., & Chong, K. N. (2018). Workplace flexibility and organisational citizenship behaviour: an investigation of the mediating role of engagement and moderating role of perceived fairness. <i>International Journal of Work Organisation and Emotion</i> , 9(1). https://doi.org/10.1504/ijwoe.2018.091336	The study examines how workplace flexibility influences positive workplace behaviour, focusing on employee engagement as a mediator and perceived fairness as a moderator. The findings highlight the importance of flexible work arrangements in fostering organizational citizenship behaviour, promoting work-life balance, and enhancing employee well-being.
2	2a	Uglanova, E., & Dettmers, J. (2017). Sustained Effects of Flexible Working Time Arrangements on Subjective Well-Being. <i>Journal of Happiness Studies</i> , 19(6), 1727–1748. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10902-017-9894-6	The study investigates the impact of transitioning to two flexible working time arrangements on subjective well-being using a longitudinal approach. It identifies three well-being patterns—stability, recovery, and chronic strain/long-term improvement—and highlights gender differences, providing insights into the effectiveness of flexible work arrangements for different demographic groups.
2	2b	Kelliher, C., & Anderson, D. (2010). Doing More with less? Flexible Working Practices and the Intensification of Work. <i>Human Relations</i> , 63(1), 83–106. https://doi.org/10.1177/0018726709349199	The study examines an unanticipated consequence of flexible working practices: work intensification. It identifies three ways this intensification occurs and applies social exchange theory to explain the paradox of high job satisfaction and organizational commitment despite increased work demands, offering insights into the challenges of implementing flexible work arrangements.

3	3c	Costa, G., Sartori, S., & Åkerstedt, T. (2006). Influence of Flexibility and Variability of Working Hours on Health and Well-Being. <i>Chronobiology International</i> , 23(6), 1125–1137. https://doi.org/10.1080/07420520601087491	The study examines how flexible working hours affect health and psycho-social well-being, considering demographic, work, and social factors. It finds that higher flexibility and lower variability in hours are linked to better health and well-being, with flexibility being the most influential factor. Properly arranged flexible work schedules yield positive outcomes for both employees and organizations.
1	1b	Ghimire, B. (2022). Impact of Covid and Challenges in Academia with the reference to Teachers' Job Satisfaction. <i>NJMSR Journal</i> , 5(1), 1-14.	The study investigates how flexible working arrangements influence job satisfaction among teachers in academia, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic. It provides empirical insights into the relationship between flexibility and satisfaction, highlights implications for academic institutions to balance work and personal life, and acknowledges limitations that suggest the need for further research.
1	1b	Höge, T., & Hornung, S. (2013). Perceived flexibility requirements: Exploring mediating mechanisms in positive and negative effects on worker well-being. <i>Economic and Industrial Democracy</i> , 36(3), 407–430. https://doi.org/10.1177/0143831x13511274	The study investigates how perceived flexibility requirements (PFR) affect employee well-being, highlighting negative impacts—particularly related to working time. It examines mediating factors such as time pressure and work-family conflict, offering insights into the mechanisms through which organizational flexibility expectations influence worker well-being.
1	1b	Berg, P., Appelbaum, E., Bailey, T., & Kalleberg, A. L. (2004). Contesting Time: International Comparisons of Employee Control of Working Time. <i>ILR Review</i> , 57(3), 331–349. https://doi.org/10.1177/001979390405700301	The study compares work time control across multiple countries, examining how institutional, regulatory, labor market, and union-management factors influence employee control and flexibility. It highlights variations in workplace flexibility and its impact on job satisfaction and well-being, showing how negotiation outcomes and country-specific contexts shape workers' ability to balance work and life.
1	1b	Eldridge, D., & Nisar, T. M. (2011). Employee and Organizational Impacts of Flexitime Work Arrangements. <i>Articles</i> , 66(2), 213–234. https://doi.org/10.7202/1006144ar	The study examines the effects of flexitime on employee and organizational outcomes, highlighting both benefits and limitations. While flexitime is linked to increased employee participation and decision-making, it shows a negative relationship with job security and does not significantly reduce stress, providing a nuanced view of its impact on workplace flexibility and job satisfaction.
1	1a	Ren, X., & Xu, H. (2023). Flexible working during the COVID-19 pandemic: gains and strains in a Chinese state-owned organisation. <i>JOURNAL of ASIA BUSINESS STUDIES</i> . https://doi.org/10.1108/jabs-03-2022-0109	The study examines managerial perspectives on flexible working practices (FWPs) in a Chinese state-owned publishing organization, highlighting how management attitudes and commercial priorities shape their implementation. FWPs are found to enhance employee engagement, retention, business continuity, and well-being during the pandemic, but performance-driven practices create dilemmas, revealing a complex relationship between flexibility, job satisfaction, and employee well-being in this specific cultural and organizational context.
1	1a/b	Sanders, S., & Karmowska, J. (2020). Voluntary flexible working arrangements and their effects on managers and employees. <i>Harvard Deusto Business Research</i> , 9(2), 197–220. https://doi.org/10.48132/hdbr.304	The study explores flexible working arrangements in a global management consultancy, emphasizing how management approaches shape employee outcomes. Flexible work can enhance job satisfaction, commitment, performance, and well-being, but may also cause work intensification, blurred work-life boundaries, professional isolation, and perceived injustice. Contextual factors, such as the accelerated adoption of flexibility during COVID-19, influence these outcomes, highlighting the complex effects of flexible working across organizational settings.

2	2a	Wickramasinghe, V. (2012). Supervisor support as a moderator between work schedule flexibility and job stress. <i>International Journal of Workplace Health Management</i>, 5(1), 44–55. https://doi.org/10.1108/17538351211215384	The study investigates how work schedule flexibility affects job stress among software developers, highlighting supervisor support as a key moderating factor. Findings emphasize that managerial support can mitigate stress associated with flexible schedules, offering practical strategies to enhance employee well-being and productivity in flexible work environments.
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CHAPTER 3: ARTICLE 2 WORKPLACE FLEXIBILITY, PRACTITIONER WELL-BEING AND WORK-LIFE BALANCE OF EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT PRACTITIONERS AND MANAGERS IN THE SEDIBENG DISTRICT

Abstract

Orientation: Workplace flexibility is a crucial factor in ensuring job satisfaction, well-being, and retention in the Early Childhood Development (ECD) sector. Given the high demands and emotional labour associated with ECD roles, flexible work arrangements (FWAs) may help mitigate burnout, improve work-life balance, and enhance organisational commitment. However, existing research on FWAs primarily focuses on corporate and international contexts, with limited studies exploring their application in South Africa's ECD sector.

Research purpose: This study addresses this gap by investigating how workplace flexibility impacts ECD practitioners and institutions alike. The primary objective of this study is to examine the role of workplace flexibility in enhancing job satisfaction, well-being, and retention in the ECD sector. Guided by Social Exchange Theory (SET), the study explores how FWAs influence practitioner perceptions and organisational outcomes.

Research design, approach and method: A qualitative research approach was adopted to gain in-depth and contextual insights. The method involved utilising semi-structured interviews with ECD practitioners and managers to gain in-depth insights into their experiences with workplace flexibility. The method further involved utilizing a thematic analysis process as adapted by Naeem et al. (2023).

Main finding of the study: *Findings reveal that while FWAs improve job satisfaction and reduce stress, challenges such as workload redistribution, financial constraints, and institutional resistance hinder their full implementation. Participants emphasised the need for clear policies and leadership support to maximise the benefits of flexibility.*

Practical recommendations and managerial implications: The study highlights that FWAs are not merely an practitioner benefit but a strategic tool for workforce sustainability. These insights provide practical recommendations for policymakers and ECD institutions to develop flexible work policies that support both practitioner well-being and organisational efficiency.

Keywords

"Workplace flexibility," "workplace conditions," "practitioner well-being," "work-life balance," and "early childhood sector."

Introduction

Workplace flexibility is essential in the Early Childhood Development (ECD) sector, helping educators and managers navigate the demanding nature of their roles. A key factor in job satisfaction is the ability to balance work and personal life commitments (Press et al., 2015; Milner et al., 2013; Koreshi & Alpass, 2023). Flexible work arrangements (FWAs) such as telecommuting, flexitime, and compressed workweeks are the most effective in this sector when tailored to practitioners' circumstances (Westover & Kupka, 2019). However, challenges still exist, such as cultural stigmas, fear of career repercussions, financial concerns, and a lack of institutional support (Williams et al., 2013; Abrams et al., 2022). A strong workplace culture based on trust and management support may be crucial for the successful implementation of flexible work arrangements (FWAs) (Wörtler, Van Yperen, & Barelds, 2020). While FWAs may enhance retention and reduce stress, they may also blur work-life boundaries, thus increasing work-family conflict if not properly managed (Kim et al., 2020). In addition to this FWAs may support professional development but may also limit mentorship and networking opportunities in environments requiring physical presence (Pramanik et al., 2023).

Building on these findings, it is important to explore workplace flexibility in South Africa's ECD sector, as existing research is largely based on international contexts. Understanding how FWAs function locally may help address sector-specific challenges and optimize their benefits such as increased productivity and retention of talent. Evaluating both practitioner (practitioners) and manager (managers) perspectives in the ECD sector is essential to ensure that FWAs are practical, sustainable, and aligned with the needs of both the workforce and institutional goals. This study aims to explore workplace flexibility within the ECD sector through the lens of the manager and practitioners and to identify its importance within the specific sector. Workplace flexibility is a key component of modern HR management, in the aim of enhancing practitioner well-being and organisational performance (Sturman & Walsh, 2014). FWAs may contribute to job satisfaction, stress reduction, and practitioner retention (Chia-Lin & Wei- Wen, 2017). However, workplace flexibility policies may also introduce challenges such as increased performance pressures and disparities in access, particularly across gender and caregiving roles (Ren & Xu, 2023; Laurijssen et al., 2024). Flexibility, when effectively managed, may align work schedules with practitioner needs, fostering both productivity and job satisfaction. Yet, without clear policies and leadership support, it may end up leading to longer hours and potential burnout (Lu, Wang, & Olsen, 2023).

Literature review and theoretical basis of the study

Practitioner perceptions play a pivotal role in shaping workplace experiences, influencing commitment, satisfaction, and engagement (Wörtler, Van Yperen, & Barelds, 2020). Psychological contracts -unwritten expectations between practitioners and managers- are instrumental in managing these perceptions. Çam and Tüzüner (2022) found that when organisations effectively manage practitioners' perceptions through psychological contracts, commitment levels increase. Their study, conducted across various sectors in Istanbul, highlights how these contracts can shape expectations and reduce resistance to workplace flexibility. Perceived organisational alignment is another crucial factor in how practitioners interpret workplace policies. Zafari et al. (2019) explored how practitioners' perceptions of alignment between organisational policies and their own expectations influence job satisfaction and engagement. Their findings indicate that when practitioners perceive similarity between their needs and workplace policies, they are more likely to embrace flexible work arrangements.

The adoption of flexible work arrangements in the education sector presents significant financial, logistical, and managerial challenges for school leaders, educators, and parents (IFF Research, 2023). Leaders express concerns about rising costs, increased workload, and difficulties in maintain communication, while educators fear negative impacts on career progression, pay, and workload distribution (Department for Education, 2019). Additionally, challenges in monitoring performance and ensuring accountability further complicate implementation, as business lack widely implemented productivity measurement tools (Brouge, 2023). School leaders report that flexible work has made communication and scheduling more difficult, placing additional burdens on full-time staff (IFF Research, 2023). Parents, often overlooked, highlight the logistical burden and potential negative effects on family life. Successful implementation requires careful planning, investment in technology, and open dialogue to address stakeholder concerns and minimise inequalities.

Jerrim et al. (2021) provided empirical evidence on long-term trends in teachers' mental health and well-being in England, indicating a rise in reported mental health issues among teachers, though this trend aligns with patterns seen in other professions. While high workloads and long hours are persistent challenges in the teaching profession, the study indicated that these factors have remained relatively stable over time and thus may not fully account for the observed increase in reported mental health issues but it remains an issue of concern. This underscores the need for policymakers to develop strategies to support teacher well-being, happiness, and occupational stress among primary school teachers in Iran, revealing a negative correlation between occupational stress and various aspects of well-being, emphasising the need for balance in the

education sector. Similarly, Kwon et al. (2022) examined the working conditions and well-being of early childhood education (ECE) teachers, highlighting disparities in their physical and psychological well-being, which remain an overlooked issue. These findings stress the importance of improving working conditions and mental health support across different levels of the education workforce to ensure long-term sustainability.

Santovec (2014) highlights that workplace flexibility in the education sector cannot follow a “one size fits all” approach due to the diverse roles of teaching, research, and other roles. At Yale University, for example, the standard workweek is 37.5 hours, but schedules are adjusted on a case-by-case basis. The COVID-19 pandemic increased the popularity of flexible work arrangements, as many schools were forced to adopt them to comply with government regulations; however, this shift was short-lived, with schools largely reverting to their traditional schedules once restrictions eased (Finnegan, 2022; Wills & van der Berg, 2022).

Social Exchange Theory (SET) and workplace flexibility

The theoretical framework for this study is guided by the Social Exchange Theory (SET), which provides a comprehensive perspective for examining workplace flexibility and its impact on practitioner well-being, job satisfaction, and organisational outcomes. The founding fathers of SET are Homans, Blau, and Emerson, who suggested that social behaviour is the result of an exchange process which aims to maximise benefits and minimise costs (Cook, 2015). This theory is key to understanding the dynamics between practitioners and manager within flexible work arrangements.

SET suggests that relationships are maintained through a reciprocal exchange of resources, which may be economic, social, or emotional (Homans, 1974; Blau, 1964; Emerson, 1976). In the workplace, this may translate to the exchange of effort and commitment from practitioners for tangible and intangible rewards from managers, such as salaries and benefits (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). SET highlights the fact that when practitioners perceive that their contributions are valued and reciprocated by their managers through supportive work policies like flexibility, they are more likely to experience job satisfaction, commitment, and motivation (Blau, 1964; Emerson, 1976).

Application of SET in the ECD

In the context of the ECD sector, SET may showcase how flexible work arrangements might influence the work experiences of ECD practitioners (ECDPs). Given the demanding nature of ECD work, which is characterised by long hours and high stress levels, flexible work policies may

serve as a valuable resource exchanged for the dedication and hard work of ECDPs (Rao & Karumuri, 2019; SADTU, 2019). By applying SET, this research explores the perceptions practitioners and managers have of workplace flexibility and their perceived perceptions of the outcomes such as increased job satisfaction, reduced burnout, and improved retention rates among ECDPs.

The framework also explores the connection between SET and social capital, particularly within social networks, norms, and trust in the ECD sector (Cook, 2015). Social capital, which encompasses the relationships and connections facilitating collective action, is key in educational settings. Flexible work arrangements may strengthen social capital by fostering a more supportive and collaborative work environment, possibly enhancing social cohesion and solidarity among ECDPs (Coleman, 1988).

Research objectives

The objectives of this study are:

- To explore the importance of workplace flexibility for both practitioners (ECDPs) and managers of ECD centres and to assess its impact on outcomes such as job satisfaction, work-life balance, retention, professional development, and well-being.
- To explore the perceived perceptions of workplace flexibility among managers and practitioners of the ECD sector in the Sedibeng District.

The primary research question will guide this study, ensuring that this study advances knowledge and is thoroughly researched, which is: How does workplace flexibility affect educators and managers in the ECD sector in the Sedibeng District, in terms of retention, work-life balance, job satisfaction, well-being, and professional development?

The following secondary research questions arise:

- What knowledge and perceptions do educators and managers have about workplace flexibility?
- What are the experiences and perspectives of early childhood educators regarding workplace flexibility arrangements, and how do these arrangements influence retention, work-life balance, job satisfaction, well-being, and professional development?
- What key factors contribute to or hinder the implementation of workplace flexibility policies in ECD settings?
- What are the challenges and benefits of workplace flexibility in the ECD sector?

Research design

The researcher followed a qualitative approach conducting interviews to gather data. A post-positivist paradigm informed the research. This paradigm encompasses the following philosophical elements:

- **Ontology:** The research acknowledged that multiple social realities regarding workplace flexibility exist within the ECD sector. It recognised that various stakeholders, including ECDPs and centre managers, construct and maintain these realities.
- **Epistemology:** The study adopted an interpretivist epistemological approach to understand how these diverse social realities are created and sustained within the ECD sector. It acknowledged that the participants' perceptions and experiences are central to understanding workplace flexibility.
- **Axiology:** This research values subjectivity, cultural context, and multiple perspectives. It respects the unique experiences and voices of ECDPs and centre managers, aiming to give them a platform to express their views and contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of workplace flexibility.
- **Approach to qualitative investigation:** This study's qualitative investigation was primarily exploratory. It aimed to explore the multifaceted aspects of workplace flexibility within the ECD sector and gain an in-depth understanding of how this concept is perceived and experienced by different stakeholders.

Qualitative research is a suitable method for addressing the aim of this research due to several key reasons:

- **Depth and richness:** Qualitative research allows for an in-depth exploration of workplace flexibility, uncovering the rich and nuanced experiences, perceptions, and voices of ECDPs and centre managers. It provided a platform for participants to express their views in their own words, enabling a comprehensive understanding of their experiences.
- **Contextual understanding:** Qualitative research is well-suited to capture the contextual factors influencing workplace flexibility within the ECD sector. It considers the unique challenges, constraints, and opportunities specific to this sector and the South African context.
- **Multiple perspectives:** Given the diversity of stakeholders in the ECD sector, including ECDPs and managers, qualitative research allows for the inclusion of multiple perspectives. It acknowledges that workplace flexibility is not a one-size-fits-all concept and allows for exploring varying viewpoints.

- Subjective experiences: The focus on individual and collective experiences aligned with understanding the impact of workplace flexibility on job satisfaction, work-life balance, and well-being. Qualitative research captures participants' subjective experiences and narratives.
- Theory building: While the primary approach was exploratory, qualitative research also offers the potential for theory building. By examining the ECD sector from various angles, this study contributed to a theoretical framework that addresses explicitly workplace flexibility in this context.

A qualitative approach allowed the researcher to use a small but focused sample to gain a richly detailed understanding of the importance of workplace flexibility in the ECD sector. Qualitative data is more concerned with depth than quantity of findings as it is more subjective than objective.

Participants

The research focused solely on ECD practitioners and ECD managers. The study was conducted in the Sedibeng District of the Gauteng Province.

The research population for this study comprised ECDPs of any age. However, all participants were of legal age, a cut-off year was applied during which any participant could not have been born after said cut-off year. The cut-off year was 2005, and this was done to ensure that all participants were 18 years of age as of 2024 and above to ensure an ethical study. The managers of ECD centres were not restricted by age as long as they were all above 18 as of 2024. All participants had worked within an ECD centre/school that was classified as an independent school/centre as this study did not include government practitioners, and these centres were based in the Sedibeng District of the Gauteng province.

Non-probability sampling was used, and interviews were conducted with ECDPs and ECD managers within the Sedibeng District of the Gauteng Province. Not every manager and ECD practitioner had an equal opportunity to be included in the sample as there were limitations on locations, sectors and ages. There was also no sampling data list available from which a sample can be drawn randomly to ensure an equal opportunity. For the above reasons, the researcher had chosen to use a non-probability sampling method, and due to these limitations, it was the most rational choice (Saunders et al., 2012).

This study utilised a non-probability sampling method which included the following characteristics (Saunders et al., 2012):

- Participants who met the criteria could participate, which meant that any adolescent ECD practitioner and ECD managers within the Sedibeng District of the Gauteng Province could participate.
- The researcher utilised his judgment (purposive sampling) to select initial individuals who met the criteria.
- In addition, snowball sampling was employed, where initial participants were asked to refer other eligible individuals within their professional networks. This approach was useful for accessing participants in a dispersed or informal sector, such as ECD.
- Random sampling was more complicated and costly compared to non-probability sampling.

This study had intended to identify ten ECD managers to participate in the study and twenty ECD practitioners. The study utilised a small sample due to predicted low workplace flexibility programmes in the ECD sector. The prediction is based on limited studies on workplace flexibility in the sector. However, the small sample allowed for a deep and case-oriented analysis. It is also found that most qualitative researchers using a specific set of research questions in interview-based studies generate very little new information after interviewing about 20 people. To allow adequate time to analyse data and locate participants, the researcher refrained from interviewing an excessive number of participants (Vasileiou et al., 2018).

Inclusion criteria use characteristics or attributes that prospective study participants need to have to be included in the study (Garg, 2016). This study required the following to participate:

- ECDPs above 18 years of age.
- ECD managers above the age of 18 years.
- Participants had to work at a centre in the Sedibeng District of the Gauteng Province in the Republic of South Africa.
- 50% of participants should have worked in a school/centre offering workplace flexibility.
- 50% of participants should have had no experience working in an environment that offers workplace flexibility.

Exclusion criteria use characteristics to identify potential participants who should not be included in the study (Garg, 2016). The following factors excluded participants from the study:

- ECDPs who are not legally allowed to work in the Republic of South Africa (those without work permits/visas).
- Staff members with less than one year of experience within the ECD sector.
- Staff currently occupying a temporary position or role within the ECD sector.

- Staff who are on extended leave (e.g., maternity leave, medical leave) and not actively working at the centre.
- Staff who are currently facing any disciplinary or legal charges against them.
- Government practitioners or managers.

The researcher identified ECD centres/schools in the Sedibeng District of the Gauteng Province that were eligible to join the study. This was done after presenting potential centres/schools with information about the study to establish interest and to identify the eagerness of potential participants to partake in the research process. The researcher also partnered with a registered social worker from the Gauteng Department of Education who deals with the ECD sector who aided in narrowing down schools/centres. The recruitment process of participants had to be done in accordance with the ethical considerations of this study.

To ensure the reliability and depth of the findings, data collection continued until saturation was reached—the point at which no new themes or significant insights emerged from participant responses. Saturation was assessed by continuously analysing data during the collection process, noting when recurring themes became stable across multiple participants.

In this study, saturation was achieved after 9 interviews with ECD owners/managers and 13 interviews with ECDPs, as responses began to repeat and no additional perspectives or variations emerged regarding workplace flexibility, government support, mental health, the future of ECD, and challenges in the sector. This confirms that the data collected provides a comprehensive and well-rounded representation of participants' experiences and perceptions.

Data collection

This study used a qualitative approach, so the researcher focused on gathering contextual information using guiding questions (Annexure D). The researcher focused on collecting nominal data which has qualitative characteristics and no inherent order or rank. It allowed the researcher to categorise responses and have all responses equally valued. Nominal-level data is helpful to assess differences between groups as the study will look at participants with exposure to workplace flexibility and those who did not have exposure (Taylor, 2023). The researcher further utilised thematic analysis to identify and analyse patterns (themes) within the qualitative data collected. This approach provided a rich and detailed understanding of participants' experiences and perceptions related to workplace flexibility (Naeem et al., 2023). The researcher utilised one-on-one interviews, which allowed the researcher to collect information directly from the source. This allowed participants to share their opinions, experiences, and beliefs, and they were more likely to express themselves in a one-on-one interview than in group settings due to the sensitivity

of some questions. The researcher utilised a semi-structured interview which allowed the researcher to be guided by several questions. However, it also left room for both the researcher and participant to elaborate on certain questions to create a more in-depth interview (Gill et al., 2008).

Data analysis

Given the qualitative nature of this study, all one-on-one interviews were transcribed verbatim into Word documents by the researcher. Thematic analysis was conducted following the approach outlined by Naeem et al. (2023), which involves a systematic process of identifying, analysing, and interpreting patterns within the data.

The researcher began by analysing the transcripts through repeated reading to gain a sense of familiarity and context. Initial open coding was performed by highlighting significant phrases and assigning descriptive codes to sections of the texts. These codes were then reviewed and compared across transcripts to identify recurring ideas and concepts.

Following coding, the researcher grouped related codes into broader categories based on similarity and relevance, repeatedly refining these categories into clear themes that was then able to capture key patterns across participants' responses. To enhance rigour, themes were cross-checked by revisiting the transcripts to ensure that they accurately represented the data and that no significant information was overlooked.

All identified themes and associated participants excerpts were organised in a Microsoft Excel table, which allowed a systematic tracking of frequency and context. Each participant's response was assigned to relevant themes and given a numeric value (point) to facilitate comparison and presentation of findings. This coding table can be viewed in annexure (F & G).

By following this thorough manual process, the researcher ensured a transparent, replicable, and trustworthy thematic analysis without relying on specialised software, thus maintaining rigour and depth in the qualitative data interpretation.

Rigour

To ensure that the study had rigour the researcher ensured trustworthiness. The trustworthiness of this research study was strengthened by utilising five key factors, which are as follows:

- **Credibility.** Credibility looks at how congruent the research findings are to reality. The researcher utilised triangulation to ensure that the research is credible. Data source

triangulation was used as it will involve multiple sources to ensure there is consistency in the data. Using individual perspectives allowed the researcher to remove biased sources to ensure a credible and unbiased outcome (Bryant-Lukosius et al., 2014; Shenton, 2004).

- **Conformability.** Conformability looks at the fairness of the researcher and looks at the ability to demonstrate quality research. The utilisation of data triangulation will ensure conformability, and the researcher ensured that there is a well-kept record of all sources used. All steps in the research process were recorded transparently and uploaded to the researcher's hard drive and shared with the supervisors for safe record keeping (Mandal, 2018).
- **Dependability.** Dependability looks at how dependable the research is by having a well-documented research process in which a third party can easily follow and critique it. The researcher ensured dependability by using an audit trail available on the researcher's hard drive and via the supervisor's D-Drive (Moon et al., 2016).
- **Transferability.** Transferability considers how the description of the research relates to other parts of the research. To ensure consistency between all parts/chapters of this study, the researcher utilised a well-documented and descriptive description of the research (Shenton, 2004).
- **Reflexivity.** In this study, the researcher used reflexivity, using his personal subjective experience to distinguish knowledge from data. The researcher remained honest and transparent regarding any bias, which will improve public opinion and trust in the research study (Delve, 2022).

Ethical considerations

The researcher obtained ethical clearance from the Ethics Committee of the North-West University with ethics clearance number: NWU-01821-24-A4 (see page IV). All other ethical considerations towards plagiarism had been adhered to following the North-West University rules and regulations. Therefore, all work and literature used in this study by other authors will be cited to avoid any plagiarism.

Permission and informed consent

The researcher provided all potential participants with a copy of the ethical clearance from the Ethics Committee of the North-West University. The researcher further provided potential participants with a consent form which provided the potential participant with all the necessary details needed to acquire consent.

Consent for participation in a research study requires the researcher to utilise an informed consent process. This further allowed the researcher and potential participant to have an ongoing form of communication that allowed both parties to feel safe and protected throughout the research process. The first phase of consent in an informal way was when the researcher informed the participant of the research to gauge the participant's willingness to join and if the participant was eager to partake in the research. The next step was to have an effective consent process which included the following (UCSF, 2023):

- Discussed the potential involvement of the research participant in a private location/venue to protect their privacy.
- Gave the potential participant adequate information about the study in a language that was understandable to the potential participant.
- Provided answers to any question the potential participant had regarding the research or the research process.
- Provided consent forms to potential participants and obtained their signed and documented approval before the interview process began.
- Provided copies of the consent to the participants for their record keeping. Gave the potential participant the freedom to stop the process at any time before and during the interview.

Gave participants seven days' grace after the interview to withdraw from the research. After seven days, the participants could no longer withdraw from the research process as they had had ample time to do so.

Anonymity and confidentiality

The researcher did not utilise participants' biographical data, including names, dates of birth, ethnicity, and gender. Rather, each participant had been assigned a number or letter, which was 1 to 20 for practitioners and A to J for managers. All answers by participants will remain confidential to the researcher, and only the study results will be published. The researcher will further ensure that all participants' rights in the Personal Protection of Information Act, 2013, will be upheld. This will be done by ensuring that all interview answer sheets and other data regarding participants are protected by a security code on the researcher's laptop, and only the researcher and the supervisors will have access to the data.

Findings

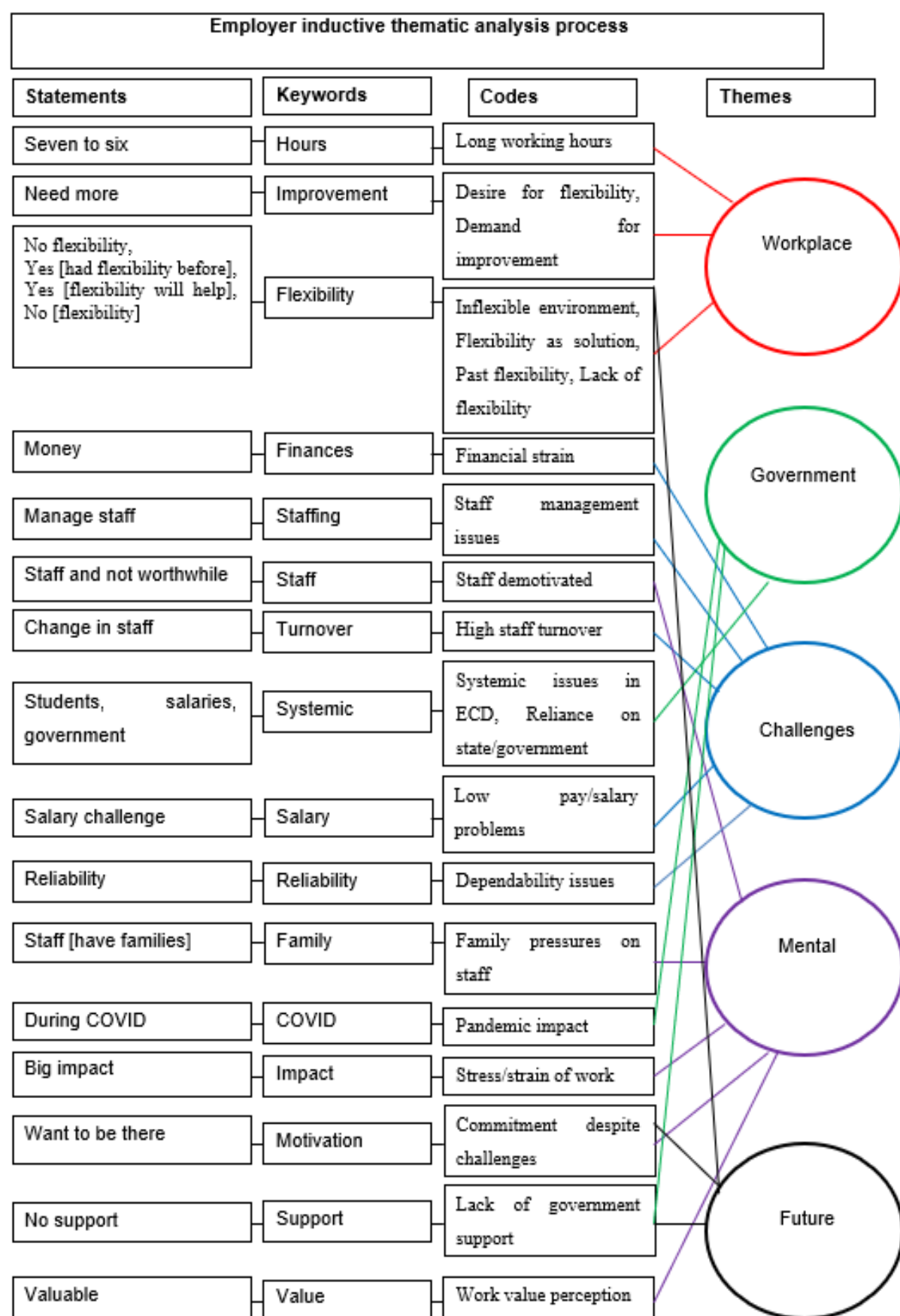
Thematic analysis of the data revealed five key themes that emerged from participants' responses: Workplace flexibility, Government Support, Mental Health, Future of ECD, and

Challenges. A summary of findings, including participant perceptions and key insights, is provided (see Annexure F for manager and Annexure G for practitioner perspectives). These themes provided direct insight into the experiences, concerns, perceptions, and expectations of professionals within the ECD sector.

- Workplace flexibility – While workplace flexibility is often seen to improve work-life balance, many participants reported not having access to flexible work arrangements or being unaware of such options within their organisations. This lack of flexibility may have contributed to job dissatisfaction and burnout for some.
- Government support - Participants expressed concerns about the level of support provided by government institutions, particularly in areas of funding, policy, clarity, and regulatory challenges. Many felt that the government's role in ECD needed to be more proactive and responsive.
- Mental Health – Stress, exhaustion, and burnout were frequently mentioned, highlighting the need for better mental health support for ECD professionals. Many felt overwhelmed by their responsibilities and the emotional demands of their work.
- Future of ECD – Participants shared mixed feelings about the future of the sector, with some optimistic about growth opportunities and others worried about sustainability, job security, and increasing demands placed on the sector.
- Challenges – Various obstacles emerged, including long hours, excessive workloads, lack of professional recognition, low wages, and insufficient resources. These factors may have impacted job satisfaction and retention within the sector.
- These themes provide a structured understanding of the participants' experiences and perspectives. The following sections will explore each theme in depth, incorporating direct quotes and analysis.

To further deepen the understanding of the key themes identified above, the following analysis alongside the inductive analysis process as shown in Figures 2 and 3 will examine how the identified issues distinctly affect both managers and practitioners within the ECD sector.

Table 3 Manager inductive thematic analysis process



Manager analysis

Based on the results of the analysis of ECD managers, the following responses were relevant to the objectives of the study. Participant A shared their structured work schedule, stating “I’m here from about seven [am] to six [pm] during the day, uh, five days a week”. This statement is shared with the majority of participants, which indicates a fixed and traditional workday, with long hours from morning until evening, suggesting limited flexibility in their current workplace arrangement. This rigid work structure may limit opportunities for a better work-life balance, as the participant is required to be at the workplace for extended periods. The lack of flexibility in working hours may contribute to challenges in managing personal and professional responsibilities effectively. The average working hours calculated was 11 hours and 20 minutes for ECD owners/managers as seen in figure 3 below except for Participant F who works on a shift schedule. This is concerning as the (Basic Conditions of Employment Act, 1997, s.9) allows for 45 hours a week which ECD owners are working on average 56 hours and 40 minutes far exceeding the legislative standards.

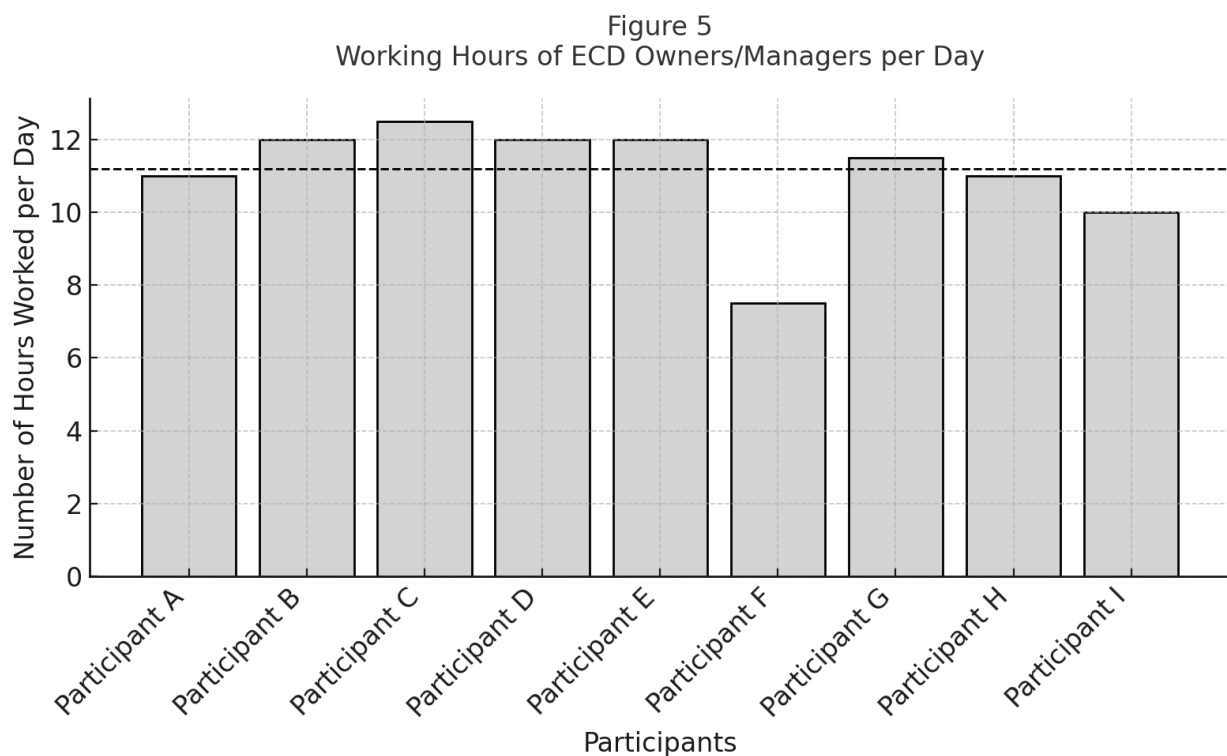


Figure 5 Average working hours for ECD owners/managers

Workplace flexibility varied significantly among participants, with some experiencing rigid work structures while others had some degree of autonomy in managing their schedules. Participant A stated, "Um, at this stage, there's no flexibility," and Participant D reinforced this sentiment, saying, "There is no flexibility," and referring to their role as a "full-time job." These responses highlight a lack of workplace adaptability, suggesting that some ECD professionals work in environments where schedules are rigidly structured, limiting their ability to balance personal and professional commitments. Conversely, Participant B expressed greater control, stating, "As an ECD principal, I have more flexibility" and "control over my schedule." This suggests that managerial roles within the ECD sector may offer more autonomy in scheduling compared to other roles.

However, some participants described partial flexibility with constraints. Participant C stated, "Flexibility [...] very difficult for me," explaining that they could only adjust their schedule within limited hours, "I can do something between 10 and 12." But also emphasised the burden of their work, saying, "No such thing as taking leave, it's a luxury." This reflects a reality where some ECD owners experience small pockets of flexibility but remain bound to rigid work structures overall. Similarly, Participant E acknowledged that "workplace flexibility is possible," but noted, "I don't have opportunities to work online or on a part-time schedule." This suggests that while flexibility may be theoretically available in certain settings, structural limitations-such as an expectation of in-person work-restrict its practicality.

Some participants emphasised the necessity of flexibility in their roles. Participant F stated, "flexibility is essential," explain that "sometimes parents want meeting after working hours, and I have to avail myself." This response suggests that flexibility is not always a benefit but sometimes an obligation, requiring professionals to adapt to the needs of parents and children beyond standard working hours. A few participants described autonomy in their scheduling. Participant G simply stated, "I am flexible," adding, "I arrange my schedule accordingly," indicating an ability to self-manage time effectively. Likewise, Participant H shared, "I have some flexibility," implying that while they may not have full control over their schedule, they experience some level of adaptability. Finally, Participant I responded with a definitive "no," indicating an absence of flexibility without elaboration.

A major challenge faced by participants is financial limitations, which affect staffing, salaries, and professional development. Participant A acknowledged that they "got a bit of money" during Covid but still had "no extra money," limiting their ability to manage staff effectively. Participant C described the financial strain as "a lot of stress, financial, safety, a lot of challenges every day," while Participant E noted that during Covid, student numbers dropped, making it "financially

tough” and requiring “external funding.” The impact extends to staff training, with Participant H stating, “There are training courses available, but funding is a challenge.” Many participants struggled with staffing issues, particularly qualifications and turnover. Participant A highlighted the difficulty of “managing the staff” and sudden staffing changes. Participant D pointed out the challenge of the government mandate for qualified teachers, mentioning an “unqualified teacher who couldn’t find work” due to policy requirements. Meanwhile, Participant G stressed that flexibility is only feasible if “your planning is in place and your staff is reliable,” emphasising the importance of a stable workforce.

The demanding nature of ECD management adds to strain. Participant C described owning a centre as “a lot of stress,” while Participant E noted that “the job is demanding” and called for “improvements that support efficiency or work-life balance.” The financial and staffing struggles worsened during Covid, with Participant F summing up the experience as “horrible,” citing “salary cuts” and “lack of funding.” Despite these challenges, some participants acknowledged the benefits of workplace flexibility. Participant E stated that “flexibility can be beneficial,” and Participant H agreed it “can be helpful in some cases, especially with work-life balance.” However, as Participant G pointed out, flexibility is “manageable” only when “planning is in place, and your staff is reliable.”

Most participants expressed frustration over the lack of government support, particularly in terms of funding. Participant A stated, “There is no support,” while Participant B echoed this sentiment, saying, “The government does not support my school” and pointing to the “lack of support [...] finances.” Similarly, Participant C noted, “We don’t get any support,” adding that ECD centres are often left to “help ourselves.” However, despite this frustration, they acknowledge that “financially, we need it.” Several participants emphasised that the absence of financial assistance creates additional burdens. Participant F, representing an NPO, explained, “We don’t receive funding from the government,” meaning they “rely entirely on school fees,” which puts financial pressure on providing learning materials. Participant G noted that while “government provides some support in guidance,” there is “no financial assistance.” The impact was especially evident during Covid, as Participant H recalled, “We had UIF funding during Covid, but it was difficult,” and participant G admitted, “We relied on UIF, but it wasn’t enough.”

While financial assistance is largely absent, some participants acknowledged limited administrative support. Participant H stated, “Government provides administrative support,” but also pointed out that “when it comes to financial support, there is none,” which “limits what we can do.” Similarly, Participant E mentioned that the government helps “oversee compliance,” but their ECD centre operates independently and does not receive direct assistance. However, not

all views were negative. Participant I stood out as an exception, stating that “the support from government is satisfying” and that “the government is paying attention to improve the standard.”

Mental health in the ECD sector is closely linked to workplace demands, resource limitations, and flexibility. Many participants acknowledged the challenges of managing stress, while others emphasised the importance of maintain a positive mindset. Participant B highlighted the mental strain of managing staff and meeting demands, stating, “Managing staff is difficult” and “the school doesn’t have all the resources.” Financial stress also plays a role, as they mentioned “salaries” as a contributing factor. However, they found that introducing workplace flexibility had a positive effect, explain that a “trial flexibility [was] very successful” and that “the staff reported to be happier.” Similarly, Participant D observed that flexibility was well-received, stating “They appreciated it and find it very helpful.” Participant F also linked workplace structure to well-being, noting that “staff happiness” is influenced by having a “set of rules,” suggesting that clear guidelines contribute to a sense of stability.

On the other hand, some participants downplayed the mental health challenges. Participant C stated, “Create your own happiness,” suggesting a personal approach to well-being. They acknowledge the inability to take breaks freely, saying, “I can’t just go take leave or whatever, but it’s fine,” indicating an acceptance of workplace pressures. The impact of Covid-19 on mental well-being was also mentioned. Participant I reflected on how difficult the period was, explain that “Covid was difficult, and communication wasn’t flowing,” suggesting that isolation and poor communication added to the stress.

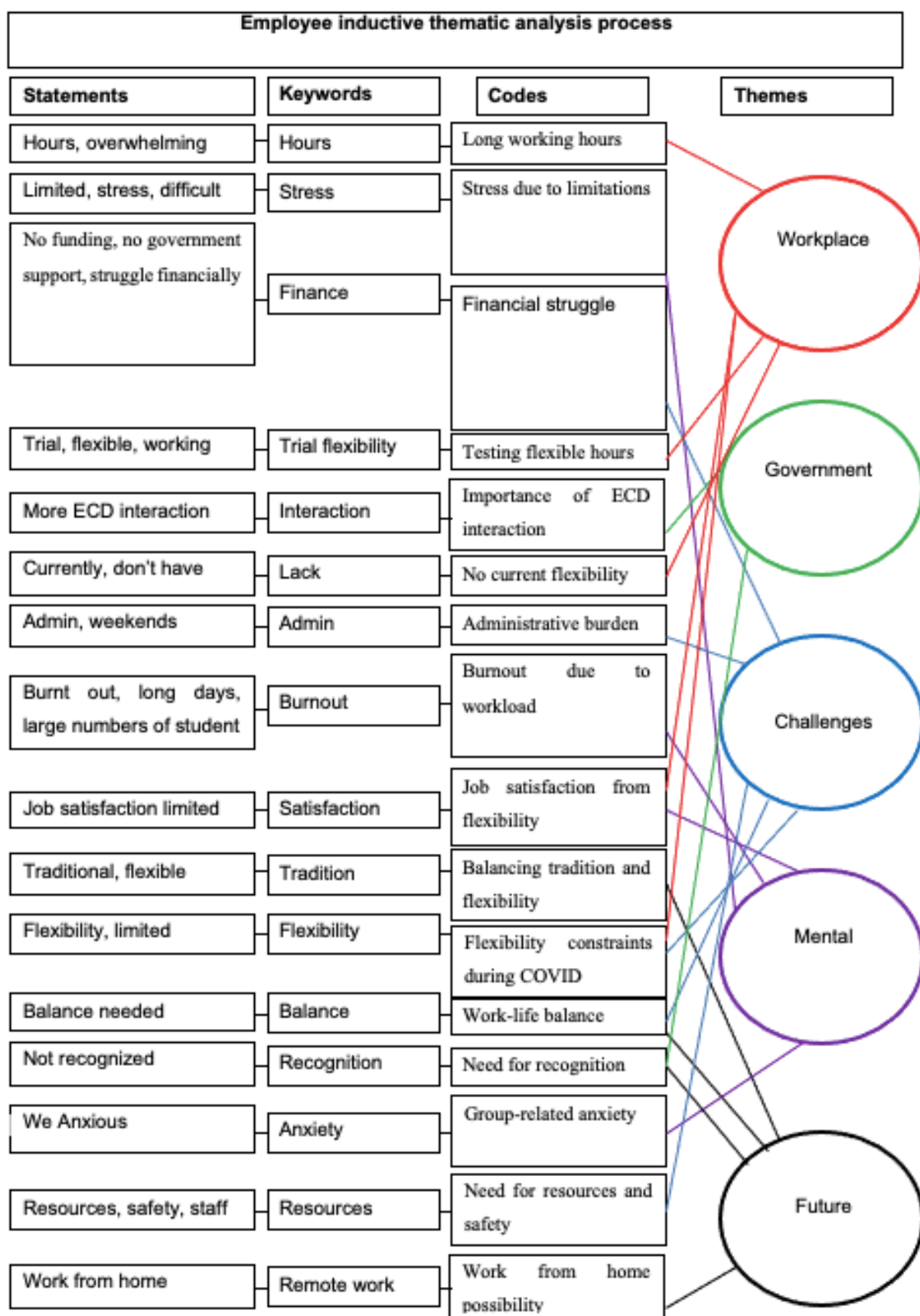
Participants expressed a hopeful yet cautious outlook on the future of the ECD sector, emphasising the need for greater government involvement, better salaries, and stronger education support. Many participants stressed the importance of government intervention. Participant A called for “more input from government,” particularly in “paying salaries” and increasing student enrolment. They also felt “excluded from ne legislation,” highlighting concerns about policy changes that overlook ECD centres. Similarly, Participant B stated that government needs “to take us more seriously,” while Participant D emphasised the need for “qualified teachers from government,” “better salaries and subsidies,” and “educational support” to expand the workforce. Participant I echoed this sentiment, saying they want the department “to work with us and not against us.”

Participants also emphasised the critical role of ECD in child development. Participant C reinforced that “children are the most important” and that educators “must work hard with children” to ensure a strong foundation. Participant G warned that “without a strong ECD, the future of children is in a difficult position,” reinforcing the sector’s long-term impact. Beyond funding, some

participants highlighted the importance of quality education and professional growth. Participant E stated that “education should be fun” while maintain “structured learning,” balancing engagement with effective teaching. Participant F welcomed the fact that “ECD gets some recognition” and emphasised the need for “skills development” in the sector. Despite challenges, some participants remained optimistic. Participant H expressed hope, stating, “I’m optimistic” and emphasising the need to “focus on education and not business.” Participant I shared a positive vision, saying, “I would like to see it growing,” underscoring the importance of collaboration for sector development.

While the manager perspectives shed light on institutional and managerial challenges, it is equally important to explore how these issues are experienced on the ground by the practitioners working within the ECD sector.

Table 4 Practitioner inductive thematic analysis process



Practitioner analysis

Based on the results of the analysis of ECD practitioners, the following responses were relevant to the objectives of the study. Participant 1 shared their structured work schedule, stating, "Monday to Friday, 7am to 5pm," while Participant 6 reported working from "9am to 2pm." This variation highlights the different working arrangements within ECD centres, where some practitioners follow a traditional full-day schedule, while others work shorter shifts. Despite this variation, many practitioners still experience long and structured hours with limited flexibility. Those working full-day shifts may face challenges in balancing work and personal responsibilities. While shorter shifts offer some flexibility, they may also impact earning and job stability. These differences in working hours suggest that ECD centres operate on a mix of fixed and flexible schedules, but further consideration is needed to ensure fair working conditions that align with labour regulations and promote practitioner well-being.

The average working hours calculated was 9 hours and 15 minutes for ECD practitioners as seen in figure 4 below. This is not compliant with the (Basic Conditions of Employment Act, 1997, s.9) which allows for 45 hours a week, and participants are working on average 46 hours and 15 minutes. There are concerns as a majority of the participants are working beyond 45 hours a week (as seen in Figure 3). Participant 6 works online and Participant 8 works half-day due to parental duties, so if these participants are taken out then full day participants are working 9 hours and 49 minutes which equates to 49 hours and 5 minutes per week which is on par with the statement made by The South African Democratic Teachers Union (SADTU) regarding long working hours in Gauteng Province to be on average around 50 hours (SADTU, 2019).

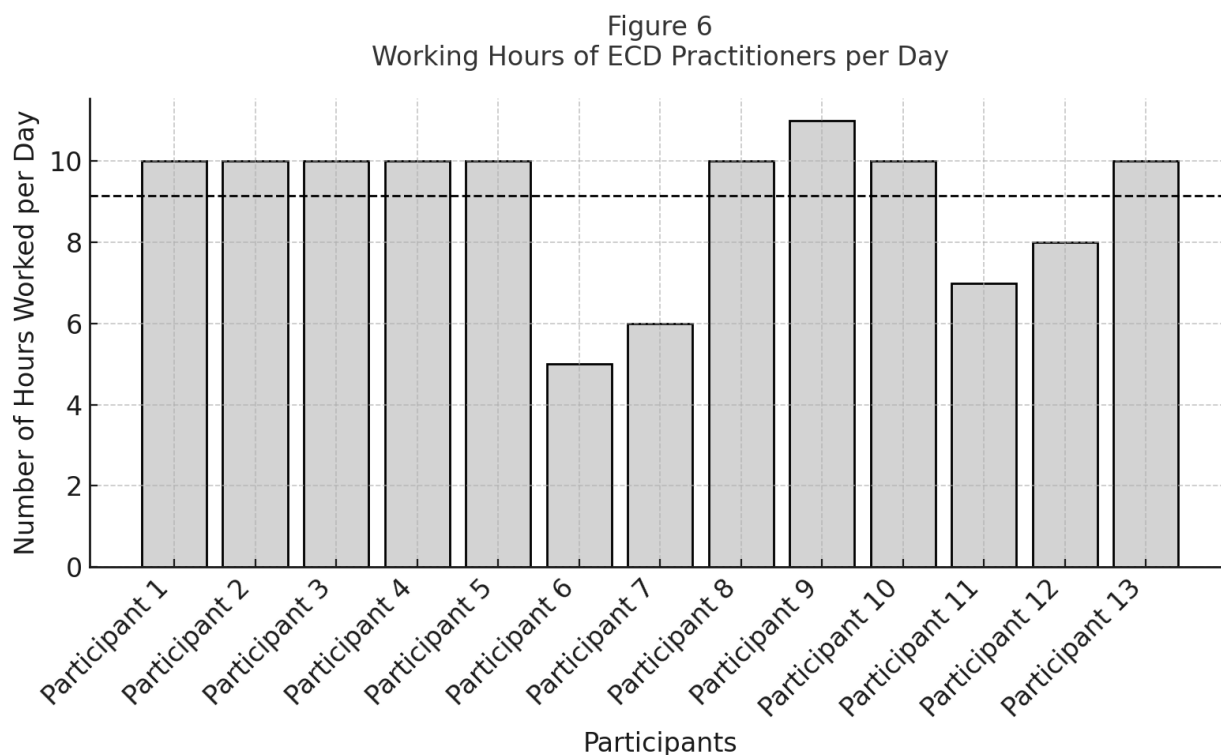


Figure 6: Average working hours for ECD practitioners

Participants had diverse perspectives on workplace flexibility, influenced by their experiences, job roles, and nature of ECD work. Many participants indicated that flexibility was not standard practice in their workplaces. Participant 1 stated that “Flexibility is limited,” explaining that, while virtual learning was attempted during the pandemic, “it was difficult because you couldn’t reach everyone.” Similarly, Participant 5 mentioned, “We only experienced flexibility during Covid, but now we don’t have flexibility.” Some participants reported isolated instances of trial programmes. Participant 2 noted, “The school had a trial flexible working hours programme,” but added, “Currently, we don’t have it.” Participant 4 recalled, “I heard that my school had a trial last year where teachers got off early on a Friday,” and while they did not personally participate, they mentioned, “I heard they worked a bit harder to get the Friday off and they appreciated it.” Participant 7 confirmed a similar system, stating, “We got Fridays off. We had a rotation system where teachers covered for each other.”

Several participants noted that flexibility was more common during the pandemic. Participant 2 reflected, “We had a lot of flexibility during the pandemic,” while Participant 6, who currently works as an online ECD teacher, emphasised the benefits of remote work: “In my case, working as an online ECD educator has been enjoyable. I am able to balance my personal and professional life.” They also added, “During Covid, people realised online teaching is easier.” However, some participants found remote learning to be ineffective. Participant 8 who works half-day shared, “We

used Zoom during Covid. It worked well for us, but students had a backlog because parents were not engaged.” Participant 1 similarly observed that “virtual learning during the pandemic” did not always reach all students. Several participants expressed a desire for more flexibility to reduced stress and burnout. Participant 7 stated, “The toddlers are overwhelming - getting a Friday afternoon off would help me recharge.” They also emphasised the consequences of inflexibility, noting, “If teachers don’t get flexibility or support, they burn out. When that happens, they don’t care as much.” Participant 5 similarly remarked, “I think it could help to go home and rest.”

Conversely, some participants felt that their work environments already provided sufficient flexibility. Participant 11 stated, “I feel we’ve got quite a bit of flexibility,” while Participant 12 commented, “The hours are fine, and you get a chance to work with all age groups.” While formal flexibility programmes were not widely reported, some participants highlighted teamwork as a factor that allowed for some level of flexibility. Participant 13 shared, “Yes, there is a program, and everyone works together.” Participant 11 also pointed out, “The fact that teachers work together” makes things more manageable.

ECD practitioners face long hours, financial constraints, staff shortages, and limited parental involvement, all of which impact their well-being and job performance. Many participants reported overwhelming work hours, with Participant 1 stating, “Working hours are overwhelming,” and Participant 5 adding, “We are always tired because we work long hours.” Staff shortages further strain operations, as Participant 11 noted, “Since the school is short-staffed, I don’t have an assistant.” Funding shortages were a major concern. Participant 3 stated, “Many ECD centres struggle financially, which affects resources and staff.” Similarly, Participant 8 added, “Many ECDs struggle to obtain curriculum materials.” Late child pickups and lack of parental engagement create additional challenges. Participant 6 explained, “Parents pick up their children late, making flexible schedules difficult.” Participant 8 also noted, “Parents don’t always support their children’s learning.” Covid-19 disrupted operations, with Participant 3 stating, “We lost students, which reduced income,” and Participant 11 adding, “It was very scary.” Admin tasks also add to workload, as Participant 2 shared, “I do admin on weekends.”

Most participants expressed frustration with the lack of government support, highlighting insufficient resources, financial constraints, and excessive administrative burdens. Many felt ECD is undervalued by the government. Participant 1 stated, “The sector is not well supported,” while participant 6 added, “ECD centres are one of the least recognized sectors in the government’s eyes.” Participant 3 shared a similar sentiment, saying, “We are not getting enough recognition and support.” Multiple participants pointed out that ECD centres receive no direct financial support, making it difficult to provide quality education. Participant 8 stated, “At our centre, we do

not receive any help from the government,” and Participant 9 added, “No, no stationery and stuff like that.” Participant 10 emphasised, “If they gave us support, it would make a big difference.”

Some felt that less urban ECD centres receive even less support than urban schools. Participant 5 noted, “I don’t think we get enough support, especially compared to schools in the cities.” A few participants acknowledged some level of government involvement but criticized its focus. Participant 4 stated, “The government focuses too much on paperwork-there’s a lack of creativity.” Overall, the responses highlight a pressing need for increased government recognition, financial support, and resource allocation to strengthen ECD services.

Participants highlighted the emotional and physical toll of working in ECD, with burnout, stress, and the need for workplace flexibility being recurring themes. Long hours and large class sizes contribute to teacher exhaustion. Participant 2 stated, “teachers are burnt out working long days and large number of students.” Similarly, Participant 5 noted that “new babies joining the class take a long time to adjust, and that can be stressful.” Several participants emphasised the positive impact of flexibility on mental well-being. Participant 7 shared, “Having flexible working arrangements improved my job satisfaction,” while Participant 8 added, “Flexibility made my job satisfaction better.” There was a strong call for schools to prioritize teacher well-being. Participant 7 expressed, “If schools value teachers’ well-being, they will implement workplace flexibility because we are human-we can’t work like robots.”

Participants expressed a strong need for increased government support, improved resources, and workplace flexibility to ensure the sector’s growth and sustainability. A key concern was the lack of financial and resource support from the government. Participant 1 called for “increased funding and government support,” while Participant 3 stressed, “Government needs to be more involved in supporting us.” Similarly, Participant 5 and Participant 9 highlighted the need for “resources like DBE [Department of Basic Education] books, stationery, and education materials.” Some participants focused on enhancing workplace conditions.

Participant 4 suggested “bringing back the flexibility option,” and Participant 6 recommended “hiring additional care workers for the last few hours to help teachers.” Participant 7 emphasised the need for “more team building to reduce staff conflicts.” The transition of Grade R to primary schools was seen as a challenge. Participant 12 noted, “Grade R going to primary school took business away.” Additionally, Participant 10 pointed out that late enrolment into ECD programmes affects early childhood development, stating, “Parents bring their kids late in life to ECD.” Participants believe that the future of ECD depends on increased government support, better resources, and more flexible working arrangements to create a sustainable and effective early childhood education system.

Discussion

This section presents a discussion of the themes identified in the study, as outlined in the findings section. The analysis of the research findings is structured around 10 research questions. The study's objectives were met through an interview-based approach, leading to the identification of 5 key themes. The theme analysis can be viewed in **Annexures (F & G)**.

Theme 1: Workplace Flexibility

Workplace flexibility in the ECD sector must be understood through SET, which emphasises reciprocal relationships between practitioners and managers. Workplace flexibility in the ECD is limited, though it holds potential to reduce burnout and improve work-life balance. Participants expressed that flexibility was more prevalent during the pandemic, with some reporting trial programmes such as rotating Fridays off (Participant 4,7) and online teaching (Participant 6). However, many noted that these arrangements were temporary, and flexibility has since declined (Participant 1,5). SET suggests that practitioners are more committed when their contributions are reciprocated through supportive policies (Blau,1964). While some participants acknowledged the benefits of flexibility, they also highlighted the constraints of financial limitations and staffing challenges (Participant A, C), echoing findings by IFF Research (2023), which indicated that pandemic-induced flexibility was not widely retained.

While limited research exists on workplace flexibility specifically within the South African ECD sector, several studies from international ECD, primary, and secondary education contexts (Wang, 2021; Jeon et al., 2017; Ford et al., 2025) have highlighted the importance of FWAs in improving educators' wellbeing, and retention. For example, Jeon et al. (2017) found that ECD practitioners working in supportive environments with some autonomy over their schedules reported significantly lower levels of emotional exhaustion and higher job satisfaction. Although structural conditions may differ across contexts, such key findings are transferable to the South African ECD context where job stress and burnout are persistently causing concerns. SET further suggests that when practitioners perceive organisational support, such as flexibility, they are more likely to reciprocate with increased job satisfaction and motivation (Blau,1964). Yet, financial struggles and inconsistent flexibility hinder this exchange (IFF Research, 2023). Participants also noted that collaboration with teams (Participant 11, 13) provided a form of flexibility, although it was not structured. The pandemic temporarily increased flexible work options, but the lack of sustainable policies post-Covid highlights the need for ongoing investment in flexibility to improve practitioner well-being and retention. These operational constraints are consistent with findings from Parliamentary Monitoring Group (2023), Equal Education (2023), and Mavuso and Hadebe (2023) which noted that limited funding and human resource capacity continue to hamper

innovation and positive progression such as access to improved employment conditions in the ECD.

Theme 2: Government support

A significant theme among participants is the lack of government support, particularly regarding financial assistance and resources. The Department of Basic Education has a policy framework that aims to support the ECD sector through formal registration drives and subsidies to the most vulnerable ECD centres however, the department also notes the complexities within the sector such as the lack of access to services (Department of Basic Education, 2024).

While participants acknowledged some degree of administrative support from government, this study focused on independent, for-profit ECD centres that often do not receive subsidies due to the restrictive eligibility requirements. According to the Gauteng Department of Education (GDE), ECD centres may apply for a government subsidy only if they are formally registered as partial care facilities and ECD programmes under the Children's Act, and if they are located in designated wards or meet the strict income-based means test criteria (GDE, 2023) (Annexure G). Furthermore, applicants must submit detailed documentation including audited financials, income declarations from parents, and governance structures such as a five-member governing body. The application process is resource-intensive and places administrative and operational burdens on centres that often lack capacity.

In addition, accepting a government subsidy may limit the operational autonomy of ECD owners, particularly those who wish to remain commercially oriented. The funding must be allocated according to rigid cost ratios - 40% for nutrition, 40% for salaries, and 20% for learning materials and other operating costs (ECD Subsidy Form, 2023) (Annexure H). This restricts how ECD managers allocate resources based on their centre's specific needs. This also increases the chance that centres may lose control over business decisions, making it less appealing for independent providers. As such, while administrative support exists in principle - through help with compliance and application guidelines-its practical value is limited for centres that do not fit the government's subsidy model or who choose to preserve operational flexibility.

Both Participants A, B, and C and Participants 1, 2, and 3 expressed frustrations with the limited recognition of the ECD sector. Participant A stated that the sector is undervalued by the government, while Participant B described ECD centres as "one of the least recognized sectors." Similarly, Participant C shared their view that "not enough recognition or support" is given. This aligns with Zafari et al. (2019), who highlighted that when there is a misalignment between organisational policies and practitioner expectations, dissatisfaction increases. The absence of

financial support from the government was a common concern. Participant D, E, F, and G as well as Participants 4, 5, and 6 noted that their centres operate solely on school fees without receiving any direct government funding. Participant D pointed out that financial assistance could make a big difference, while Participant E lamented that without it, “it’s difficult to provide quality education.” Participant F further highlighted the stress of managing without government support, which parallels the concerns raised by Brouge (2023) regarding financial strain on education sectors lacking resources.

Participants H and I and Participants 7, 8, and 9 emphasised the lack of government support with Participant going further to state that “rural schools get even less support compared to urban one’s,” making the disparity even more apparent. Participant I noted that the ECD are often overlooked. This reflects the broader challenges described in Jerrim et al. (2021) regarding disparities in mental health and well-being in rural vs. urban education settings. While the government’s administrative support was acknowledged by Participants A, D, G and Participants 10, 11, most emphasised that it is limited and largely centred around compliance, but “when it comes to financial support, there is none,” noted Participant A. This aligns with the findings from IFF Research (2023), which observed that administrative focus often does not equate to adequate resource allocation. While many participants expressed frustration, Participants 12 and 13 noted that there is some acknowledgement from the government in the form of supportive policies. Participant 12 shared that they have seen “improvements in standards” due to government involvement, though this is not widely felt across the sector.

Theme 3: Mental health

Mental health in the ECD sector is influenced by workplace demands, resource limitations, and flexibility. Participants widely acknowledged burnout, stress, and the need for greater support. Long hours and large class sizes were key stressors (Participants 2, 5, B). FWAs particularly those that offers practitioner control over schedules can significantly improve the mental health of ECD practitioners by reducing stress, emotional exhaustion, and burnout (Royer & Moreau, 2016). In the ECD sector, where practitioners often face emotional strain and rigid schedules, such flexibility can offer vital support for psychological well-being. Psychological contracts shape expectations in this context, as unmet expectations regarding workload can increase dissatisfaction (Çam & Tüzüner, 2022). Many participants highlighted workplace flexibility as a factor in improving mental well-being. Participants 7 and 8 noted that flexible arrangements enhanced job satisfaction. Similarly, Participants A and D reported that flexibility improved morale, aligning with finding that perceived alignment between practitioners’ needs and workplace policies found managing staff under flexible conditions challenging (Participant B).

Cancio et al. (2018) found that special education teachers experience high levels of stress due to workload demands and emotional demands, but also used various coping strategies such as emotional resilience, strong peer networks, and task-focused techniques. These findings align with the unique challenges that are faced by ECD practitioners thus suggesting that equipping practitioners with emotion-focused and problem-focused coping mechanisms. While some called for greater well-being initiatives (Participants 7, I), others emphasised personal responsibility for maintaining mental health. Participant C stated, “Create your own happiness,” mirroring the perspective that mental well-being depends on individual mindset rather than external changes. These contrasting views reflect findings by Kwon et al. (2022), who highlighted disparities in ECD educators’ psychological well-being. The impact of Covid-19 on mental health was also a concern. Participants I and G described the difficulties of isolation and poor communication, reinforcing research that workplace disruptions negatively affected educators’ mental well-being (Jerrim et al., 2021). Addressing these issues requires balanced approaches that integrate both organisational support and individual coping mechanisms.

Research shows that structural conditions-such as staff shortages, workload, and the absence of supportive policies-contributes significantly to stress in ECD setting (Press et al., 2015). These factors often lie beyond the control of practitioners, underlining the importance of organisational that promote flexibility into the system, such as adjusted working hours or admin day from home.

Theme 4: Challenges

ECD practitioners face significant challenges, including long hours, financial constraints, staff shortages, and limited parental involvement, all of which impact their well-being and job performance. Research shows that excessive and unpredictable hours in ECD professions lead to chronic fatigue and reduced retention, particularly in understaffed environments (Abrams et al., 2022; Kwon et al., 2022). Many participants reported overwhelming work hours, with Participant 1 stating that “working hours are exhausting,” and Participant 5 adding that they are “constantly tired due to long shifts.” Staff shortages further strain operations, as Participant 11 noted “not having an assistant”, making the workload even heavier. This aligns with global evidence that ECD workforce shortages compromise service quality and increase burnout (Press et al., 2015; Jerrim et al., 2021)

Funding shortages were a major concern, with Participant 3 highlighting that “many ECD centres struggle financially, affecting resources and staff salaries”. Studies underscore how systemic underfunding in ECD education deepens inequalities, limiting access to materials and fair wages (Parliamentary Monitoring Group, 2023; Mavuso & Hadebe, 2023). Participant 8 echoed this concern, pointing out “difficulties in obtaining curriculum materials”. Such resource gaps

disproportionately affect marginalized communities, exacerbating disparities in early learning outcomes (Wills & Van der Ber, 2022).

The financial strain also extends to staff training, with Participant H emphasising that while “training courses exist, funding remains a challenge”. Participant A acknowledged receiving “some money but still having no extra funds to manage staff effectively”. Late child pickups and lack of parental engagement create additional difficulties. Participant 6 explained that “parents picking up children late complicates flexible scheduling”, while Participant 8 noted that “parents do not always support their children’s learning”. Covid-19 exacerbated financial struggles, as Participant 3 noted that students losses reduced income, Participant 11 described the period as “frightening”. Despite these challenges, some participants recognized the benefits of workplace flexibility. Participant E stated that “flexibility can be beneficial”, and Participant H agreed that “it can help with work-life balance”. However, as Participant G pointed out, “flexibility is only feasible with proper planning and reliable staff.”

Theme 5: Future of ECD

Participants expressed a hopeful yet cautious outlook on the future of the ECD sector, emphasising the need for greater government involvement, improved salaries, and stronger educational support. Research underscores that systemic investment in ECD is critical for equitable development, particularly in underfunded contexts (Parliamentary Monitoring Group, 2023; Press et al., 2015). Many highlighted financial constraints, with Participant 1 stating, “Government needs to be more involved in supporting us,” while Participant 3 stressed, “Increased funding and government support are essential.” Participant A called for “more input from government, especially in paying salaries,” and Participant D added, “We need qualified teachers, better salaries, and educational support.” Participant I echoed these concerns, emphasising, “The department should work with us, not against us.” The role of ECD in early childhood development was another key issue. Participant C emphasised, “Children are the most important, and we must work hard with them,” while Participant G warned. “Without a strong ECD system, the future of children is in a difficult position.” The importance of structured learning was also noted, with Participant E stating, “Education should be fun but also structured,” and Participant F acknowledging, “ECD is finally getting recognition, but skills development is crucial.” Evidence suggests that high-quality ECD programmes significantly improve long-term educational and socioeconomic outcomes, yet require sustained policy commitment (Equal Education, 2023; Wills & Van der Berg, 2022).

Despite challenges, some participants remained optimistic. Participant H expressed hop, stating, “I’m optimistic-we need to focus on education, not just business,” while Participant I shared, “I

would like to see ECD growing.” This resilience aligns with findings that organisational support and professional autonomy can buffer against workplace stressors in education (Sturman & Walsh, 2014; Wörtler et al., 2022). The future of ECD depends on stronger government support, workforce development, and a focus on quality education. Research demonstrates that investment in teacher training and curriculum resources leads to measurable improvements in early learning outcomes (Mavuso & Hadebe, 2023; Pramanik et al., 2023). With proper investment and collaboration, the sector can provide better opportunities for both children and educators.

Limitations and recommendations for future research

Like any research, this has its limitations. Although there are various organisations in the ECD sector in South Africa, this study focused specifically on independent and privately run ECD centres, excluding government funded institutions. The findings must be interpreted with caution. Future research could involve both private and government sectors and expand beyond the Sedibeng District to cover the entire province or include a larger pool of participants. While this study focused on certain ECD centres, future research may also include other staff within these centres. Future studies could utilize a quantitative approach and larger samples to facilitate the generalisation of the results (Apuke, 2017). This could aid in ensuring findings are more quantifiable to further enhance the data already collected.

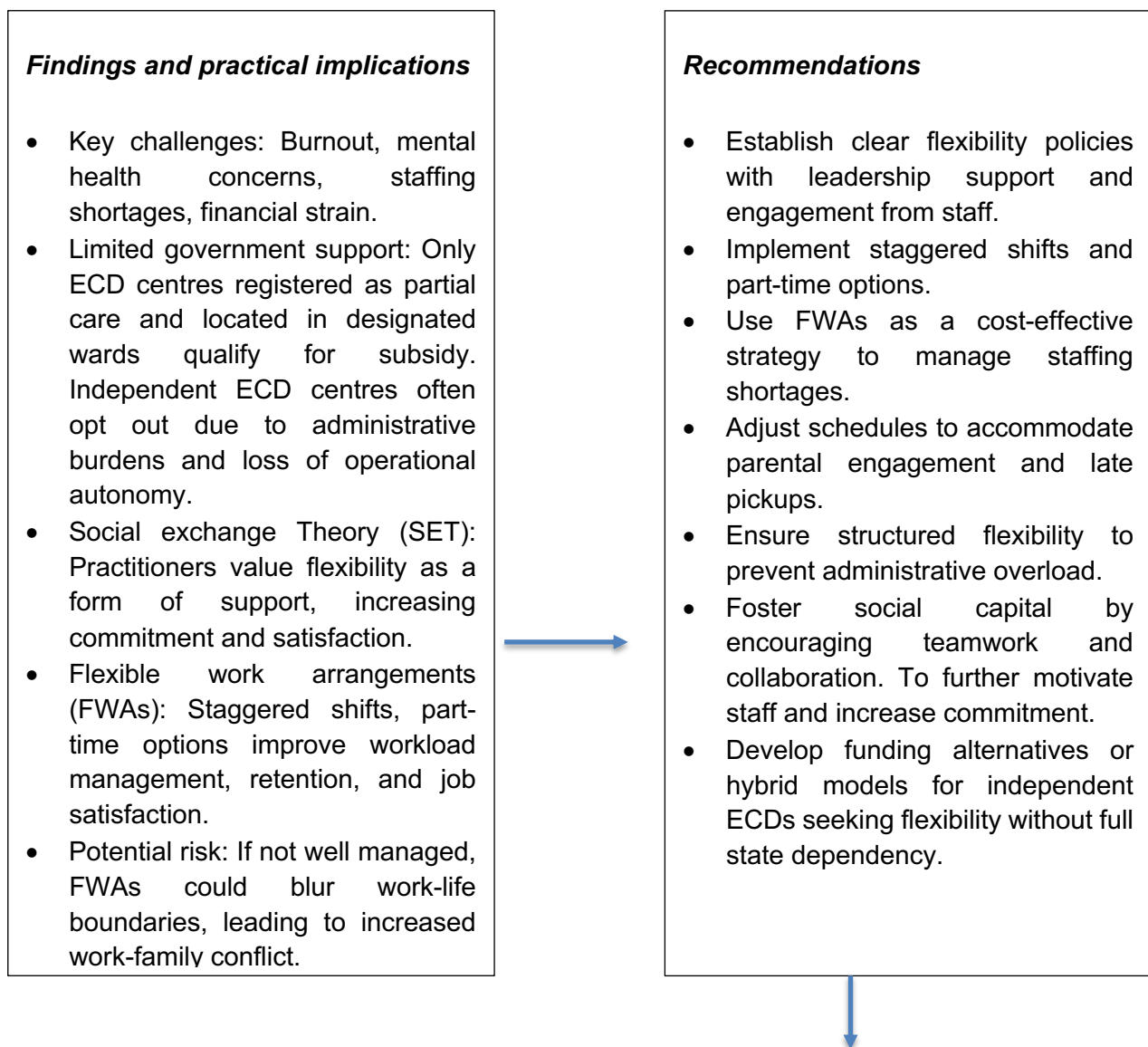
Practical implications

The findings of this study highlight the importance of workplace flexibility in addressing key challenges in the ECD sector, including burnout, mental health concerns, staffing shortages, and financial strain. SET suggests that when practitioners perceive that their efforts are reciprocated through supportive policies like FWAs, they are more likely to remain committed and satisfied in their roles (Blau, 1964; Emerson, 1976). Participants emphasised that flexibility helps manage workload pressures, leading to improved retention and job satisfaction. FWAs, such as staggered shifts and part-time options, may serve as valuable resources exchanged for educators’ dedication (Rao & Karumuri, 2019). This aligns with research indicating that FWAs contribute to well-being, job satisfaction, and practitioner retention (Sturman & Walsh, 2014; Chia-Lin & Wei-Wen, 2017). However, if not properly managed, FWAs could blur work-life boundaries, increasing work-family conflict (Kim et al., 2020). To avoid this, institutions need clear policies and leadership support to ensure flexibility enhances, rather than undermines, educators’ well-being (Lu, Wang, & Olsen, 2023).

Financial constraints remain a key challenge in the sector, but FWAs can be a cost-effective strategy to improve working conditions without requiring substantial investment. Optimizing

schedules and redistributing workloads may help mitigate staff shortages without immediate salary increases. Additionally, structured flexibility may alleviate administrative burdens, ensuring educators have time for essential tasks without excessive overtime. Parental engagement and late child pickups also create difficulties. Schools may address this by adjusting schedules to accommodate peak periods or implementing rotational support systems. Workplace flexibility may also foster social capital, strengthening relationships and teamwork within ECD institutions (Coleman, 1988).

These findings suggest that flexibility is not just a benefit but a necessity for the long-term sustainability of the sector. By implementing tailored, well-managed FWAs, ECD institutions may create a more supportive and sustainable work environment, improving both educator well-being and the quality of early childhood education. Below is a diagram as seen in figure 6 which summaries key points of the findings, recommendations, and implications.





Implications

- Improved job satisfaction and educator retention.
- Better work-life balance and mental well-being.
- Cost-effective solution for staffing and financial challenges.
- Enhanced quality of early childhood education.
- Greater policy awareness among independent centres navigating funding options.

Figure 7 Findings of the study (Authors' own compilation)

Contributions and value add of the study

This study provides key insights into the challenges faced by the ECD sector, highlighting issues like financial constraints, staffing shortages, and the need for workplace flexibility. It emphasises the importance of government support, improved resources, and better workplace conditions for enhancing the well-being of ECD practitioner and the quality of services. The findings contribute to existing literature by linking mental health, stress, and work conditions in ECD settings, offering actionable recommendations for policymakers and educational leaders to improve the sector's sustainability and effectiveness.

Conclusion

This article investigated how workplace flexibility is perceived by practitioners and managers within the ECD sector, using qualitative data collected through interviews with both managers (managers) and practitioners (practitioners). Thematic analysis revealed five interconnected themes for managers (see Table 3) and practitioners (see Table 4): workplace flexibility, government support, mental health, future of ECD, and sector-specific challenges.

Findings from the study show that there is limited access to FWAs which contributes to job dissatisfaction and burnout, with many participants unaware of or unable to access such options. The participants experienced government support was as insufficient, particularly on key issues such as funding, policy clarity, and regulatory oversight. Mental health challenges-such as stress, emotional exhaustion, and burnout-were common across participant responses, underscoring the urgent need for structured support systems. While some participants expressed optimism about the growth potential of the sector, others raised concerns about its long-term sustainability and increasing demands. Additional challenges such as long hours, low pay, lack of professional recognition, and resource constraints were found to affect both retention and morale.

This research provides practical and theoretical insights into the lived experiences of ECD professionals and makes a strong case for improved workplace flexibility, targeted interventions, and more proactive government engagement. These findings are especially relevant for policymakers, ECD managers, and practitioners committed to creating a sustainable, supportive, and mentally healthy ECD workforce.

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CHAPTER 4: CONCLUSION

Introduction

This chapter presents the analysis of qualitative data collected through interviews with ECD managers and practitioners in the Sedibeng District. Thematic analysis revealed five major themes: workplace flexibility, government support, mental health, the future of the ECD sector, and sector-specific challenges. Both managers and practitioners expressed concerns about the rigid work conditions, lack of government involvement, and the psychological toll of working under-resourced environments. While some ECD centres demonstrated innovative ideas/programmes during the pandemic, many flexible practices were temporary and have since faded, raising questions about long-term sustainability. These themes offer insight into how systemic and interpersonal dynamics shape the well-being and engagement of ECD professionals.

Article 1

This study identified three main themes: 1. perceptions and views on workplace flexibility, 2. implementation and variations in flexible work arrangements (FWAs), and 3. outcomes related to retention and professional development. The findings indicated that FWAs significantly influenced practitioner well-being and job satisfaction across sectors. Educators and managers viewed workplace flexibility as essential for managing work-life balance and improving job satisfaction. Studies such as those by Sturman and Walsh (2014) and Chia-Lin and Wei-Wen (2017) highlighted the positive effects of flexible scheduling, while research by Koreshi and Alpass (2023) emphasised the role of FWAs in enhancing organisational effectiveness. However, some studies, such as those by Kaduk et al. (2019), identified potential downsides, including work-family conflict due to involuntary FWAs. Within the education sector, FWAs were linked to reduced stress and improved staff morale (Orlanda-Ventayen & Ventayen, 2022; Turner et al., 2017).

When compared with the literature reviewed in Article 1, the findings from Article 2 echo similar challenges and concerns. While research suggests that FWAs improve job satisfaction and staff morale (Orlanda-Ventayem & Ventayen, 2022), participants in this study highlighted a gap between theoretical potential and practical implementation. Similarly, while government support is often viewed as essential in theory, the local context reveals significant limitations in funding and policy application. This alignment reinforces the value of SET in understanding the gap between expectations and perceived reciprocity in workplace relationships.

Article 2

Thematic analysis of the data revealed five key themes that emerged from participants' responses. These themes provided direct insight into the experiences, concerns, perception, and expectations of professionals within the ECD sector. The first theme, Workplace Flexibility, highlighted that while workplace flexibility is often seen to improve work-life balance, many participants reported not having access to flexible work arrangements or being unaware of such options within their organisations. This lack of flexibility may have contributed to job dissatisfaction and burnout for some.

The second theme, Government Support, revealed that participants expressed concerns about the level of support provided by government institutions, particularly in areas such as funding, policy clarity, and regulatory challenges. Many felt that the government's role in ECD needed to be more proactive and responsive. The third theme, Mental Health, discussed the prevalence of stress, exhaustion, and burnout, highlighting the need for better mental health support for ECD professionals. Many participants felt overwhelmed by their responsibilities and the emotional demands of their work. Lastly, the theme of Challenges identified various obstacles such as long hours, excessive workloads, lack of professional recognition, low wages, and insufficient resources, which may have impacted job satisfaction and retention within the sector. These themes provide a structured understanding of participants' experiences and perspectives. The following sections will explore each theme in depth, incorporating direct quotes and analysis.

Summary

The findings from this study contribute valuable insights into the broader discourse on workplace flexibility and its perceived impacts on practitioner well-being, particularly within the ECD sector. By focusing on the Sedibeng District, the study offers nuanced insights that are contextually relevant and actionable for policymakers, practitioners, and stakeholders within the district and beyond. The discussion in this chapter is guided by Social Exchange Theory (SET) and thematic analysis. SET provides a lens through which the interactions and exchanges within the workplace can be understood, emphasising the reciprocal nature of relationships and organisational dynamics. Thematic analysis allows for a structured exploration of patterns and meanings within the data, ensuring a robust and insightful interpretation of the research findings.

Discussion

This section explores the findings of the study through the lens of SET, which serves as the conceptual framework for this research. The themes identified in the analysis are examined in

relation to SET principles such as reciprocity, trust, power dynamics, and fairness. By integrating insights from both Article 1 and 2, this discussion provides a comprehensive understanding of how workplace relationships and organisational support influence practitioner experiences in the ECD sector.

Reciprocity in workplace relationships

Workplace flexibility in the ECD sector must be understood through SET, which emphasises reciprocal relationships between practitioners and managers. Workplace flexibility in the ECD is limited, though it holds potential to reduce burnout and improve work-life balance. Participants expressed that flexibility was more prevalent during the pandemic, with some reporting trial programmes such as rotating Fridays off (Participants 4,7) and online teaching (Participant 6). However, many noted that these arrangements were temporary, and flexibility has since declined (Participants 1,5). SET suggests that practitioners are more committed when their contributions are reciprocated through supportive policies (Blau, 1964). While some participants acknowledged the benefits of flexibility, they also highlighted the constraints of financial limitations and staffing challenges (Participants A,C).

SET suggests that when practitioners perceive organisational support, such as flexibility, they are more likely to reciprocate with increased job satisfaction and motivation (Blau, 1964). Yet, financial struggles and inconsistent flexibility hinder this exchange (IFF Research, 2023). Participants also noted that collaboration with teams (Participant 11,13) provided a form of flexibility, although it was not structured. The pandemic temporarily increased flexible work options, but the lack of sustainable policies post-Covid highlights the need for ongoing investment in flexibility to improve practitioner well-being and retention.

Trust and psychological contracts

A significant theme among participants is the lack of government support, particularly regarding financial assistance and resources. Both Participants A, B, and C and Participants 1,2, and 3 expressed frustrations with the limited recognition of the ECD sector. Participant A stated that the sector is undervalued by the government, while Participant B described ECD centres as “one of the least recognized sectors.” Similarly, Participant C shared their view that “not enough recognition or support” is given. This aligns with Zafari et al. (2019), who highlighted that when there is a misalignment between organisational policies and practitioner expectations, dissatisfaction increases. The absence of financial support from the government was a common concern. Participant D, E, F and G as well as Participant 4, 5, and 6 noted that their centres operate solely on school fees without receiving any direct government funding. Participant D

pointed out that financial assistance could make a big difference, while Participant E lamented that without it, “it’s difficult to provide quality education.” Participant F further highlighted the stress of managing without government support, which parallels the concerns raised by Brouge (2023) regarding financial strain on education sectors lacking resources.

Participants H and I and Participants 7, 8, and 9 emphasised the lack of government support with Participant 5 going further to state that “fewer urban schools get even less support compared to urban one’s,” making the disparity even more apparent. Participant I noted that the ECD sector is often overlooked. This reflects the broader challenges described in Jerrim et al. (2021) regarding disparities in mental health and well-being in rural vs. urban education settings. While the government’s administrative support was acknowledged by Participant A, D, G and Participant 10, 11, most emphasised that it is limited and largely centred around compliance, but “when it comes to financial support, there is none,” noted Participant A. This aligns with the findings from IFF Research (2023), which observed that administrative focus often does not equate to adequate resource allocation. While many participants expressed frustration, Participant 12 and 13 noted that there is some acknowledgement from the government in the form of supportive policies. Participant 12 shared that they have seen “improvements in standards” due to government involvement, though this is not widely felt across the sector.

Power dynamics and fairness in exchanges

Mental health in the ECD sector is influenced by workplace demands, resource limitations, and flexibility. Participants widely acknowledge burnout, stress, and the need for greater support. Long hours and large class sizes were key stressors (Participants 2, 5, B). Psychological contracts shape expectations in this context, as unmet expectations regarding workload can increase dissatisfaction (Çam & Tüzüner, 2022). Many participants highlighted workplace flexibility as a factor in improving mental well-being. Participants 7 and 8 noted that flexible arrangements enhanced job satisfaction. Similarly, Participant A and D reported that flexibility improved morale, aligning with findings that perceived alignment between practitioners’ needs and workplace policies found managing staff under flexible conditions challenging (Participant B).

While some called for greater well-being initiatives (Participants 7, 1), others emphasised personal responsibility for maintain mental health. Participant C stated, “Create your own happiness,” mirroring the perspective that mental well-being depends on individual mindset rather than external changes. These contrasting views reflect findings by Kwon et al. (2022), who highlighted disparities in ECD educators’ psychological well-being. The impact of Covid-19 on mental health was also a concern. Participants I and G described the difficulties of isolation and poor communication, reinforcing research that workplace disruptions negatively affected

educators' mental well-being (Jerrim et al., 2021). Addressing these issues requires balanced approaches that integrate both organisational support and individual coping mechanisms.

Integration with existing literature

This study reinforces the applicability of SET in understanding manager-practitioner relationships within the ECD sector. The findings align with Blau's (1964) premise that workplace relationships function on reciprocity, where practitioners are more engaged and committed when they perceive support from their organisation. The study demonstrates that workplace flexibility, financial support, and recognition from governing bodies influence practitioner motivation, satisfaction, and retention. However, when these aspects are lacking, practitioners experience dissatisfaction, burnout, and disengagement, highlighting the importance of balancing exchanges in the employment relationship.

The study also extends SET by emphasising the role of external stakeholders, such as government entities, in shaping the perceived fairness of employment conditions. Unlike traditional manager-practitioner exchanges, where reciprocity is primarily between these two parties, the ECD sector shows that government involvement (or lack thereof) significantly affects practitioner commitment and well-being.

Conclusion

This study explored workplace flexibility in the ECD sector through the lens of SET. By analysing the perspectives of both managers and practitioner, the research highlighted key themes including workplace flexibility, government support, mental health, the future of ECD, and sectoral challenges. The findings illustrate that workplace exchanges are not solely determined by manager-practitioner interactions but are also shaped by external influences, particularly government policies and financial constraints.

One of the most significant insights is the inconsistent application of workplace flexibility within the ECD sector. While flexibility is generally associated with improved work-life balance and job satisfaction, many practitioners reported having limited or no access to flexible work arrangements, which contributed to dissatisfaction and burnout. Additionally, the study confirmed that trust and reciprocity-fundamental principles of SET-play a crucial role in shaping employment relationships. Practitioners who perceive a fair exchange in terms of financial support, recognition, and managerial trust demonstrate higher commitment and motivation. On the other hand, when these elements are lacking, disengagement and frustration emerge.

SET was instrumental in interpreting these findings by providing a framework to understand how perceived fairness in workplace exchanges impacts practitioner outcomes. Reciprocity was evident in cases where practitioners felt valued and supported, reinforcing Blau's (1964) argument that fair exchanges foster commitment. However, the study also exposed power imbalances and breaches of psychological contracts, particularly in cases where practitioners felt overworked, underpaid, and unsupported by both managers and the government relationships, showing that when workers lack bargaining power, they are more likely to experience dissatisfaction and attrition.

Overall, this research contributes to the broader discourse on SET by demonstrating its applicability in under-resourced sectors like ECD. It extends SET by emphasising the role of external stakeholders, such as government entities, in shaping workplace exchanges. The study also underscores the need for sustainable workplace flexibility, stronger institutional support, and better mental health resources for ECD professionals. Future research should continue exploring these dynamics, particularly in rural and underfunded contexts, to develop more comprehensive strategies for improving working conditions in the sector.

Recommendations (practical Implications)

Managerial recommendations

To enhance social exchanges within the ECD sector, organisations should adopt leadership strategies that align with SET principles.

- **Implement transparent reward and recognition systems**

A clear and structured reward system may strengthen reciprocity in the workplace. Practitioners who feel valued are more likely to remain engaged and committed to their roles. Organisations should provide consistent feedback, acknowledge contributions, and offer incentives (monetary or non-monetary) to ensure practitioners perceive fairness in their exchanges with managers. This aligns with SET by fostering a positive cycle of mutual benefit and reinforcing trust in management.

- **Promote workplace flexibility**

Findings indicate that limited flexibility negatively impacts job satisfaction and contributions to burnout. Leadership should explore alternative work arrangements, such as adjusted hours, hybrid models where feasible, or structured leave policies. Enhancing flexibility aligns with SET by demonstrating organisational support, which may strengthen practitioners' commitment and discretionary effort.

- **Strengthen trust and psychological contracts**

Practitioners who trust their managers demonstrate higher motivation and engagement. To cultivate trust, management should maintain open communication, involve practitioners in decision-making, and provide clear policies regarding career development and job security. Ensuring that commitments made to practitioners are honoured reinforces the psychological contract, reducing dissatisfaction and turnover.

- **Mental health support initiatives**

High levels of stress and burnout were reported among ECD professionals. Organisations should implement well-being programmes, offer mental health resources, and provide counselling services. Encouraging a supportive work culture and reducing excessive workloads would enhance perceived fairness in exchanges and improve overall job satisfaction.

Policy recommendations

- **Establish clear guidelines on workplace flexibility**

Government and regulatory bodies should provide clear policies on flexible work arrangements within the ECD sector. Managers should be mandated to offer reasonable flexibility where possible, ensuring fair working conditions. This aligns with SET by promoting fairness and reducing power imbalances between practitioners and managers.

- **Improve government support for the ECD Sector**

The findings highlight a gap in government funding and policy clarity. Increased financial support, policy standardization, reducing the barriers for funding, and streamlined regulatory processes are essential for improving working conditions. Policies should focus on sustainable funding models that ensure fair wages, adequate resources, and professional recognition for ECD workers.

- **Enforce mental health and well-being policies**

Government institutions should mandate mental health support initiatives for practitioners in high-stress sectors such as ECD. Policies should require managers to implement workplace wellness programmes and ensure practitioners have access to professional counselling services. Recognizing mental health as a fundamental workplace concern would enhance social exchanges and foster long-term commitment

By implementing these managerial and policy recommendations, organisations and policymakers may foster fair and mutually beneficial exchanges, ultimately improving job satisfaction, retention, and overall well-being within the ECD sector.

Future research directions

Based on the findings of this study, several areas for further investigation may enhance the application of SET within the ECD sector.

- **Expanding the scope of SET in ECD research**

This study highlights the importance of workplace flexibility, government support, mental health, and power dynamics in shaping manager-practitioner relationships. However future research should explore:

- How different leadership styles influence social exchanges in ECD settings.
- The role of workplace culture in reinforcing or undermining reciprocity and trust.
- The long-term effects of perceived inequities in social exchanges on practitioner retention and sector stability.

- **Investigate the intersection of SET with other theories**

While SET provides a strong framework for understanding workplace relationships, future research could integrate it with:

- Psychological Contract Theory to explore how unfulfilled expectations impact practitioner engagement.
- Job Demands-Resources Model to examine how resource availability affects social exchanges and practitioner well-being.
- Equity Theory to assess how perceived fairness in reward distribution influences workplace satisfaction.

- **Longitudinal studies on reciprocity and practitioner commitment**

Most studies, including this one, rely on cross-sectional data, which captures only a snapshot of workplace dynamics. Longitudinal research tracking practitioners over time would provide deeper insights into:

- How workplace flexibility policies evolve and impact practitioner perceptions of reciprocity.
- The long-term effects of government support (or lack thereof) on job satisfaction and retention.
- The sustainability of mental health initiatives and their impact on practitioner performance.

- **Methodological improvements for future studies**

This study primarily used thematic analysis to identify key themes. Future research could enhance methodological rigor by:

- Using mixed-methods approaches – combining qualitative interviews with quantitative surveys would allow for a more comprehensive understanding of workplace exchanges.
- Comparative studies across regions – exploring workplace flexibility in different geographical areas or comparing urban and rural ECD settings could reveal broader trends.
- Experimental or intervention-based studies – implementing and assessing workplace policies (e.g., flexible scheduling or mental health programmes) in real-time could provide evidence-based recommendations for improving social exchanges.

By addressing these research gaps, future studies may contribute to a more nuanced understanding of SET in the ECD sector, leading to more effective workplace policies and improved manager-practitioner relationships.

Evidence of research questions fulfilment (article 1):

Question	Heading	Page
How does the literature on workplace flexibility explain the perception of educators and managers on workplace flexibility?	Theme 1: Perception and views on workplace flexibility and its subsequent sub-themes.	Pg 40 – 41
What are the experiences and perspectives of early childhood educators regarding workplace flexibility arrangements, and how do these arrangements influence retention, work-life balance, job satisfaction, well-being, and professional development?	Theme 2: Implementation and variations in workplace flexibility and Theme 2a: What are the most effective flexible work arrangements?	Pg 41 – 42
What key factors contribute to or hinder the implementation of workplace flexibility policies in ECD settings?	Theme 2b: What are the barriers to implementation of flexible work arrangements? And Theme 2c: What are the enablers and facilitators of flexible work arrangements?	Pg 42 – 43
What are the challenges and benefits of workplace flexibility in the ECD sector?	Theme 3: Outcomes and impact on retention and development and its subsequent sub-themes.	Pg 43 – 44

Evidence of research questions fulfilment (article 2):

Question	Heading	Page
What knowledge and perceptions do educators and managers have about workplace flexibility?	Theme 1: Workplace flexibility	Pg 78 – 79

What are the experiences and perspectives of early childhood educators regarding workplace flexibility arrangements, and how do these arrangements influence retention, work-life balance, job satisfaction, well-being, and professional development?	Manager Analysis and Practitioner Analysis	Pg 69 – 77
What key factors contribute to or hinder the implementation of workplace flexibility policies in ECD settings?	Theme 2: Government support, and Theme 3: Mental health	Pg 79 – 81
What are the challenges and benefits of workplace flexibility in the ECD sector?	Theme 4: Challenges	Pg 81 – 82

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ANNEXURE A (PRISMA REPORTING METHODS):

RESEARCH METHODS AND REPORTING

Table 1 | PRISMA 2020 item checklist

Section and topic	Item #	Checklist item	Location where item is reported
Title	1	Identify the report as a systematic review.	
Abstract			
Abstract	2	See the PRISMA 2020 for Abstracts checklist (table 2).	
Introduction			
Rationale	3	Describe the rationale for the review in the context of existing knowledge.	
Objectives	4	Provide an explicit statement of the objective(s) or question(s) the review addresses.	
Methods			
Eligibility criteria	5	Specify the inclusion and exclusion criteria for the review and how studies were grouped for the syntheses.	
Information sources	6	Specify all databases, registers, websites, organisations, reference lists and other sources searched or consulted to identify studies. Specify the date when each source was last searched or consulted.	
Search strategy	7	Present the full search strategies for all databases, registers and websites, including any filters and limits used.	
Selection process	8	Specify the methods used to decide whether a study met the inclusion criteria of the review, including how many reviewers screened each record and each report retrieved, whether they worked independently, and if applicable, details of automation tools used in the process.	
Data collection process	9	Specify the methods used to collect data from reports, including how many reviewers collected data from each report, whether they worked independently, any processes for obtaining or confirming data from study investigators, and if applicable, details of automation tools used in the process.	
Data items	10a	List and define all outcomes for which data were sought. Specify whether all results that were compatible with each outcome domain in each study were sought (e.g. for all measures, time points, analyses), and if not, the methods used to decide which results to collect.	
	10b	List and define all other variables for which data were sought (e.g. participant and intervention characteristics, funding sources). Describe any assumptions made about any missing or unclear information.	
Study risk of bias assessment	11	Specify the methods used to assess risk of bias in the included studies, including details of the tool(s) used, how many reviewers assessed each study and whether they worked independently, and if applicable, details of automation tools used in the process.	
Effect measures	12	Specify for each outcome the effect measure(s) (e.g. risk ratio, mean difference) used in the synthesis or presentation of results.	
Synthesis methods	13a	Describe the processes used to decide which studies were eligible for each synthesis (e.g. tabulating the study intervention characteristics and comparing against the planned groups for each synthesis (item #5)).	
	13b	Describe any methods required to prepare the data for presentation or synthesis, such as handling of missing summary statistics, or data conversions.	
	13c	Describe any methods used to tabulate or visually display results of individual studies and syntheses.	
	13d	Describe any methods used to synthesise results and provide a rationale for the choice(s). If meta-analysis was performed, describe the model(s), method(s) to identify the presence and extent of statistical heterogeneity, and software package(s) used.	
	13e	Describe any methods used to explore possible causes of heterogeneity among study results (e.g. subgroup analysis, meta-regression).	
	13f	Describe any sensitivity analyses conducted to assess robustness of the synthesised results.	
Reporting bias assessment	14	Describe any methods used to assess risk of bias due to missing results in a synthesis (arising from reporting biases).	
Certainty assessment	15	Describe any methods used to assess certainty (or confidence) in the body of evidence for an outcome.	
Results			
Study selection	16a	Describe the results of the search and selection process, from the number of records identified in the search to the number of studies included in the review, ideally using a flow diagram (see fig 1).	
	16b	Cite studies that might appear to meet the inclusion criteria, but which were excluded, and explain why they were excluded.	
Study characteristics	17	Cite each included study and present its characteristics.	
Risk of bias in studies	18	Present assessments of risk of bias for each included study.	
Results of individual studies	19	For all outcomes, present, for each study: (a) summary statistics for each group (where appropriate) and (b) an effect estimate and its precision (e.g. confidence/credible interval), ideally using structured tables or plots.	
Results of syntheses	20a	For each synthesis, briefly summarise the characteristics and risk of bias among contributing studies.	
	20b	Present results of all statistical syntheses conducted. If meta-analysis was done, present for each the summary estimate and its precision (e.g. confidence/credible interval) and measures of statistical heterogeneity. If comparing groups, describe the direction of the effect.	
	20c	Present results of all investigations of possible causes of heterogeneity among study results.	
	20d	Present results of all sensitivity analyses conducted to assess the robustness of the synthesised results.	
Reporting biases	21	Present assessments of risk of bias due to missing results (arising from reporting biases) for each synthesis assessed.	
Certainty of evidence	22	Present assessments of certainty (or confidence) in the body of evidence for each outcome assessed.	
Discussion			
Discussion	23a	Provide a general interpretation of the results in the context of other evidence.	
	23b	Discuss any limitations of the evidence included in the review.	
	23c	Discuss any limitations of the review processes used.	
	23d	Discuss implications of the results for practice, policy, and future research.	
Other information			
Registration and protocol	24a	Provide registration information for the review, including register name and registration number, or state that the review was not registered.	
	24b	Indicate where the review protocol can be accessed, or state that a protocol was not prepared.	
	24c	Describe and explain any amendments to information provided at registration or in the protocol.	
Support	25	Describe sources of financial or non-financial support for the review, and the role of the funders or sponsors in the review.	
Competing interests	26	Declare any competing interests of review authors.	
Availability of data, code, and other materials	27	Report which of the following are publicly available and where they can be found: template data collection forms; data extracted from included studies; data used for all analyses; analytic code; any other materials used in the review.	

BMJ: first published as 10.1136/bmj.n71 on 29 March 2021. Downloaded from <https://www.bmj.com/> on 3 June 2025 by guest. Protected by copyright, including for uses related to text and data mining, AI training, and similar technologies.

Table 2 | PRISMA 2020 for Abstracts checklist*

Section and topic	Item #	Checklist item
Title		
Title	1	Identify the report as a systematic review.
Background		
Objectives	2	Provide an explicit statement of the main objective(s) or question(s) the review addresses.
Methods		
Eligibility criteria	3	Specify the inclusion and exclusion criteria for the review.
Information sources	4	Specify the information sources (e.g. databases, registers) used to identify studies and the date when each was last searched.
Risk of bias	5	Specify the methods used to assess risk of bias in the included studies.
Synthesis of results	6	Specify the methods used to present and synthesise results.
Results		
Included studies	7	Give the total number of included studies and participants and summarise relevant characteristics of studies.
Synthesis of results	8	Present results for main outcomes, preferably indicating the number of included studies and participants for each. If meta-analysis was done, report the summary estimate and confidence/credible interval. If comparing groups, indicate the direction of the effect (i.e. which group is favoured).
Discussion		
Limitations of evidence	9	Provide a brief summary of the limitations of the evidence included in the review (e.g. study risk of bias, inconsistency and imprecision).
Interpretation	10	Provide a general interpretation of the results and important implications.
Other		
Funding	11	Specify the primary source of funding for the review.
Registration	12	Provide the register name and registration number.

*This abstract checklist retains the same items as those included in the PRISMA for Abstracts statement published in 2013,⁵⁴ but has been revised to make the wording consistent with the PRISMA 2020 statement and includes a new item recommending authors specify the methods used to present and synthesise results (Item #6).

refer to as elements).⁶¹ The bullet-point structure is new to PRISMA 2020 and has been adopted to facilitate implementation of the guidance.^{60 61} An expanded checklist, which comprises an abridged version of the elements presented in the explanation and elaboration

paper, with references and some examples removed, is available in the data supplement on bmj.com. Consulting the explanation and elaboration paper is recommended if further clarity or information is required.

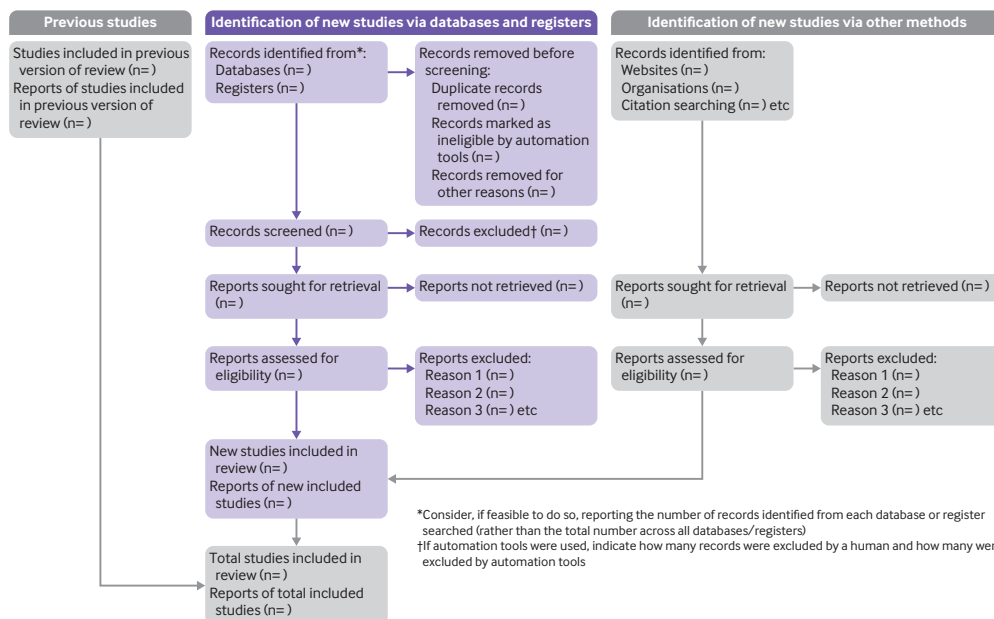


Fig 1 | PRISMA 2020 flow diagram template for systematic reviews. The new design is adapted from flow diagrams proposed by Boers,⁵⁵ Mayo-Wilson et al.⁵⁶ and Stovold et al.⁵⁷ The boxes in grey should only be completed if applicable; otherwise they should be removed from the flow diagram. Note that a "report" could be a journal article, preprint, conference abstract, study register entry, clinical study report, dissertation, unpublished manuscript, government report or any other document providing relevant information.

ANNEXURE B (AMSTAR 2 APPRAISAL TOOL):

AMSTAR 2: a critical appraisal tool for systematic reviews that include randomised or non-randomised studies of healthcare interventions, or both

1. Did the research questions and inclusion criteria for the review include the components of PICO?		
For Yes: ☐ Population ☐ Intervention ☐ Comparator group ☐ Outcome	Optional (recommended) ☐ Timeframe for follow-up	☐ Yes ☐ No
2. Did the report of the review contain an explicit statement that the review methods were established prior to the conduct of the review and did the report justify any significant deviations from the protocol?		
For Partial Yes: The authors state that they had a written protocol or guide that included ALL the following: ☐ review question(s) ☐ a search strategy ☐ inclusion/exclusion criteria ☐ a risk of bias assessment	For Yes: As for partial yes, plus the protocol should be registered and should also have specified: ☐ a meta-analysis/synthesis plan, if appropriate, <i>and</i> ☐ a plan for investigating causes of heterogeneity ☐ justification for any deviations from the protocol	☐ Yes ☐ Partial Yes ☐ No
3. Did the review authors explain their selection of the study designs for inclusion in the review?		
For Yes, the review should satisfy ONE of the following: ☐ <i>Explanation for</i> including only RCTs ☐ OR <i>Explanation for</i> including only NRSI ☐ OR <i>Explanation for</i> including both RCTs and NRSI		☐ Yes ☐ No
4. Did the review authors use a comprehensive literature search strategy?		
For Partial Yes (all the following): ☐ searched at least 2 databases (relevant to research question) ☐ provided key word and/or search strategy ☐ justified publication restrictions (e.g. language)	For Yes, should also have (all the following): ☐ searched the reference lists / bibliographies of included studies ☐ searched trial/study registries ☐ included/consulted content experts in the field ☐ where relevant, searched for grey literature ☐ conducted search within 24 months of completion of the review	☐ Yes ☐ Partial Yes ☐ No
5. Did the review authors perform study selection in duplicate?		
For Yes, either ONE of the following: ☐ at least two reviewers independently agreed on selection of eligible studies and achieved consensus on which studies to include ☐ OR two reviewers selected a sample of eligible studies <u>and</u> achieved good agreement (at least 80 percent), with the remainder selected by one reviewer.		☐ Yes ☐ No

AMSTAR 2: a critical appraisal tool for systematic reviews that include randomised or non-randomised studies of healthcare interventions, or both

6. Did the review authors perform data extraction in duplicate?		
For Yes, either ONE of the following:		
☐ at least two reviewers achieved consensus on which data to extract from included studies	☐ Yes ☐ No	
☐ OR two reviewers extracted data from a sample of eligible studies <u>and</u> achieved good agreement (at least 80 percent), with the remainder extracted by one reviewer.		
7. Did the review authors provide a list of excluded studies and justify the exclusions?		
For Partial Yes:	For Yes, must also have:	
☐ provided a list of all potentially relevant studies that were read in full-text form but excluded from the review	☐ Justified the exclusion from the review of each potentially relevant study	☐ Yes ☐ Partial Yes ☐ No
8. Did the review authors describe the included studies in adequate detail?		
For Partial Yes (ALL the following):	For Yes, should also have ALL the following:	
☐ described populations ☐ described interventions ☐ described comparators ☐ described outcomes ☐ described research designs	☐ described population in detail ☐ described intervention in detail (including doses where relevant) ☐ described comparator in detail (including doses where relevant) ☐ described study's setting ☐ timeframe for follow-up	☐ Yes ☐ Partial Yes ☐ No
9. Did the review authors use a satisfactory technique for assessing the risk of bias (RoB) in individual studies that were included in the review?		
RCTs		
For Partial Yes, must have assessed RoB from:	For Yes, must also have assessed RoB from:	
☐ unconcealed allocation, <i>and</i> ☐ lack of blinding of patients and assessors when assessing outcomes (unnecessary for objective outcomes such as all-cause mortality)	☐ allocation sequence that was not truly random, <i>and</i> ☐ selection of the reported result from among multiple measurements or analyses of a specified outcome	☐ Yes ☐ Partial Yes ☐ No ☐ Includes only NRSI
NRSI		
For Partial Yes, must have assessed RoB:	For Yes, must also have assessed RoB:	
☐ from confounding, <i>and</i> ☐ from selection bias	☐ methods used to ascertain exposures and outcomes, <i>and</i> ☐ selection of the reported result from among multiple measurements or analyses of a specified outcome	☐ Yes ☐ Partial Yes ☐ No ☐ Includes only RCTs
10. Did the review authors report on the sources of funding for the studies included in the review?		
For Yes		
☐ Must have reported on the sources of funding for individual studies included in the review. Note: Reporting that the reviewers looked for this information but it was not reported by study authors also qualifies	☐ Yes ☐ No	

AMSTAR 2: a critical appraisal tool for systematic reviews that include randomised or non-randomised studies of healthcare interventions, or both

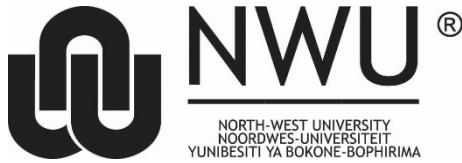
11. If meta-analysis was performed did the review authors use appropriate methods for statistical combination of results?		
RCTs For Yes: ☐ The authors justified combining the data in a meta-analysis ☐ AND they used an appropriate weighted technique to combine study results and adjusted for heterogeneity if present. ☐ AND investigated the causes of any heterogeneity ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ No meta-analysis conducted		
For NRSI For Yes: ☐ The authors justified combining the data in a meta-analysis ☐ AND they used an appropriate weighted technique to combine study results, adjusting for heterogeneity if present ☐ AND they statistically combined effect estimates from NRSI that were adjusted for confounding, rather than combining raw data, or justified combining raw data when adjusted effect estimates were not available ☐ AND they reported separate summary estimates for RCTs and NRSI separately when both were included in the review ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ No meta-analysis conducted		
12. If meta-analysis was performed, did the review authors assess the potential impact of RoB in individual studies on the results of the meta-analysis or other evidence synthesis?		
For Yes: ☐ included only low risk of bias RCTs ☐ OR, if the pooled estimate was based on RCTs and/or NRSI at variable RoB, the authors performed analyses to investigate possible impact of RoB on summary estimates of effect. ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ No meta-analysis conducted		
13. Did the review authors account for RoB in individual studies when interpreting/ discussing the results of the review?		
For Yes: ☐ included only low risk of bias RCTs ☐ OR, if RCTs with moderate or high RoB, or NRSI were included the review provided a discussion of the likely impact of RoB on the results ☐ Yes ☐ No		
14. Did the review authors provide a satisfactory explanation for, and discussion of, any heterogeneity observed in the results of the review?		
For Yes: ☐ There was no significant heterogeneity in the results ☐ OR if heterogeneity was present the authors performed an investigation of sources of any heterogeneity in the results and discussed the impact of this on the results of the review ☐ Yes ☐ No		
15. If they performed quantitative synthesis did the review authors carry out an adequate investigation of publication bias (small study bias) and discuss its likely impact on the results of the review?		
For Yes: ☐ performed graphical or statistical tests for publication bias and discussed the likelihood and magnitude of impact of publication bias ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ No meta-analysis conducted		

AMSTAR 2: a critical appraisal tool for systematic reviews that include randomised or non-randomised studies of healthcare interventions, or both

16. Did the review authors report any potential sources of conflict of interest, including any funding they received for conducting the review?	
For Yes:	
☐ The authors reported no competing interests OR	☐ Yes
☐ The authors described their funding sources and how they managed potential conflicts of interest	☐ No

To cite this tool: Shea BJ, Reeves BC, Wells G, Thuku M, Hamel C, Moran J, Moher D, Tugwell P, Welch V, Kristjansson E, Henry DA. AMSTAR 2: a critical appraisal tool for systematic reviews that include randomised or non-randomised studies of healthcare interventions, or both. *BMJ*. 2017 Sep 21;358:j4008.

ANNEXURE C (CONSENT FORM):



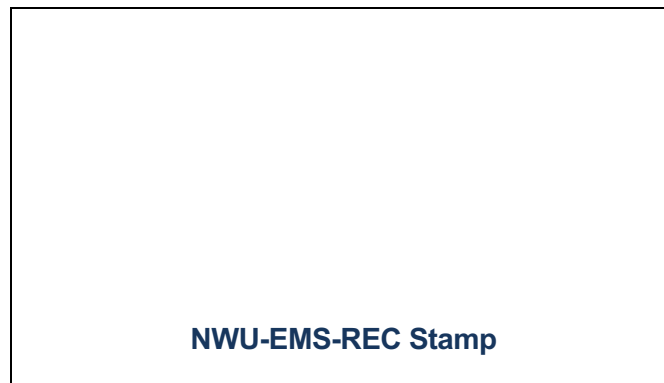
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Fax: +2718 299-4910

Web: <http://www.nwu.ac.za>

The Faculty of Economics and Management Ethics Office of the North-West University is acknowledged for the use of their document with minor adjustments made by the researcher for the purpose of this study (NWU-EMS-REC).



INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENTATION

FOR _____

TITLE OF THE RESEARCH STUDY: Exploring workplace flexibility of early childhood development practitioners and managers within the Sedibeng District

ETHICS REFERENCE NUMBER: NWU-01821-24-A4

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Ryan Bartlett

POSTGRADUATE STUDENT: 32775377

ADDRESS: N/A

CONTACT NUMBER: Ryanbartlet@outlook.com

You are being invited to take part in a **research study** that forms part of my **dissertation**. Please take some time to read the information presented here, which will explain the details of this study. Please ask the researcher or person explaining the research to you any questions about any part of this study that you do not fully understand. It is very important that you are fully satisfied and that you clearly understand what this research is about and how you might be involved. Also, your participation is **entirely voluntary**, and you are free to say no to participation. If you say no, this will not affect you negatively in any way whatsoever. You are also free to withdraw from the study at any point, even if you do agree to take part now. This study has been approved by the North-West University **Management and Economic Sciences** Research Ethics Committee (NWU EMS-REC) and will be conducted according to the ethical guidelines and principles of international ethical guidelines applicable to this study. It might be necessary for the research ethics committee members or other relevant people to inspect the research records.

What is this study all about?

- The purpose of this study is to identify the importance of workplace flexibility within the ECD sector with a particular focus on the Sedibeng District of Gauteng.
- This study will be conducted via one-on-one interviews and will be done by the researcher. 30 participants will be included in this study.

Why have you been invited to participate?

- You have been invited to be part of this research because you are near the researcher and work within the Sedibeng District of the Gauteng Province.
- You will unfortunately not be able to participate in this research if you are under the age of 18 as of 2024.

What will be expected of you?

- You will be expected to answer questions that relate to workplace flexibility within the ECD sector.

Will you gain anything from taking part in this research?

- The gain for you, if you take part in this study, will be the fact that you have contributed to research in the field of labour relations management. There will not, however, be any direct gains for you in this study.

Are there risks involved in you taking part in this research and what will be done to prevent them?

- The risks to you in this study are potential cyber breaches but these will be limited by applying a security code to your data and ensuring that your data is securely stored away.

How will we protect your confidentiality and who will see your data?

- The anonymity of your data will be protected by not including your biographical details in the research. Your privacy will be respected in accordance with the Personal Protection of Information Act, 2013 and your personal data will only be shared with the supervisors in this study.

What will happen with the data or results?

- The data of this study will only be used by the researcher, and the results of the entire study may be used by other researchers in the future.

How will you know about the results of this research?

- Once the research has been concluded then you will be informed and receive a copy thereof.

Will you be paid to take part in this study and are there any costs involved?

- This study is funded through a bursary and there will be no payment to participants nor will participants have to pay to be involved in this study.

Is there anything else that you should know or do?

- You can contact Ryan Bartlett at ryanbartlett@outlook.com should you have any further questions or experience any problems.
- You can also contact the North-West University, Management and Economic Sciences, Research Ethics Committee via Bontlenyana Malueka at 018 285 2436 or botlenyana.maluleka@nwu.ac.za or via Prof Diana Viljoen-Bezuidenhout at diana.viljoen@nwu.ac.za if you have any concerns that were not answered about the research or if you have complaints about the research.
- You will receive a copy of this information and consent form for your own purposes.

Declaration by participant

By signing below, you agree to take part in the research titled: *Workplace flexibility of early childhood development practitioners and managers within the Sedibeng District*. I declare that:

- I have read this information/it was explained to me by a trusted person in a language with which I am fluent and comfortable.
- The research was clearly explained to me.
- I have had a chance to ask questions to both the person getting the consent from me, as well as the researcher and all my questions have been answered.
- I understand that taking part in this study is **voluntary** and I have not been pressurised to take part.
- I may choose to leave the study at any time and will not be handled in a negative way if I do so.
- I may be asked to leave the study before it has finished, if the researcher feels it is in the best interest, or if I do not follow the study plan, as agreed to.

Signed at (*place*) on (*date*) 20....

.....

Signature of participant

Declaration by the person obtaining consent

I Ryan Bartlett declare that:

- I clearly and in detail explained the information in this document to the participant.
- I did/did not use an interpreter.
- I encouraged him/her to ask questions and took adequate time to answer them.
- I am satisfied that he/she adequately understands all aspects of the research, as discussed above
- I gave him/her time to discuss it with others if he/she wished to do so.

Signed at (*place*) on (*date*) 20...

ANNEXURES D (QUESTIONNAIRE):

Question Set 1 (ECD Practitioners)

Workplace conditions and flexibility:

1. Could you provide an overview of your typical work schedule, including your daily working hours and the days of the week you work?

2. In your experience, how would you describe the level of workplace flexibility you have in your current ECD position, and have you had any previous experiences with more flexible work arrangements?

3. What are the specific challenges and stressors you face in your current work environment, and do you believe that workplace flexibility could address any of these challenges?

4. Have you had any opportunities to work remotely on part-time schedules, or with flexible hours? If so, how did these arrangements affect your job satisfaction?

ECD Sector and Government support:

5. How do you perceive the level of support and recognition that the ECD sector receives from the government in terms of employment conditions?

6. What impact do you believe the lack of workplace flexibility and government support has on the quality of early childhood education provided in ECD centres?

Workplace flexibility programmes:

7. Are you aware of any workplace flexibility programmes or initiatives within your ECD centre or organisation, and if so, could you describe your experiences with these programmes?

8. What factors do you think contribute to the success or hindrance of implementing workplace flexibility policies in the ECD sector?

Impact of COVID-19:

9. Can you share any insights into how your experience with workplace flexibility during the pandemic differed from your pre-pandemic work arrangements?

Suggestions and future outlook:

10. Based on your experiences and observations, what suggestions or recommendations do you have for improving workplace conditions and flexibility in the ECD sector?

Question Set 2 (ECD managers)**Workplace conditions and flexibility:**

1. Could you provide an overview of your typical work schedule, including your daily working hours and the days of the week you work?

2. In your experience, how would you describe the level of workplace flexibility you have in your current position, and have you had any previous experiences with more flexible work arrangements?

3. What are the specific challenges and stressors you face in your current work environment, and do you believe that workplace flexibility could address any of these challenges?

4. Have you had any opportunities to work remotely on part-time schedules, or with flexible hours? If so, how did these arrangements affect your job satisfaction?

ECD sector and government support:

5. How do you perceive the level of support and recognition that the ECD sector receives from the government in terms of employment conditions?

6. What impact do you believe the lack of workplace flexibility and government support has on the quality of early childhood education provided in ECD centres?

Workplace flexibility programmes:

7. Are you aware of any workplace flexibility programmes or initiatives within your ECD centre or organisation, and if so, could you describe your experiences with these programmes?

8. Have you witnessed any positive or negative effects on job satisfaction among colleagues who have participated in workplace flexibility programmes?

9. What factors do you think contribute to the success or hindrance of implementing workplace flexibility policies in the ECD sector?

Impact of COVID-19:

10. Can you share any insights into how your experience with workplace flexibility during the pandemic differed from your pre-pandemic work arrangements?

Suggestions and future outlook:

11. Based on your experiences and observations, what suggestions or recommendations do you have for improving workplace conditions and flexibility in the ECD sector?

ANNEXURE E (RESEARCH FILTERING PROCESS):

	TOTAL	1875	21	1854	
Oxford Journals Online	"Workplace flexibility"	51	4	47	Not empirical research, not relevant, restricted access, duplicates.
	"Flexi work"	0	N/A	N/A	Not empirical research, not relevant, restricted access, duplicates.
	"Employee"	378	0	378	Not empirical research, not relevant, restricted access, duplicates.
	"Educators"	19	0	19	Not empirical research, not relevant, restricted access, duplicates.
	"Teachers and Managers"	177	6	170	Not empirical research, not relevant, restricted access, duplicates.
	"Employer and Manager"	23	1	22	Not empirical research, not relevant, restricted access, duplicates.
	"Wellbeing"	5	0	5	Not empirical research, not relevant, restricted access, duplicates.
	"Compressed work week"	556	11	545	Not empirical research, not relevant, restricted access, duplicates.
Open Access Journals	"Workplace flexibility"	758	0	758	Not empirical research, not relevant, restricted access, duplicates.
	"Flexi work"	0	N/A	N/A	Not empirical research, not relevant, restricted access, duplicates.
	"Employee"	1822	0	1822	Not empirical research, not relevant, restricted access, duplicates.
	"Educators"	2079	0	2079	Not empirical research, not relevant, restricted access, duplicates.
	"Teachers and Managers"	402	0	402	Not empirical research, not relevant, restricted access, duplicates.
	"Employer and Manager"	51	2	49	Not empirical research, not relevant, restricted access, duplicates.
	"Wellbeing"				

Source	Keywords used	Results	Included	Excluded	Reasons for exclusion
EBSCOhost	"Workplace flexibility"	23	11	12	Not empirical research, not relevant, restricted access, duplicates.
	"Flexi work"	0	N/A	N/A	Not empirical research, not relevant, restricted access, duplicates.
	"Employee"	99	0	99	Not empirical research, not relevant, restricted access, duplicates.
	"Educators"	170	7	163	Not empirical research, not relevant, restricted access, duplicates.
	"Teachers and Managers"	259	14	245	Not empirical research, not relevant, restricted access, duplicates.
	"Employer and Manager"	0	N/A	N/A	N/A
	"Wellbeing"				
	"Compressed work week"	2	1	1	Not empirical research, not relevant, restricted access, duplicates.
Google Scholar	"Workplace flexibility"	871	14	857	Not empirical research, not relevant, restricted access, duplicates.
	"Flexi work"	116	0	116	Not empirical research, not relevant, restricted access, duplicates.
	"Employee"	0	N/A	N/A	Not empirical research, not relevant, restricted access, duplicates.
	"Educators"	0	N/A	N/A	Not empirical research, not relevant, restricted access, duplicates.
	"Teachers and Managers"	271	5	266	Not empirical research, not relevant, restricted access, duplicates.
	"Employer and Manager"	455	0	455	Not empirical research, not relevant, restricted access, duplicates.
	"Wellbeing"				
	"Compressed work week"	182	2	180	Not empirical research, not relevant, restricted access, duplicates.

"Employee" and "Manager" and "Well-being" work week"	89	2	87	Not empirical research, not relevant, restricted access, duplicates.
TOTAL	1562	57	1505	
Spanned/linked	338	0	338	Not empirical research, not relevant, restricted access, duplicates.
"Flex work" flexibility"	35	1	34	Not empirical research, not relevant, restricted access, duplicates.
"Employee"	0	N/A	N/A	Not empirical research, not relevant, restricted access, duplicates.
"Educators"	0	N/A	N/A	Not empirical research, not relevant, restricted access, duplicates.
"Teachers" and "Manager" and "Well-being" work week"	109	1	108	Not empirical research, not relevant, restricted access, duplicates.
"Manager" and "Well-being" work week"	1011	0	1011	Not empirical research, not relevant, restricted access, duplicates.
Compressed work week"	58	3	55	Not empirical research, not relevant, restricted access, duplicates.
TOTAL	1551	5	1546	
Product and these global	276	4	272	Not empirical research, not relevant, restricted access, duplicates.
"Flex work" flexibility"	20	0	20	Not empirical research, not relevant, restricted access, duplicates.
"Employee"	175	0	175	Not empirical research, not relevant, restricted access, duplicates.

Compressed work week"	512	7	505	Not empirical research, not relevant, restricted access, duplicates.
Research	50	7	83	Not empirical research, not relevant, restricted access, duplicates.
Gale	100	0	100	Not empirical research, not relevant, restricted access, duplicates.
"Employee"	120	1	119	Not empirical research, not relevant, restricted access, duplicates.
"Educators"	100	4	96	Not empirical research, not relevant, restricted access, duplicates.
"Teachers" and "Manager" and "Well-being" work week"	140	11	129	Not empirical research, not relevant, restricted access, duplicates.
"Manager" and "Well-being" work week"	130	0	130	Not empirical research, not relevant, restricted access, duplicates.
Compressed work week"	100	0	100	Not empirical research, not relevant, restricted access, duplicates.
TOTAL	760	23	737	
Mandley	904	17	887	Not empirical research, not relevant, restricted access, duplicates.
"Flex work" flexibility"	67	4	63	Not empirical research, not relevant, restricted access, duplicates.
"Employee"	80	0	80	Not empirical research, not relevant, restricted access, duplicates.
"Educators"	140	2	138	Not empirical research, not relevant, restricted access, duplicates.
"Teachers" and "Manager" and "Well-being" work week"	227	8	219	Not empirical research, not relevant, restricted access, duplicates.

Source	Article accepted based on the inclusion criteria
EBSCOhost	Wentler, B., Van Ypersele, N. W., & Benard, D. P. H. (2022). The link between empowering leadership and employees' well-being: A meta-analysis. <i>European Journal of Psychology</i> , 15(3), 208-218. https://doi.org/10.5964/ejop.v15i3.1278
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	Kim, J. (2020). Workplace Flexibility and Parent-Child Interactions Among Working Parents in the U.S. <i>Social Indicators Research</i> , 151(2), 427-469. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11205-018-2032-4
	Ramsey, L. R. (2021). A Strong Teacher Identity May Buffer Women-Scientist Identity Interference: Preliminary Evidence. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4939-9924-3
	Kim, J., Henry, J. R., Gidycz, L. M., & Lambert, S. J. (2020). Workplace Flexibility and Worker Well-Being by Gender. <i>Journal of Marriage & Family</i> , 82(3), 882-910. https://doi.org/10.1111/jomf.12633
	Rios, M. (2020). The Effect of Workplace Flexibility on Family Formation. <i>Journal of Family Psychology</i> , 34(4), 885-910. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0051026
	Keck, A., Gander, K., Kelly, E. L., & Kosen, P. (2019). Involuntary vs. voluntary flexible work: Insights for scholars and practitioners. https://doi.org/10.1080/10439862.2019.1655932
	Boy, J. W., Hinde, J. M., Kessler, D. J., Mills, M. J., Kavanagh, G. T., Ganadek, K. R., Kelly, E. L., Kosen, P., & Hinde, J. M. (2019). Effects of a flexibility-support intervention on Work Performance Evidence From the UK. https://doi.org/10.1177/0950117119859244
	Coch, E. A., & O'Connor, L. T. (2017). Like second-hand smoke: The toxic effect of workplace flexibility bias for workers' health. <i>Community Work & Family</i> , 20(6), 545-572. https://doi.org/10.1080/15370331.2017.1341477
	Brown, M., & Piliavin, I. M. (2016). A mediational model of workplace flexibility, work-family conflict, and perceived stress among caregivers of older adults. <i>Community Work & Family</i> , 19(4), 379-395. https://doi.org/10.1080/15370331.2016.1198582
	McPherson, K. L. (2019). The triple effect of flexible work: A social network approach. <i>Community Work & Family</i> , 19(4), 377-394. https://doi.org/10.1080/15370331.2019.1655932

"Educators"	359	0	359	Not empirical research, not relevant, restricted access, duplicates.
"Teachers" and "Manager" and "Well-being" work week"	191	1	190	Not empirical research, not relevant, restricted access, duplicates.
"Manager" and "Well-being" work week"	87	2	85	Not empirical research, not relevant, restricted access, duplicates.
"Employee"	95	2	93	Not empirical research, not relevant, restricted access, duplicates.
TOTAL	1203	9	1194	
SA ePublications	0	N/A	N/A	Not empirical research, not relevant, restricted access, duplicates.
"Workplace flexibility"	0	N/A	N/A	Not empirical research, not relevant, restricted access, duplicates.
"Employee"	0	N/A	N/A	Not empirical research, not relevant, restricted access, duplicates.
"Educators"	0	N/A	N/A	Not empirical research, not relevant, restricted access, duplicates.
"Teachers" and "Manager" and "Well-being" work week"	0	N/A	N/A	Not empirical research, not relevant, restricted access, duplicates.
"Employee" and "Manager" and "Well-being" work week"	0	N/A	N/A	Not empirical research, not relevant, restricted access, duplicates.
Compressed work week"	0	N/A	N/A	Not empirical research, not relevant, restricted access, duplicates.
TOTAL	0	N/A	N/A	

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SA applications	N/A

ANNEXURE F (SUMMARY OF FINDINGS FROM INTERVIEWS MANAGERS):

Participants' perspectives on ECD (Manager)

Theme	Sub-theme	Participant views	Summary of findings
Workplace flexibility	Work-life balance	9 participants: 4 expressed negative views, 1 was positive, and 4 were mixed.	Managers reported long work hours (averaging 11.2 hours/day). Flexibility was often misunderstood or inconsistently applied. Only one participant worked significantly fewer hours.
Government support	Impact on education, staff, and managers	9 participants: 8 expressed negative views, 1 was positive.	Most participants feel ignored by government decision-makers. Government engagement is mainly for compliance, with limited support and funding.
Mental health	Policy development	9 participants: 2 were positive, 2 were mixed, 1 was negative, and 4 had no opinion.	No formal mental health policies exist. Awareness is growing, but there is little practical or emotional support in place. COVID-19

			reduced opportunities for team communication.
Future of ECD	Trends	9 participants: 3 were positive, 6 were mixed.	Participants are cautiously optimistic. There are concerns about exclusion from policy processes, but many hope for child-focused reform and sector unity.
Challenges	Management	9 participants: 6 were negative, 2 were mixed, and 1 was positive.	Key issues include staff turnover, chronic financial pressure, and slow post-COVID recovery. Some are trailing flexible practices or rebuilding old systems.

ANNEXURE G (SUMMARY OF FINDINGS FROM INTERVIEWS MANAGERS):

Participants' perspectives on ECD (Practitioner)

Theme	Sub-theme	Perception Distribution	Key Findings
Workplace flexibility	Work-life balance	8 Negative 4 Positive 1 Balanced	• Average workday: 9h 15min • Only 4 worked below average hours • 1 ESL online teacher had high flexibility • Majority report burnout symptoms
Government support	Recognition and benefits	11 Negative 2 Balanced 0 Positive	• Exclusion from standard teacher benefits • All report resource shortages • Some note slight improvements
Mental health	Workplace wellbeing	2 Negative 2 Positive 9 Balanced	• No mental health policies in place • Burnout directly tied to workload • Growing awareness but no systems
Future of ECD	Sector outlook	4 Negative 1 Positive 8 Balanced	• All passionate about their work • Most feel unheard

			by government • Strong push for earlier education start
Operational challenges	Resources and support	12 Negative 1 Balanced 0 Positive	• Universal financial stress • Staffing ratios unsustainable • Majority demand teaching assistants • Compensation below living wage

ANNEXURE H (ECD FUNDING REQUIREMENTS):

Sowetan Wednesday September 4 2024

News 3

I chose to wear all my pain and celebrations – Makhadzi

Makhadzi channels Rihanna for ‘miracle child’ album cover

By Innocentia Nkadameng

South African musician Ndivhudzanyini “Makhadzi” Ralivhona has unveiled the cover for her upcoming album Miracle Child, set to drop on October 7.

The cover, inspired by Barbadian singer Robyn “Rihanna” Fenty’s Unapologetic album, shows Makhadzi unclothed with words such as miscarriage, polygamy, close mic, mojolo, Sars, art and culture, BET, one woman show and Phalaphala painted across her body, embracing her life experiences.

She said the words represent the pain and celebrations that have shaped her life and career.

“What’s life without challenges and celebrations? How do you know God if he has never come and rescued you and given you another chance to breathe and count more blessings? Ladies and gentlemen, allow me to introduce my album cover: A Miracle Child.

“I opened my wardrobe and found nothing to wear to cover my pain and celebrations. I decided not to cover them; instead, I chose to wear all my pain and celebrations. All challenges in life are God’s protection and all celebrations are God’s blessings and miracles,” she said.

The Ganama hitmaker has been through trials and tribulations during her career.

From borrowing money to attend the BET Awards, where she won the prestigious Viewers’ Choice: Best New International Act award in June, to owing Sars millions of rand, the cover serves as a powerful reminder of the strength and resilience of the musician.

“I think I’m a miracle child. If you know where I started and where I come from, God brought me to this world so those who don’t believe in his miracles can believe,” she said.

Miracle Child promises to be a deeply personal album, reflecting Makhadzi’s journey



Makhadzi shares inspiration behind album cover. /INSTAGRAM / MAKHADZI

through life’s challenges and triumphs.

The bold and unapologetic nature of the cover has

sparked a debate on social media, with some admiring Makhadzi’s courage and vulnerability in using her plat-

form to address sensitive topics. Others have criticised her for “copying” Rihanna’s album.



GAUTENG PROVINCE
EDUCATION
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

IMPORTANT NOTICE: CALL/REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS

CALL/REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL(S) BUSINESS PLAN(S) FOR THE ECD SECTOR FOR 2025/2026 FINANCIAL YEAR

The Gauteng Department of Education invites the **Early Childhood Development ECD Centres** to submit funding applications to provide **early childhood development** services on behalf of the Department.

The call for proposals is primarily targeting new applicants that are **Currently Not** receiving subsidy from the Department. The application is for **25/26 financial year** funding cycle.

ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA:

Note: ECD service provider will only be eligible for funding if the service meets the following requirements.

1. The ECD center **MUST BE registered in terms of the Children’s Act as a Partial Care service and ECD programme.**
2. **The Governing body must at least comprise of 5 or more people** (Chairperson, Deputy Chairperson, Secretary, Deputy Secretary and Treasurer) who are unrelated. The Governing Body for the funding purpose means those in charge with governance in an ECD Centre and who will accept the fiduciary responsibility to ensure compliance.
3. The ECD operation must be **based in Gauteng Province.**
4. All proposals for funding must be within Education mandate and be done using the Department’s application forms (Form 1-Application for ECD subsidy). All sections of the **application form must be fully and comprehensively completed with all required attachments.**
5. As per the application forms - clear targets, outputs, outcomes and intended impact must be reflected in funding applications, which **must be aligned to the Mandate of the Department.**
6. **Submission of proposals does not guarantee approval of funding as it is subject to availability of Departmental budget.**
7. **Prior funding application the ECD Centre should be registered in terms of the Children’s Act 38 of 2005 with Gauteng Department of Education.**

HOW TO APPLY:

The following documents are required from applicants who wish to be considered for funding:

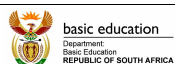
- Funding application (Form 1-Application for ECD subsidy) is available at reception areas at GDE District Offices).
- Copy of the registration certificate as Partial Care and ECD Programme as prescribed in the Children’s Act 38 of 2005
- Signed copy of constitution and list of approved board members
- **The deadline for submission of funding applications is 30 September 2025 at 15h00;**
- **Proposals received after the closing date as well as proposals received via fax/email will not be considered/accepted.**

All relevant information can be accessed online at www.gpg.gov.za or by contacting the following Departmental offices:

DISTRICT ADDRESS	DISTRICT ADDRESS
EKURHULENI NORTH [EN] Enquiries: Hlamarisa Mabasa Tel: 082 554 4028 Physical Address: 78 Howard Avenue, Mumpen Building, Benoni Postal Address: Private Bag X059 BENONI, 1500	EKURHULENI SOUTH [ES] Enquiries: Johanna Mashabela Tel: 066 291 4939 Physical Address: Infinity Office Park, 2 Robin Close, Meyersdal, Alberton Postal Address: Private Bag X8001, ALBERTON, 1450
GAUTENG EAST [GE] Enquiries: Hlamarisa Mabasa Tel: 082 554 4028 Physical Address: Cnr. 7th Str. & 5th Ave, 5th Floor Telkom Towers, SPRINGS, 1559	GAUTENG NORTH [GN] Enquiries: Elsie Motaung Tel: 082 564 0131 Physical Address: Yorkcor Park Building, Watermeyer Street, Pretoria Postal Address: Private Bag X75 86 VAL DE GRACE, 0001
GAUTENG WEST [GW] Enquiries: Iris Cindi Tel: 082 331 0903 Physical Address: Cnr. Bothoff and Human Street, Krugersdorp Postal Address: Private Bag X2020, KRUGERSDORP, 1740	JOHANNESBURG CENTRAL [JC] Enquiries: Lungelo Mavundhla Tel: 067 597 2763 Physical Address: P. O. Box 1995, FLORENCE, 2013
JOHANNESBURG EAST [JE] Enquiries: Zandile Monama Tel: 079 529 4584 Physical Address: Sandown High School, 11 North Road, Sandown, Sandton Postal Address: Private Bag X9910, SANDTON, 2146	DISTRICT JOHANNESBURG NORTH [JN] Enquiries: Zandile Monama Tel: 079 529 4584 Physical Address: Cnr Biccard & Jorison Str. FNB Building, Braamfontein Postal Address: Private Bag X01, BRAAMFONTEIN, 2017
JOHANNESBURG SOUTH [JS] Enquiries: Lungelo Mavundhla Tel: 067 597 2763 Physical Address: 100 Northern Parkway, Crownwood, Ormonde Postal Address: Private Bag X13, Lenasia, JOHANNESBURG, 1820	JOHANNESBURG WEST [JW] Enquiries: Zukiswa Mabutho Tel: 071 492 1053 Physical Address: 20 Goldman Street, Florida, 1710
SEDIBENG EAST [SE] Enquiries: Christian Nkosi Tel: 067 597 2724 Physical Address: Sanlam Building Cnr. Joubert & Kruger Streets, Vereeniging Postal Address: Private Bag X05, VEREENIGING, 1930	SEDIBENG WEST [SW] Enquiries: Christian Nkosi Tel: 067 597 2724 Physical Address: Sebokeng College, 6 Samuel Street, Zone 18, Sebokeng Postal Address: Private Bag X067, VANDERBULPARK, 1900
DISTRICT TSHWANE NORTH [TN] Enquiries: Elsie Motaung Tel: 082 564 0131 Physical Address: Wonderboom Junction, 11 Lavender Street, Pretoria Postal Address: Private Bag X945, PRETORIA, 0001	DISTRICT TSHWANE SOUTH [TS] Enquiries: Mmakgomo Motsepe Tel: 067 597 2764 Physical Address: President Towers Building, 265 Pretorius Street, Pretoria Postal Address: Private Bag X198, PRETORIA, 0001
DISTRICT TSHWANE WEST [TW] Enquiries: Mmakgomo Motsepe Tel: 067 597 2764 Physical Address: Klipgat Road, Old Hebron College, Rosslyn Postal Address: Private Bag X 38, ROSSLYN, 0200	HEAD OFFICE Enquiries: Nthekiso Kgukuti Tel: 082 336 3123 / Mantliso Mogashoa: 085 6730769 / Khuthala Mguni: 072 393 3178 No funding applications will be received at Head Office.

ANNEXURE I (ECD SUBSIDY FORM):

ANNEXURE A: FORMS



Form 1: Application for ECD subsidy

Completing this form:
PARTS A, B, D, E and F: All applicants must complete these parts.
PART C: Only applicants submitting individual child income information because:
 a. the ECD programme is NOT located in a ward designated for universal targeting of the ECD subsidy, or
 b. the ECD programme is located in a designated ward, but has been given a written instruction by the provincial department to fill in this section, or
 c. the ECD programme is located in a designated ward, but has volunteered to fill in this section because fewer than 80% of the children attending the programme come from poor households.
 If the applicant has completed Part C, it must submit a file with the relevant supporting documents for each child.

PART A
All applicants must complete this part.

Name of ECD Programme		Contact details	
Physical address		Code	
Postal address		Code	
Business tel		Cell	
Fax			
Email			
Contact Person 1	Name	Cell	
Contact Person 2	Name	Cell	

ECD programme eligibility

DMS number	number	
Partial Care Facility registration number	number	year
ECD Programme registration number	number	year
Does the applicant have conditional registration for either the partial care facility or ECD programme?	Yes	No
If yes, when was the conditional registration given?	day	month year

PART B

All applicants must complete this part.

Children currently attending programme

How many children are currently enrolled at the ECD programme?

Age profile of children on the current register

1-18 months	18-36 months	37-59 months	60 months and older
th	s	s	s

Give the number of children in each age category

How many children attending the ECD programme have disabilities?

Number of places in the ECD programme to be subsidised

For how many children is the ECD programme applying for ECD subsidies?

Is a completed Form 2 List of Children eligible for an ECD subsidy attached to this application?

Note: this application will not be considered unless a completed Form 2 is attached.

Age profile of children on Form 2

1-18 months	18-36 months	37-59 months	60 months and older
th	s	s	s

Give the number of children in each age category

How many children listed on Form 2 have disabilities?

ECD Programme operating times

For how many days in the year is the ECD programme open?

For how many hours in a normal day does the ECD programme run an ECD programme?

PART C

This part must be completed only by applicants submitting individual child income information because:

a. the ECD programme is NOT located in a ward designated for universal targeting of the ECD subsidy, or
 b. the ECD programme is located in a designated ward, but has been given a written instruction by the provincial department to fill in this section, or
 c. the ECD programme is located in a designated ward, but has volunteered to fill in this section because fewer than 80% of the children attending the programme come from poor households.

Information on individual child applications

Is the required income information for each of the children listed on Form 2 attached to this application?

Note: ECD subsidies can only be allocated to children for whom the required income information has been submitted and who qualify for an ECD subsidy according to the prescribed income-based means test

For how many children have caregivers given proof that they are recipients of a Child Support Grant?

For how many children have caregivers given proof that they are recipients of a Foster Care Grant?

For how many children have caregivers provided an affidavit declaring their status of income?

For how many children have caregivers provided documentary proof of income information?

Total

Does the above total equal the number of children listed on Form 2?

If 'No' then the applicant must review the list of children and the supporting income information to make sure it is complete and correct.

PART D

All applicants must complete this part.

ECD programme fees

Does the ECD programme charge parents / caregivers fees for children to attend the programme?

If yes, provide following details of the fees charged:

How are the fees charged?

Mark the relevant boxes with an X

Per day	Per week	Per month	Per term	Per year
R	R	R	R	R

State the fees per child for the time periods noted

Are additional fees charged for afternoon care?

If yes, what is the fee per child for afternoon care?

What year are the above fees applicable for?

What is the estimated annual income from fees for the coming year?

Other sources of income and in-kind donations

Does the ECD programme currently receive an ECD subsidy from the department?

If yes, what is the programme's current ECD subsidy amount for the year?

Does the ECD programme receive income from other sources?

If yes, provide details

of other sources of expected income for the coming year

Total estimated income for the year:

Does the ECD programme receive any regular in-kind donations?

If yes, please provide details:

Does the ECD programme have a vegetable garden?

Do parents volunteer their time to do maintenance / gardening for the ECD programme?

If there are other strategies to promote sustainability, please provide details:

High level annual budget of the ECD Programme

Budgeted Annual Income

	Next Year	Current Year
ECD subsidy from the department	R	R

ANNEXURE J (AFRICAN JOURNAL OF EMPLOYEE RELATIONS):

unisapressjournals.co.za

+

African Journal of Employee Relations

... Back to Submissions

19204 / Bartlett et al. / Workplace flexibility, employee well-being and work-life balance of early childhood development practitioners

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Round 1

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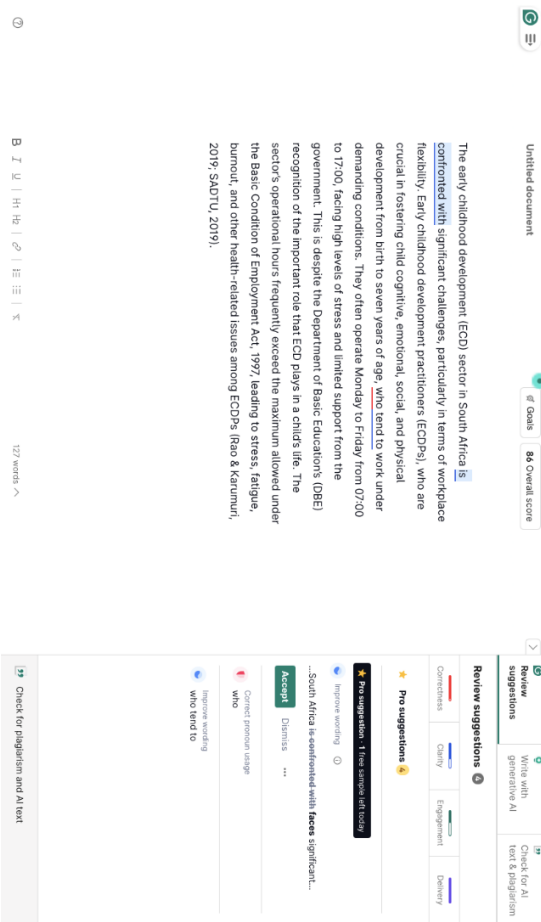
New reviews have been submitted and are being considered by the editor.

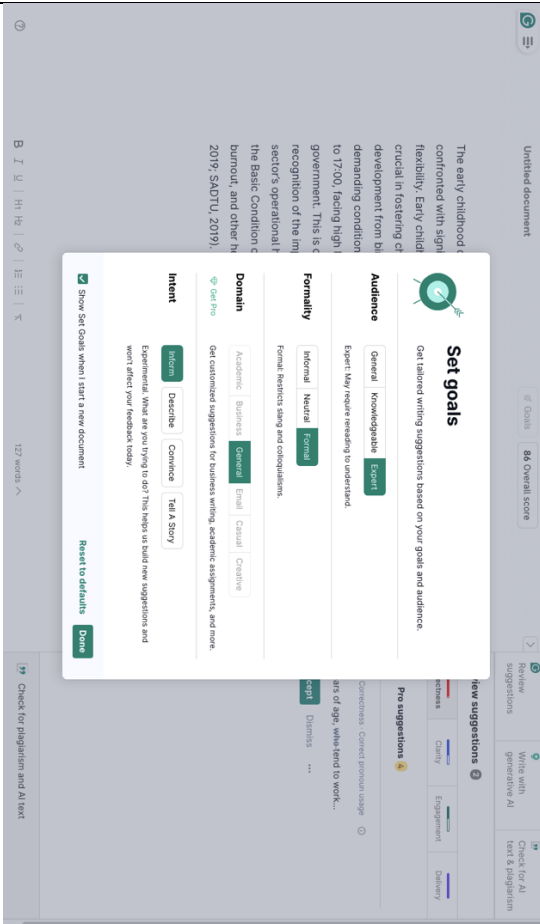
Review Discussions

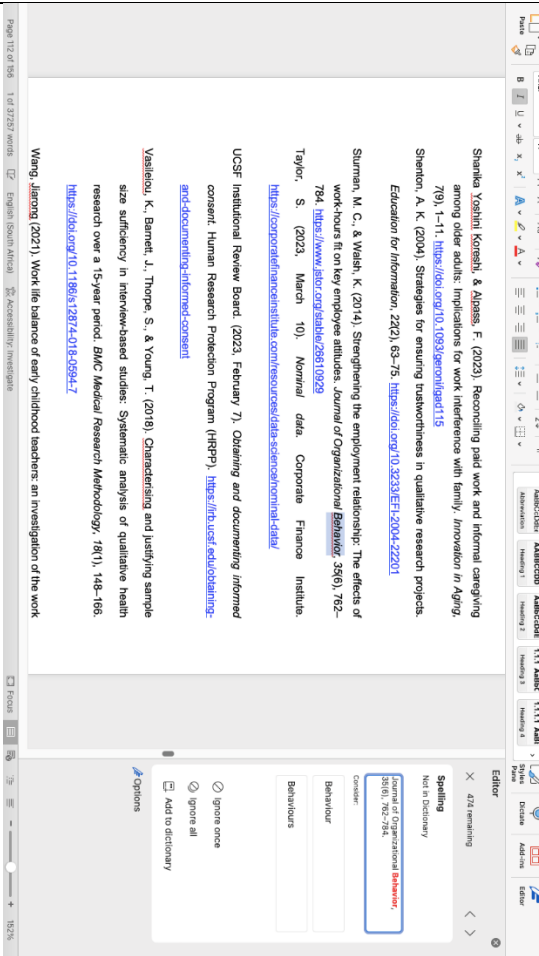
Add discussion

Name	From	Last Reply	Replies	Closed
No Items				

ANNEXURE K (AI USAGE):

Application	How it was used	Evidence
Grammarly.com and Microsoft Word Editor	- Grammar and spelling accuracy - Purpose: Detects and corrects common and advanced grammar errors (e.g., subject-verb agreement, article usage, misplaced modifiers). - Example Use: Grammarly flagged <i>"The results shows..."</i> and suggested <i>"The results show..."</i>. - Academic Tone and formality - Purpose: Ensures writing adheres to academic formality - avoiding contractions, slang, and overly casual phrasing. - Example Use: Changed <i>"kids"</i> to <i>"children"</i>, or <i>"a lot of research"</i> to <i>"numerous studies"</i>. - Conciseness and wordiness reduction - Purpose: Suggests more concise phrasing to improve clarity without losing meaning. - Example of use: Grammarly suggested changing <i>"due to the fact that"</i> to <i>"because"</i>. - Sentence variety and readability - Purpose: Flags overly long or monotonous sentences that could hinder reader comprehension. - Example of use: Grammarly recommended splitting a 45-	

	word sentence into two for better flow. 5. Vocabulary enhancement • Purpose: Offers academic-appropriate synonyms to avoid repetition and strengthen word choice. • Example Use: Changed “<i>good results</i>” to “<i>favourable outcomes</i>”. 6. Punctuation accuracy • Purpose: Detects missing commas, incorrect quotation mark placement, semicolon misuse, and APA-style hyphenation issues. • Example Use: Grammarly flagged “<i>However the results...</i>” and suggested “<i>However, the results...</i>”. 7. Consistency in formatting and spelling • Purpose: Ensures consistent use of UK or US spelling, hyphenation patterns, and capitalisation. • Example of use: Converted “organisation” to “organization” throughout for APA style consistency. 8. Plagiarism detection • Purpose: Compares text against billions of web pages and academic sources to identify possible plagiarism. • Example of use: Detected an unintentional close match to a source, prompting rephrasing and proper citation.	
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	9. Clarity improvements - Purpose: Recommends rewording unclear phrases or overly complex structures to improve reader understanding. - Example Use: Changed “<i>The phenomenon which is observed in several contexts...</i>” to “<i>This phenomenon occurs in several contexts...</i>”. 10. Overall writing score tracking - Purpose: Grammarly gives an overall score (0–100) based on correctness, clarity, engagement, and delivery. - Example of use: Draft improved from 82 to 96 after applying suggestions. 11. Style Guide Compliance - Purpose: If customised, Grammarly can check against institutional style rules (e.g., APA, Harvard). - Example of use: Flagged “&” in the text and suggested replacing with “and” in formal writing.	 The screenshot displays the Grammarly web interface. On the left, a list of references is visible, including works by Shankar, Yoshimi, Koneh, & Aiyasu (2023), Shenon, A. K. (2004), Surman, M. C., & Walsh, K. (2014), Taylor, S. (2023), UCSF Institutional Review Board (2023), Vasilidou, K., Barnett, J., Thorpe, S., & Young, T. (2018), and Wang, Jiarong (2021). The main text area is currently empty. On the right, the Grammarly editor panel is open, showing a spelling correction suggestion for the word 'Behaviours' (highlighted in blue) to 'Behaviors' (suggested in red). The suggestion includes options to 'ignore once', 'ignore all', or 'add to dictionary'. The overall writing score is not visible in this view.
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Page 10 of 106 1 of 2720 words English (South Africa) Accessibility: Passages

Search (Cmd + Ctrl + U) Editing Show

Shanika Yoshini Korchi, & Alsas, F. (2023). Reconciling paid work and informal caregiving among older adults: Implications for work interference with family. *Innovation in Aging*, 7(9), 1-11. <https://doi.org/10.1093/innov/iaad115>

Shenton, A. K. (2004). Strategies for ensuring trustworthiness in qualitative research projects. *Education for Information*, 22(2), 63-76. <https://doi.org/10.3233/EFI-2004-22201>

Sturman, M. C., & Welsch, K. (2014). Strengthening the employment relationship: The effects of work-hours fit on key employee attitudes. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 35(9), 762-784. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/25610929>

Taylor, S. (2023, March 10). *Kennel data*. Corporate Finance Institute. <https://corporatefinanceinstitute.com/resources/kennel-data/>

UCSF Institutional Review Board. (2023, February 7). *Obtaining and documenting informed consent*. Human Research Protection Program (HRPP). <https://irb.ucsf.edu/obtaininformed-consent>

<https://doi.org/10.1186/s12874-018-0594-2>

Vasilikiou, K., Barnett, J., Thorpe, S., & Young, T. (2018). Characterising and justifying sample size sufficiency in interview-based studies: Systematic analysis of qualitative health research over a 15-year period. *BMC Medical Research Methodology*, 18(1), 148-166. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12874-018-0594-2>

Wang, Jiliang (2021). *Work-life balance of early childhood teachers: an investigation of the work*

Editor

Editor Score 83%

Corrections

Spelling 472

Grammar EN 1

Refinements

Conciseness EN

Similarity

Check for similarity to other sources.

Insights

Document stats

Scribbr

1. Detecting missing references in the Reference List

- Purpose: Identifies in-text citations that do not have a matching entry in the reference list.
- Example Use: Flagged (Johnson, 2022) in the text with no corresponding Johnson (2022) in the references.

2. Detecting missing in-text citations

- Purpose: Finds sources in the reference list that are not cited in the main text.
- Example Use: Highlighted "Smith, R. (2020)" in the references section with no in-text appearance.

3. Checking citation Style consistency

- Purpose: Ensures uniform citation style according to the chosen format (APA, MLA, Chicago, Harvard).
- Example Use: Noticed inconsistent APA formatting, such as (Smith & Jones, 2020) in one place and (Smith and Jones, 2020) in another.

4. Verifying formatting of references

- Purpose: Flags inconsistencies in punctuation, italics, and capitalisation according to the style guide.
- Example Use: Corrected "*Journal of Education*" to "*Journal of Education Research*" in APA style.

The screenshot displays the Scribbr Proofer interface, which is used for checking citation consistency and formatting. The interface is divided into several sections:

- Header:** Includes the Scribbr logo, navigation tabs (Proofer, Citing, AI Writing, Learn), and a search bar.
- Left Sidebar:** Contains a list of sources, including "Scribbr (2023, August 1) The People Factor Magazine - Scribbr" and "Scribbr (2023, August 1) The People Factor Magazine - Scribbr".
- Main Content Area:** Displays a list of citations with various flags indicating issues. For example, one citation is flagged with a red circle and the text "The People Factor Magazine - Scribbr". Another citation is flagged with a red circle and the text "Scribbr (2023, August 1) The People Factor Magazine - Scribbr".
- Right Sidebar:** Contains a list of sources, including "Scribbr (2023, August 1) The People Factor Magazine - Scribbr" and "Scribbr (2023, August 1) The People Factor Magazine - Scribbr".
- Bottom Section:** Displays a list of sources, including "Scribbr (2023, August 1) The People Factor Magazine - Scribbr" and "Scribbr (2023, August 1) The People Factor Magazine - Scribbr".

	5. Identifying incorrect author Names • Purpose: Detects possible misspellings or mismatches in author names between in-text citations and references. • Example Use: Flagged (Brown, 2018) in text when the reference list had (Browne, 2018). 6. Detecting incorrect publication years • Purpose: Finds mismatched years between in-text citations and the reference list. • Example Use: Corrected (Taylor, 2019) in text when the reference entry stated (Taylor, 2020). 7. Highlighting broken or Missing URLs/DOIs • Purpose: Checks for missing, incorrect, or outdated links in online sources. • Example Use: Identified a DOI in APA that was missing the https://doi.org/ prefix. 8. Catching Duplicated References • Purpose: Detects whether the same source is listed more than once in the reference list. • Example of use: Removed two identical entries for "Smith, J. (2019)". 9. Suggesting correct capitalisation in titles • Purpose: Ensures title case or sentence case is applied	
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	correctly depending on citation style. • Example of use: Changed “<i>the effects of climate change</i>” to “<i>The effects of climate change</i>” for APA sentence case rules.	
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Reference

Assistive and generative AI guidelines for authors | Policies & guidelines | Sage Publishing.
(n.d.). <https://www.sagepub.com/about/policies/ai-author-guidelines>

ANNEXURE L (CONFERENCE LETTER):



13 March 2025

Dear Mr. Ryan Bartlett, Dr. Werner Gresse, and Prof. Elsabé Keyser

Submission reference: GPPC_LRM_029

We appreciate your submission to us, which has now been peer-reviewed and accepted for the 1st Global People Practice Conference. Accordingly, we would like to invite you to join us at Khaya iBhubesi in Parys, South Africa, for the first biennial Global People Practice Conference organised by the School of Industrial Psychology and HRM of the North-West University from 28 to 30 May 2025. The conference will feature presentations, discussions, and networking opportunities. We seek academic conversations with paper submissions and presentations that will broaden our understanding and foster sustainable people practices. To this end, we invite submissions that cover conceptual, theoretical, and empirical investigations that adopt a broad range of methodologies and highlight fair, equal and sustainable people practices. The format of your presentation will 20 minutes, including a 15-minute presentation and five-minute discussion. Currently, your presentation will fall under the Industrial Psychology; Labour and Employment Relations Track, but this might be adapted according to the final conference programme.

Sincerely,

Prof. Bennie Linde – Conference organiser

ANNEXURE M (ACTA UNIVERSITATIS DANUBIUS OECONOMICA JOURNAL):

Acta Universitatis Danubius. **Oeconomica**



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Round 1

Round 1 Status

Submission accepted.

Notifications

[\[AUDOE\] Editor Decision](#)2025-12-03 12:56 PM

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Review Discussions

ANNEXURE N (TURNITIN REPORT):

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Kitnikone, N. Kitty | Lee, Susan | Walker, Laura. "Understanding Early Learning Educator Perspectives on Retention in Western Washington State: A Qualitative Inquiry", Seattle University, 2024

Publication

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Lugo-Ramos, Victoria. "Nurturing the Future Fleet: Examining Teacher Retention in the Department of Defense's Navy Child and Youth Program", Trident University International

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