I acknowledge the use of Microsoft Editor on 30 March 2025 to check my Spelling and Grammar.

Introduction

The development of children is significantly influenced by the quality of early childhood education. It depends on family involvement, teacher preparation and careful planning. Assessment techniques such as Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS) and Sustained Shared Thinking and Emotional Wellbeing Scale (SSTEW) can be significant for improving learning opportunities.

Family and community involvement, curriculum design and resource allocation are the main factors that affect the quality of education (United Nations Children's Fund, UNICEF, 2021). Palaiologou (2023) identifies two significant aspects of quality, process quality which emphasises successful pedagogy and educator-child interactions and structural quality which encompasses staff qualifications and child-to-adult ratios.

High-quality early education could be conducted directed by knowledgeable professionals to improve children's academic achievement. Archer and Merrick (2020) stress the importance of expanding access to early childhood services and guaranteeing their quality. Campbell-Barr *et al.* (2023) agree stating that promoting lifelong learning and development requires excellent training. The interconnected components of system, technique and structure that are necessary to improve the quality of education are further explained by Eadie *et al.* (2022).

Through encouraging constructive relationships between staff and students, effective leadership enhances educational experiences (Douglass, 2019). Both material and social interactions are hallmarks of high-quality education (Rossbach *et al.*, 2024). Furthermore, engagement, safety and solid bonds between pupils, teachers and peers are given the highest priority in the best learning settings (Adlerstein and Cortazar, 2022).

Fostering cognitive and social-emotional growth, especially for children from low-income families, requires an engaging curriculum, positive educator relationships and continuous professional growth for employees. This emphasises the significance of continuous improvements in early education (Schoch *et al.*, 2023; First Five Years Fund, 2018).

Improving early childhood education still faces many obstacles, namely the requirement for qualified staff and sufficient support for practitioners (Soukakou, Dionne and Palikara, 2024). Enhancing quality of programmes requires funding professional development. To improve social-emotional, cognitive and health outcomes particularly for low-income children and their long-term prospects, it is imperative to prioritise high-quality education (Jarvie, Ollerearnshaw, and Goddard, 2023).

Methods

The ECERS and SSTEW are two tools for evaluating the quality of education, compared in this study. Both emphasise unique contributions to creating surroundings that support children' development and education.

The SSTEW and ECERS frameworks highlight the important relationships practitioners build, which improve the high-quality interactions in the environment (Siraj *et al.*, 2018). To support the development of self-control, emotional resilience, effective communication, critical thinking, creativity, and teamwork in children ages two to five, the significance of social and emotional development is emphasised by SSTEW (Siraj, Kingston, and Melhuish, 2015; Howard *et al.*, 2018; Leatherbarrow, 2025).

In contrast, ECERS is a thorough evaluation tool that assesses the efficacy of group programmes for children. It consists of seven subscales, totalling forty-three items related to activities, furnishings, and space (Pa Keys, 2020). ECERS evaluates both process and structural quality, just like SSTEW (Brunsek *et al.*, 2017). In line with SSTEW, which emphasises the quality of learning settings and interactions, a focus on developmentally appropriate cognitive and social-behavioural outcomes improves subjects like reading, science, and environmental awareness (Victorian Government, 2024; Nh Connections, 2025).

Furthermore, the ECERS framework assesses curriculum elements such as science, maths, literacy, and diversity, offering comprehensive insights connected to favourable long-term results (Siraj *et al.*, 2018). Through highlighting both areas that need attention and those that are well-developed, this framework assists in identifying teaching imbalances in educational contexts (Lundqvist, Franzen and Munter, 2023; Spreckelsen *et al.*, 2019).

Additionally, SSTEW places a high value on child-centred, developmentally appropriate methods that help children develop their capacity for continuous learning, independence, self-control, emotional well-being, sustained shared thought, and effective communication (Howard *et al.*, 2018).

Advantages

A detailed evaluation of environmental elements and interactions catered to the cognitive, social, emotional and health requirements of children ages three to five is provided through the ECERS. In analysis, ECERS prepares children for future academic achievement through providing stimulating learning environments that encourage self-directed play, improve language proficiency, and support general child development. This approach promotes the design of activities that are in line with children's needs and development (Carmon *et al.*, 2021).

According to Melhuish and Gardiner (2018) higher SSTEWS scores are associated with improved staff qualifications, suggesting that qualified teachers are better able to promote socioemotional development. As Thümmler, Engel, and Bartz (2022) point out practitioners have an invaluable part in supporting children to manage their emotions, which is fundamental for future achievement and general welfare.

McLaughlin, Aspden and Clarke (2017) suggest educators' evidence-based methods for fostering environments that support children's socioemotional development. According to Carter (2016 cited in Featherbe, (2020), this development encompasses a children's capacity for empathy and self-assurance, both of which are enhanced by SSTEWS's organised frameworks (Featherbe, 2020).

Furthermore, SSTEWS desires to improve the interaction between adults and children through encouraging children to communicate clearly and exercise self-control. According to Siraj, Kingston, and Melhuish (2015) this method evaluates how responsive adults are during play and emphasises the quality of relationships that influence children' social experiences. Children's self-regulation skills could be improved through the positive interactions, these partnerships allow them to better comprehend themselves and others' emotions (Cumbria County Council, 2021).

Disadvantages

A disadvantage of early childhood evaluation techniques is how resource-intensive these are. To create environments that support children's development, practitioners could connect effectively with one another. It may not be possible in all settings to have highly qualified experts who are competent in assessing children's socioemotional, linguistic, and cognitive development to successfully implement the SSTEW framework (Siraj, Kingston, and Melhuish, 2015).

For children's readiness and critical thinking, a secure, stimulating, and caring learning environment is fundamental (Melhuish, 2004, cited in Siraj, Kingston and Melhuish, 2015). However, issues arise due to concerns regarding the quality and reliability of classroom education. Discussions over classroom quality and the outcome of evaluations, as well as the dependability of year-round data collecting continue despite the validity of the ECERS instrument. Inadequate funding could compromise the dedication to quality necessary to guarantee fair access to enriched early life experiences (Early *et al.*, 2018).

The situation is made difficult by practical implementation concerns. Lack of funding, individuals and time resources is a common source of worries regarding teachers' ability to manage diversity (Margevica and Sumane, 2021). The maintenance of a motivated workforce is largely dependent on practitioner burnout, which is further exacerbated by understaffing, insufficient resources and time constraints (Purdon, 2014). According to Fumoto (2012 cited in Purdon, (2014), professional growth and compensation have implications for the workforce's capacity to advance the SSTEW framework.

Furthermore, the ECERS assessment usually takes three hours to complete, it depends on yes or no answers that might not accurately reflect the complexity of the classroom, particularly when it comes to unrecorded activities (Neitzel *et al.*, 2019). The ECERS requirements could place further burden on existing fewer resources, despite research claiming that it is valid and dependable for evaluating quality (Pianta *et al.*, 2008, cited in Neitzel *et al.*, 2019).

Insights

Using the SSTEW framework to analyse children's development offers significant insights for improving teaching methods. With an emphasis on concept development, self-regulation, positive relationships and effective communication, this method highlights evaluating interactions between adults and peers. This aligns with Hadley, Waniganayake and Shepherd's (2015) objective of promoting professional learning experiences that enhance pedagogical practices informed by practitioners through placing an emphasis on adult responsiveness in supporting children's play and learning (Siraj, Kingston and Neilsen-Hewett, 2019).

Findings highlight the value of teaching strategies that foster self-control, creativity, critical thinking skills and task attention through interactions (Sylva, 2015, cited in Waters and McDonald, 2020). Through emphasising the value of strategies that promote social, emotional, and cognitive development, the SSTEW scale challenges outdated concepts about development (Siraj, Kingston, and Melhuish, 2015).

Higher ECERS scores have been linked to beneficial child development outcomes, which are necessary for academic performance, according to studies (Howes, 2013; Vermeer *et al.*, 2008, cited in Peterson and Elam, 2020). Critiques point out that rating scales are not always able to adequately capture the complexities of interactions between teachers, students, and families. Despite ECERS's acknowledged importance, questions remain about how broadly applicable it is in various settings (Bisceglia *et al.*, 2009; Helmerhorst *et al.*, 2014, cited in Peterson and Elam, 2020).

Through emphasising family engagement, cultural diversity, and assistance for children with impairments, the most recent edition of ECERS addresses structural and procedural issues in education. According to Brunsek *et al.* (2017), the assessment of cognitive, social, emotional, and motor outcomes emphasises the difficulty of separating the effects of carer quality from child traits, underscoring the necessity of strong practitioner-child relationships.

Key insights on developing children's social, emotional and communication abilities in school are offered by the techniques employed in this project. Building strong, receptive relationships between staff and children is the primary objective since it is key to fostering a supportive learning environment. Four competencies creativity,

communication, cooperation, and critical thinking have been recognised as significant lifelong abilities for learners in the twenty-first century (Sefton Council, 2024).

The SSTEW Scales demonstrate effective teaching strategies that enhance children's creativity, concentration, and critical thinking skills. To establish developmental baselines and track progress, this framework encourages self-evaluation, thoughtful action planning and in-depth observations. Teachers could match their efforts with performance management goals and promote consistent development throughout the year through linking observations to ongoing action plans (Knowsley Early Years Service, 2019).

According to Coventry City Council (2019) the SSTEW method places a particular focus on adult support for students' emotional health and collaborative thinking. Teachers need to remain aware of each child's developmental phases and cultural background. Kingston and Siraj (2015) emphasise the value of an excellent education in promoting holistic development by pointing out that successful teachers should use a variety of activities to increase children's vocabulary and focus.

Long-Term Benefits

Improving education programmes necessitates a deep comprehension of the types of data and feedback that are required. The relational component of children's interactions with peers and carers is significant in quality since nurturing surroundings have a significant impact on how well children develop (Birth to Five Matters, 2025; Snyder, 2024).

A skilled staff team is indispensable for high-quality care and practitioners could address children's developmental requirements through ongoing professional development and reflective practices. Identifying areas for improvement, placing action plans into place and evaluating results are all part of this self-reflective process. In addition to keeping up with the most recent research, practitioners could prioritise significant aspects of child development and look for opportunities to gain experience in their careers (Education Scotland, no date). Improved learning outcomes result from improved adult-child interactions facilitated by targeted approaches and enquiries. Addressing community needs in educational settings is another benefit of working with families (Education Scotland, 2020).

Since early childhood educators are aware of the detrimental effects that less stimulation and exclusion have on children's development, inclusivity in early childhood is fundamental. Establishing educational options more accessible improves the quality of care and fosters equity for all children (Robb, 2025).

Despite a growing recognition of the significance of quality in enhancing results, particularly for underprivileged children, evaluating research on this subject is difficult because of limitations and inconsistency. Understanding the efficacy of quality measures is made more difficult by problems including inconsistent intervention, imprecise outcome definitions and dependence on out-of-date data (Bonetti and Brown, 2018).

In addition to lowering children's anxiety and antisocial behaviour once children start school, high-quality preschools also significantly enhance academic results, especially in pre-reading abilities. These findings suggest that the quality of childcare has a significant impact on children's academic success (Blanden, Hansen and McNally, 2017; Taggart *et al.*, 2015).

Quality Standards offer a fundamental structure for reflective inquiry, allowing individuals as well as teams to pinpoint areas for improvement while upholding high standards. Teams can efficiently focus their thoughts by organising them into themes or stages, which guarantees that the questions are relevant to their developmental stage (Welsh Government, 2023). Furthermore, professional growth gained from these reflective techniques also strengthens improvement priorities, improving children's experiences and development while promoting more environmental improvements. Practitioners could track their development and make well-informed practice adjustments with the help of tools like peer feedback and self-assessment frameworks (Education Scotland, 2016).

Children, families, and communities all benefit in the future from high-quality education. Children from low-income households, those with disabilities and dual language learners benefit most from high-quality programmes' positive relationships, interesting curriculum, and continuous teacher development (Schoch *et al.*, 2023).

Quality indicators function as self-assessment tools for enhancing services for children and families. These are necessary in programmes that place children's welfare first (Care Inspectorate, 2014). Moreover, a variety of factors influence a

child's development, investing in future generations is significant for reaching these aims. Place-based interventions are effective strategies that have demonstrated potential in promoting children's development (Hoang *et al.*, 2024).

Conclusion

To conclude, an excellent early childhood education has a big impact on the development of children, especially for children from low-income homes. Educational results are enhanced through successful programmes run by qualified experts. Problems such as lacking resources and the requirement for ongoing professional development still exist, making assessment instruments like SSTEW and ECERS necessary to gauge the quality of education. Prioritising quality in education is fundamental for the development of both individuals and society.

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