Unpacking the Relationship Between International Development and Early Childhood Care and Education in Dharamshala, India

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Abstract

This research study provides a new model to evaluate early childhood development internationally by integrating perspectives from the disciplines of International Development and Early Childhood Care and Education. This new model, *The Geographic Context Education Development Matrix*, was developed through this piece of research and will assist in providing a deeper understanding of the intersectionality of these disciplines as they relate to early childhood development. This model helps to illustrate the scholarly gap in understanding the local perspectives of international development, specifically through short-term international volunteering in Dharamshala, India. Data was collected through an experiential learning project where the primary investigator volunteered for one month in a private school in Dharamshala during the summer of 2017. Following this participatory experience, qualitative semi-structured interviews were conducted with local teachers and parents. The purpose of this research was to understand the current effectiveness of international interventions in Early Childhood Care and Education, especially through international volunteers, in Dharamshala, India and provide insight into the barriers impeding sustainable Early Childhood Care and Education. Through the analysis of the data collected, it was evident that the practice of short-term international volunteering is not effective in supporting Early Childhood Care and Education in Dharamshala. Short term volunteers are not an effective intervention because they cannot address the most significant barriers faced by local educators, their support is generally unreliable, and their presence can, and often does, perpetrate neocolonial tendencies.

Keywords: early childhood care and education, international development, international interventions, early childhood development, Northern India

Introduction

Over the last few years, emphasis on the role of education in affecting long-term change for global sustainable development has increased (United Nations General Assembly [UNGA], 2015; World Bank, 2018). Additionally, scholarly literature related to early childhood development (ECD) unanimously agrees that early intervention can protect against generational transmission of poverty (Kostelnik, Soderman, Whiren, & Rupiper, 2015; Richter et al., 2017; World Bank, 2018). It is argued that a quality education provides a pathway to improve global inequalities by shrinking the social gap between the rich and the poor. More simply, a basic education allows citizens to read community notices, calculate change when shopping, or understand basic

hygiene needs. Lacking these basic skills in this rapidly developing world may further enlarge this social gap (World Bank, 2018). Therefore, by focusing on positive development and learning in early years, it is conceivable that many individuals may break the cycle of poverty that affects much of our world.

The primary investigator of this study was immersed in the complexities and challenges of Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) in Northern India while volunteering at a private school in Dharamshala, an urbanizing city in the northern region of the country.

The primary investigator was accepted into an International Summer Field School program offered at the

University of Guelph entitled “The Ethics of Community Engaged Learning in India” in the Fall of 2016. This program consisted of two parts: a classroom-based seminar during the winter semester, and a one-month experiential learning course based in Dharamshala. The seminar encouraged students to critically engage with concepts related to international internships and volunteerism, cultural competency, power and privilege. After a semester of preparation through the first portion of the program, the investigator, along with 24 other undergraduate students, went to Dharamshala the summer of 2017 for the second portion of the program, volunteering in strategically assigned placements in the community in a range of areas (e.g. women’s rights, environmentalism, health, and education) and engaging in course-based guided reflection. The placement assignment process was created and implemented by a local experiential learning organization based in Dharamshala. As a result, the primary investigator was placed at a local private school, volunteering alongside a local teacher in a nursery/kindergarten class. Through this participatory experience, the primary investigator became critical of the role of international volunteers, especially in the realm of ECCE. As a result, the investigator elongated her stay to conduct research concerning this critique after the one-month program ended.

This experience illuminated a series of factors that have not been extensively studied together and, as a result, the effect of the interrelationship of these factors have not been well understood. India is often referenced in literature as a “developing country”¹ struggling to provide quality education for all citizens, specifically in rural areas (World Bank, 2018). In the Global South, the presence of volunteers in educational institutions travelling from the western world is common. These volunteer trips are becoming a norm, adding a new level of complexity when evaluating the progress in local ECD (Tiessen & Huish, 2014).

This research study will provide a new model to evaluate ECD in the Global South by integrating perspectives from the disciplines of International Development (ID) and Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE). The purpose of this research is to explore the current effectiveness of international interventions in ECCE, especially through international volunteers in Dharamshala, India and provide insight into the barriers impeding sustainable ECCE. Although ECCE is a focus in ID and these two disciplines are interrelated, they have rarely been approached in a multidisciplinary way that gives equal importance to both. Consequently, this research will identify some of the barriers to providing quality ECCE through the emerging ID practice of short-term volunteer interventions.

Theoretical Framework

Although ID and ECCE are vastly different fields, both concepts are important in gaining an understanding of how globalized and localized contexts effect ECD. A comprehensive integration of both disciplines can provide a complete understanding of opportunities and barriers for ECD based on the specific context. The intersection of the concepts is easiest to visualize using a two-by-two matrix. The Geographic Context Education Development Matrix (**Figure 1**) provides a simple tool to investigate the intersection of these two variables: a *perspective based on professional field* (ID vs. ECCE), and a *perspective based on the degree of localization* (local vs. global).

The model will be used as the structure for this paper to evaluate each of the four quadrants separately. The expectation is that by evaluating each quadrant individually, insight will be gained to illuminate the influence and inter-relatability of each section of the model upon the others. This will allow for the differences between global expectations and the local reality, especially in Dharamshala, to become more apparent. Each quadrant will be examined throughout the paper in a different section; either through the literature review or findings of the current study.

The first quadrant, Global Perspectives on International Development, will provide a macro perspective on the field of ID. This section will explore multiple players, primarily international institutions and volunteers, and their roles in international interventions in low- or middle-income countries, like India. The issues focused on in this paper will be the roles of multilateral organizations and international volunteer organizations (either locally or internationally organized).

The second quadrant, Global Perspectives on Early Childhood Care and Education, will provide an overview of the current research on ECCE globally. This section is intended to create a benchmark for understanding the aspirations and expectations for ECCE on a global scale and the role multilateral organizations play in its improvement.

The third quadrant, Local Perspectives on Early Childhood Care and Education, will focus on the local, Indian perspective on ECCE. This quadrant will provide a snapshot of the historical progression of ECCE across India to pinpoint the major challenges and gaps within the field today indicated throughout academic literature and governmental documentation. The data collected in this study will further focus on the specific context of ECCE in Dharamshala, India. Therefore, finding from the study will be subsequently added to this quadrant.

The final quadrant, Local Perspectives on International Development, will provide insight into a newly developing

¹ This is an outdated term yet is still periodically used by different organizations and research disciplines and embedded in day-to-day language. There has been a shift, primarily in International Development, towards using the term “Global South”; this is a more neutral term, as the terminology of “developed/developing” follows a colonial ideology, implying that higher-income countries are fully developed or superior. This paper will use “Global South” where possible to mitigate this issue.

area of research. This section is meant to illustrate the specific influence of international short-term volunteer interventions and evaluate their effectiveness on a small, localized scale. As this is a developing area of research, this section will only be addressed in the findings section of this study.

Literature Review

The literature review will cover three of the four quadrants of the Geographic Context Education Development Matrix. The fourth quadrant, the Local Perspectives on International Development, will be addressed through the current research study and presented in the findings, as there is minimal research identifying local perceptions of varying forms of international interventions.

Global Perspectives on International Development

Based on the focus of this research study, international volunteering was the main form of international intervention that was investigated². This is becoming increasingly more relevant, as the UN Volunteers Programme has called for increased volunteer participation while working towards achieving the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) released in 2015 (Tiessen, 2017). Additionally, the education sector has become a common area of focus in international volunteering according to Barnhart (2012). Over a quarter of international volunteer organizations host education-related interventions for international volunteers. As the popularity of international volunteering rises, the framework of these programs is important to understand. Volunteer trips have become increasingly popular for western individuals in their mid-20s (Barnhart, 2012; Tiessen, 2017). These trips are most commonly short-term, lasting between one to three months, which creates a significant challenge when the local objective is to create notable and long-lasting change within that community (Barnhart, 2012; Ware, 2012). Thus, although many international NGO's have a lasting partnership within a community, the volunteers themselves are continually turning over. Additionally, the qualifications for volunteers vary drastically depending on the organization. According to Barnhart (2012), 12% of organizations hosting international volunteers have no requirements at all. Lack of language proficiency and related communication challenges are also commonly referenced issues with these systems (Tiessen, 2017).

Still, in spite of the unsustainable state of these interventions, host organizations have expressed that they believe that the advantages outweigh the challenges (Barnhart, 2012). These advantages fall under three main categories: increased cross-cultural connection; gaining new perspectives

and skills; and bringing credibility to their work (Barnhart, 2012; Tiessen, 2017). Although host communities consider volunteer support and intervention worthwhile, the motivators behind these positive perceptions need to be unpacked as it is unclear whether or not these advantages are creating meaningful change in the host communities, or are simply continuing to perpetrate neocolonial tendencies. For example, there is a concern that volunteer trips provide greater benefits for the international volunteers than are received by the community while creating a local dependency on international intervention (Tiessen & Huish, 2014).

Ware's (2012) proposal of five concepts that should be considered to ensure context-sensitivity within host communities can counterbalance the possible neocolonial aspects of volunteer experiences. He proposed that participation, equity, sustainability, active citizenship, and cultural sensitivity should be considered to ensure the local context is not overlooked. The concept of participation emphasizes the importance of substantial involvement from those who actually live and embody the surrounding community. This can allow for greater ownership of change while also protecting against impositions by volunteers. The concept of equity emphasizes the UN's wording of "partnership"; this implies that both parties, the local community and the volunteers, should have equal opportunity to contribute and promote mutual exchange of knowledge (Tiessen, 2017; UNGA, 2015; Ware, 2012). The third concept, sustainability, which was well addressed in the SDGs, outlines the need for continued meaningful support at an economic, social, and environmental level (UNGA, 2015). This is relevant in volunteer situations, as the evaluation of possible solutions needs to address the influence that the solution would have on future generations, not only present-day improvements (Ware, 2015). The concept of active citizenship is a natural progression towards context-sensitivity after the first three; active citizenship would ensure that the community has the control to advocate for its own developmental course. This allows for greater local accountability and pride. The last concept, sensitivity towards culture, is a critical part of understanding and working with host communities. Ware (2015) specifically focused on the importance of language-learning. Being able to communicate using the community's mother tongue and immersing in the culture can create a more trusting relationship, which can build a more meaningful and effective collaborative partnership.

Global Perspectives on Early Childhood Care and Education

ECD, especially though care and education, has become a greater international priority over the last few decades (Black et al., 2017). This has been observed through the level

² There are many other approaches that can be utilized in ID to improve education. Although these approaches also contribute to the effectiveness of international interventions in ECCE, they will not be evaluated in this study as it is beyond the scope of the current research.

of effort that the Millenium Development Goals, the predecessor of the SDGs, put toward improving the availability of education and enrolment rates in the Global South between 2000 and 2015 (Dornan, 2017). Although enrolment rates have notably improved internationally, children's educational attainment is still incredibly low. This has led many to conclude that enrolment does not equate to attendance or quality of learning and has initiated a new round of inquiry, particularly by the UN. The World Bank's 2018 World Development Report focuses on this issue, in which UNESCO has coined the *global learning crisis* (Dornan, 2017; The World Bank, 2018). Thus, both the SDGs and the World Development Report have identified a necessary shift in educational development: from enrolment to quality (The World Bank, 2018; UNGA, 2015).

While this is an important step, Brissett and Mitter (2017) caution blind praise of resolutions made by multilateral organizations without considering elements of neocolonialism that may be present. Reports released by multilateral organizations are often produced by a small number of contributors, often from nations in the Global North. There is a need to consider the potential influence documentation from multilateral organizations have in localized contexts. Furthermore, objectives for the SDGs tend to be structured following a westernized perspective of achievement through the use of goals and targets. While there is hope that an enlightened understanding that incorporates local needs and perspectives will permeate global work towards quality education, there remains a need for caution when implementing these goals. Thankfully, these organizations have released many documents since the SDG action plan, noting the need for context- and cultural-sensitivity when scaling up ECCE (UNESCO, 2017).

In 2017, UNESCO, in partnership with The World Bank, The Brookings Institution, and UNICEF, produced the Measuring Early Learning Quality and Outcomes (MELQO) Initiative with the specific intention to combat the SDGs' Target 4.2 (UNESCO, 2017). The SDGs reference the importance of improving ECCE, stating in Target 4.2, "by 2030, [the goal is to] ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education," (UNGA, 2015). This initiative was created to support governments as they work towards prioritizing ECCE, which is one of the necessary first steps before effective change can occur (Richter et al., 2017).

One of the major challenges in the way of prioritization of ECCE surrounds the lack of understanding of what this phenomenon really entails (Black et al., 2017). This holistic term, Early Childhood Care and Education, identifies the multiple elements involved in optimal child development: health, nutrition, environmental stimulation, early learning, and play (Black et al., 2017; Ministry of Women and Children Development [MWCD], 2013). Thus, ECCE is an overarching term, encompassing the biological, psychological, social, and

environmental elements of development. Without consistent interpretation, this term can be misleading and lead to confusion.

This points to the importance of work like the MELQO initiative, which is intended to provide user-friendly tools to evaluate the developmental track of young children and quantify the rich concepts associated with ECCE (UNESCO, 2017). However, the MELQO only provides insight into possible issues at the school level and does not provide a framework for the identification or analysis of systemic issues that could affect the provision of quality education. In this vein, the World Bank (2018) provided four requirements for effective learning to occur: prepared learners, effective teaching, learning-focused inputs, and skilled management. These requirements highlight the fact that there are often struggles over whose responsibility it is to initiate ECCE improvements (Black et al., 2017). On a systematic level, there needs to be a shift toward a more supportive environment for policy enhancements (Richler et al., 2017). This will require all stakeholders to have a firmer understanding of existing policies and how they reflect the local culture, while also creating an environment where all stakeholders, including local teachers and parents, can advocate for the aspects that need to be adapted.

Although these changes may be challenging and time-consuming, there are substantial social and economic costs associated with further delay in improving ECD (Richler et al., 2017). Most obviously, education is recognized as a human right by international organizations, making the global learning crisis a persistent and problematic human rights violation (The World Bank, 2018; UNGA, 1966). The learning crisis is associated with many other social issues related to socio-economic status, gender, caste, and ability (NUEPA, 2008). While these overlapping inequalities are outside the scope of this paper, it is clear that inaccessible education is associated with the widening of the educational gap, as those not receiving a quality education will continue to be unprepared to join the workforce, which can consequently perpetuate the cycle of poverty and low-functioning economies (The World Bank, 2018; Richler et al., 2017).

Local Perspectives on Early Childhood Care and Education

At the time of India's independence in 1947, education and ECD became a point of interest when developing national plans for change (Sharma, Sen & Gulati, 2008). India's governmental body recognized the importance of early childhood development and care, especially due to the influence of Maria Montessori, a notable philosopher in the ECCE field, who visited in 1939 and established training courses across the country (Schneider & Leonard, 2016). Through consecutive Five Year Plans and setting the goal of "Education for All" in 1986, the Government of India (GOI) has continued to push for greater child development (NEUPA, 2008). Although the GOI has maintained education as a

Unpacking the Relationship Between International Development and Early Childhood Care and Education in Dharamshala, India (Gushue)

national focus, progress towards quality and universal education has been slow (Sharma et al., 2008). Rural India has been recognized globally as an area that continues to struggle to provide quality education. Even today, three-quarters of students attending grade three cannot solve simple two-digit subtraction equations (The World Bank, 2018).

A major jump was made in 1975 when a nation-wide program was developed to improve early development; Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS). Through ICDS, ECCE centres, called Anganwadi preschools, were established across the country to serve children from time of conception to age six, as well as women of childbearing age (MWCD, 2013). This service has received praise for its inclusivity and holistic focus, as the program was designed to improve all aspects of development: pre- and post-natal health and nutrition, extra-familial care, early learning, and play (MWCD, 2013; Richler et al., 2017; Sharma et al., 2008). This service was part of the political shift viewing ECCE as a human right rather than a form of welfare.

However, like many programs of this magnitude, the implementation focused more on breadth rather than depth. ICDS quickly became the largest provider of ECCE across the country, servicing 80 million children by 2013, which was about half of the early childhood population at the time (MWCD, 2013). This fast growth rate led to gaps across programming. Although centres are more accessible, centres in rural areas are still limited (Sharma et al., 2008). Even in the well-established centres, staff are often overloaded with work and, due to poor regulation of programming, are often undertrained, unsupported, and unmotivated to even attend.

The issues associated with Anganwadis did not go unnoticed in the local communities, which has led to a false perception that alternative ECCE providers, including non-governmental charitable organizations or privatized institutions, are the superior choice for ECCE. Privatized institutions often require a fee, meaning the programs are targeted towards higher-income families. Yet, low-income families also seek these programs following the assumption that they will provide a better education and greater opportunity for their children (NEUPA, 2008). Private institutions have therefore increased across the country, estimated to serve 10 million children in India as of 2013 (White & Pramling-Samuelsson, 2014).

A report by Manhas and Qadiri (2010) further illustrates the negative perceptions towards Anganwadi centres. The study contrasted the quality of Anganwadi and private preschools in Kashmir, India. The conclusions made through the study illustrated that the privatized centres were superior, providing ample educational opportunities for young children. However, some of the conclusions reached by the authors are questionable. The actual statistical significance of superior results appeared minimal, a 10% margin, with a maximum of half of either program actually achieving positive outcomes in any one of the evaluated areas: infrastructure, provision of basic amenities, provision of books, methodology/teaching

aids, and developmental activities. Additionally, the authors praised the incorporation of formal methods in the private preschools. However, this idea of “formal methods”, without an explanation of its meaning, poses a concern based on the evaluation made by Sharma and colleagues (2008); privatized programs often use a downward extension of upper-year programming with the expectation that it will accelerate learning. This is a common misconception in ECCE worldwide, because an accelerated learning track very often results in developmentally inappropriate practices that can be detrimental to children’s development (Kostelnik et al., 2015).

Indian policy documents use current terminology often associated with quality ECCE pedagogy across the literature, including terms like holistic, developmentally-appropriate, inclusive, and play-based (Kostelnik et al., 2015; MWCD, 2013). However, the use of these terms throughout policy documents does not equate to proper implementation, which has been cited as a significant problem across Indian ECCE (Sharma et al., 2008). The idea of “holistic practices” has resulted in staff overload, leading to the early learning and school readiness aspects of ECCE holding a lower priority. “Inclusivity” has led to extremely high pupil-educator ratios, with 1:10 for children under three, and 1:20 for children three to six (MWCD, 2013). The policies outlined appear ambiguous and non-committal, bringing to question the accountability the GOI will take to make the necessary changes.

Through the review of the literature, only three of the quadrants from the Geographic Context Education Development Matrix were addressed. An overview of the key information taken from the literature has been organized into the model below (**Figure 2**). The matrix illustrates the gap in the literature surrounding the Local Perspectives of International Development, as signified by the shading. This gap is not surprising due to the current top-down framework influencing international interventions on ECCE, which is evident in India. This framework has prevented effective community engagement in the process. In contrast, the process towards improving ECCE has been led by individuals disconnected from the communities affected; entities from the federal government and multilateral organizations are the main potential instigators of change.

Therefore, the main objectives that have been put in place have received little input from the local community and may not reflect the local context. Additionally, the evaluation of progress does not take into consideration the local level. Under such large bodies, evaluation of improvement is made through quantitative measures, which resulted in a misleading focus on enrolment through the Millenium Development Goals. While statistics in this field have shown improvement, at the community level, children are still not learning. Instead, objectives have to be set and evaluation needs to be conducted at a local level, taking a more systematic approach to assess the overall functioning and usefulness of ECCE within that

area. Although the SDGs have shifted their focus to educational quality rather than enrolment, a proper evaluation of improvement can only be understood by the local population. Indicators of improvement are better understood through the perceptions of the local community, including educators and parents. Therefore, the data collected through this study will help to address the gap evident in the literature by evaluating the effectiveness of short-term volunteers within ECCE in Dharamshala, India. This will be addressed in the next section of this paper.

Methods

Data collection for this study took place during the summer of 2017 in Dharamshala, India. Following a one-month participatory program, the primary investigator conducted interviews with local teachers and parents from a variety of organization providing childcare, both public and private. The interviews were conducted to explore the community's perception of the role and effectiveness of international volunteers within the local schools. Institutions in Dharamshala providing childcare were identified. These institutions varied immensely based on characteristics including size, enrolment, and privatization. Some ECEC settings where part of schools catering from preschool to Grade eight, while others provided preschool-specific care only on site. The number of children attending each of these ECCE settings varied consistently. Most settings did not have concrete enrolment or attendance procedures, making it challenging to identify the number of children that attended each program. There was usually one educator at each setting. Both private and public institutions were approached.

The participants were chosen through convenience sampling based on availability and agreement to participate. Consequently, the participants were all women and consisted of educators and parents. Recruitment was assisted by XLS, the experiential learning organization based in Dharamshala. The employees of XLS belonged to the local community, therefore, their involvement constituted greater trust from the participants. In consultation with XLS, convenience sampling was deemed culturally and socially appropriate, as the employees were able to act as cultural and language brokers. This method allowed for greater respect of cultural boundaries, as the primary investigator was an outsider from the community.

Over the span of one month, 12 qualitative semi-structured interviews were conducted. The interviews ranged in length from 10-40 minutes, depending on the depth in which the participants answered the questions.

Although this study has revealed an important gap in current literature surrounding ID and ECCE, there are many significant limitations to the research methodology and data that should be acknowledged. The definition of early childhood was originally taken from Canadian literature when the interviews were conducted, covering the ages 0-12. Early childhood is defined as 0-6 throughout Indian policy, so

interviews with educators teaching children older than six were excluded as well. As a result, eight interviews were analysed. A second round of data collection was not possible due to geographical and financial barriers as the primary investigator returned to Canada before analysing the data. Furthermore, data collection was strictly conducted in Dharamshala, therefore the inferences drawn from this data are not generalizable.

It is also important to note that the interviews were conducted through a interpreter. The investigator spoke only English and the majority of those interviewed spoke in Hindi along with other local dialects with low English proficiency. The presence of the interpreter enabled the participants to speak in their mother tongue. Although this created a more comfortable and expressive environment for the participants, this methodology created additional challenges related to translating the interview transcriptions. The interviews were recorded then roughly translated and transcribed by the founder of XLS. Without the availability of a professional translator, the accuracy of the final transcriptions is questionable. However, these transcriptions, in conjunction with the primary investigator's field notes, provide a basis for extrapolation.

The positionality of the primary investigator should also be mentioned as a limitation to the study. The primary investigator is a white, fair-featured young woman from Canada. She has very limited understanding of Hindi. As an outsider from the community, it is important to note the possible effect her position may have had on research collection and the entirety of the process. Additionally, it is important to keep in mind that the investigator volunteered for one month in a local kindergarten classroom, which many of the interviewees were aware of. Even though the participants were briefed on the investigator's attempt to be objective during the interview process, there is a likelihood the participants would soften any negative review of international volunteers to ensure the investigator would not be offended.

Despite these limitations, this study provides a new model for understanding the intersectionality of ID and ECCE. The data collected provides a preliminary understanding of a local perspective addressing the unfilled quadrant of The Geographic Context Development Education Matrix: The Local Perspectives of International Development.

Data Analysis

This study followed grounded theory methodology (GMT), generating a new theoretical framework from existing qualitative data (Urquhart, 2013). GMT allowed for greater opportunities to discover new connections and relationships between the data collected and existing literature. By following GMT, the literature review was conducted after the data was collected. This process provided greater flexibility, setting aside preconceived notions surrounding international volunteer presence in ECE settings before conducting

interviews to understand the perspective of local teachers and parents in Dharamshala.

After the interviews were conducted, interpreted, and reviewed, the data was contextualized through an extensive literature review surrounding the perception of volunteers and ECCE through both an international and local lens. Through exploration of the existing literature, the Geographic Context Development Education Matrix was created to provide a visual representation. This theoretical framework was generated based on the data collected and the relationship between the data and existing literature, which is a key feature of GMT (Urquhart, 2013). The matrix provides a narrative framework of this relationship, demonstrating the relationship between international development and early childhood development.

The data analysis was systematic to understand the major themes evident in the data. Through an initial read, common issues were identified; key points of each interview were underlined in pencil. Through several rounds of reading the interview transcripts, overlapping categories were determined. Phrases from each interview were transferred to sticky-notes to tangibly work with the different items and demonstrate the major themes underlying the interviews. Once different data items were categorized together as the items represented similar issues, these phrases were then colour-coded through the use of highlighters. This process created more concise and inclusive themes to organize the data.

The next section will present the findings from this data analysis, unpacking these perspectives within the context of Dharamshala, India.

Findings

The purpose of this research is to explore the current effectiveness of international interventions in ECCE, especially through international volunteers in Dharamshala and provide insight into the potential barriers impeding sustainable ECCE. This research provides an understanding of the local perspectives of both ECCE and ID, as well as identifies areas that may require further research. The first section will provide an analysis of the data relevant to ECCE and will outline the challenges faced by educators while implementing educational programs. This section of the analysis is important in order to deepen the understanding of the local context, bringing the focus from India to Dharamshala, so that the inadequacies of the short-term volunteer interventions can be more easily recognized and understood. The analysis of the data relevant to ID provides insight into both the benefits and drawbacks of having international volunteers participate in program implementation. This section will directly address the gap within the literature providing a greater understanding of the local perspectives of ID.

³ Although Anganwadi workers were burdened with more tasks than other educators, it should be noted that workers in both public and private sectors felt overloaded with work.

Local Perspectives on Early Childhood Care and Education

Through the interviews conducted with educators, the current state of ECCE in Dharamshala was explored. Four major themes were identified: (1) levels of training, (2) educator responsibilities, (3) issues with space, and (4) thoroughness of teaching plan.

1. The educational/training levels of the educators interviewed varied widely, ranging from no training to a Master of Arts in mathematics. From six interviews, four different educational paths were outlined. Notably, in a focused comparison of the Anganwadi educators, different levels of training had been attained.
2. Through the interviews, an extensive list of responsibilities of early childhood educators, especially Anganwadi workers in the area, were expressed³. These roles included: complete care for children zero to six years, paperwork including the filing necessary for Aadhar (identity) cards, providing rations to pregnant mothers and families with young children below the poverty line, and holding meetings with both adolescent girls, pregnant women, and new mothers to promote healthy choices for them and their children.
3. Educators identified various issues regarding the integrity of the daycare spaces provided. These issues ranged from a minimal amount of space to a lack of clean drinking water.
4. The last theme involved the thoroughness of the teaching plan for educators. Only one educator identified that their teaching followed a curriculum, whereas others expressed there was no set curriculum for preschool-aged children. Additionally, most educators expressed that they did not follow a set syllabus. Especially with the presence of volunteers, an educational plan was not present. Educators expressed volunteers were given minimal guidance regarding areas to teach the children; theme-based teaching was the most usual guidance provided (e.g. names of fruits, vegetables, animals etc.).

Through both the interviews with parents and educators, another theme emerged. This theme addressed the community's perception of ECD. The educators expressed that children were often treated poorly, both by parents and fellow educators. Parents, on the other hand, had little to share about their perception of their child's education. Although they expressed that the educators were teaching their children well and the volunteers provided an opportunity for their children to learn English, parents were unable to give concrete

examples of their children's learning progress. Parents' interviews were consistently shorter than teachers, as they felt they had little to share regarding their children's education.

Local Perspectives on International Development

The interviews provided insight into the local perceptions of international volunteers. When analysing the data, both benefits and drawbacks of having international volunteers in ECCE settings were addressed. The educators and parents primarily focused on the positive aspects of volunteers, while the negative aspects were indirectly addressed. Even when a drawback of volunteer presence was mentioned, educators often denied that it should be considered problematic. It is important to account for the investigator's position as the interviewer while analysing this section. The participants may have been cautious to answer truthfully, fearing their responses may offend the investigator who had previously worked as an international volunteer in the community. This potentially influenced the nature of the participant's responses.

Four major themes were identified when exploring benefits of international volunteer involvement: (1) improving the classroom setting, (2) modeling positive interpersonal skills, (3) modeling new teaching methods, and (4) modeling new activities.

1. The first theme covered any task volunteers conducted to improve the space. This most commonly occurred through classroom decoration or providing materials.
2. The second theme covered actions volunteers modeled that educators believed exhibited favourable interactions with others. This included showing signs of acceptance, love, or patience. These actions were primarily exhibited towards children; positive interpersonal relations between educators and volunteers was only mentioned once.
3. The third theme covered the educators' and parents' positive perception of volunteers' different teaching methods, most commonly referencing the "play-way" method (i.e. teaching through playing rather than lecture-style).
4. The fourth theme covered the educators' positive perception of new activities conducted by volunteers. There were vague explanations about the specific activities or crafts that were used.

The benefits of volunteers identified throughout the interviews all appear to be short-term improvements, as most of the educators were unable to identify how these benefits influenced their practice after the volunteers had left when asked. The improvements made to the classroom setting would surpass the stay of the volunteers, however, the decorations were often handmade and temporary, and the

material donations were minimal. Therefore, even these improvements would presumably provide only a short-term benefit.

Four major themes were captured when coding the drawbacks of international volunteer involvement: (1) the language barrier, (2) dissociation from position, (3) length of stay, and (4) number of volunteers. When asked if the educators experienced any challenges hosting volunteers, almost all interviewees initially expressed they experienced no challenges. The issue regarding language and communication was referenced most often, whereas the other issues were either addressed indirectly or were identifying through probing questions.

1. The first theme covered communication challenges, as half of the educators mentioned the barrier caused by differing first languages. Additionally, the majority of the educators felt most comfortable responding to the interview questions in Hindi and having their answers translated to English; this was a similar practice within the volunteer setting.
2. The second theme that arose indicated that some volunteers disconnected from the tasks at hand, appearing uninterested in the children or only interacting with other volunteers rather than local educators. Only two educators mentioned this issue, and both were reluctant to consider it overly problematic.
3. The third theme covered the challenges associated to the duration of the volunteer's stay. Multiple educators believed the volunteer's stay was too short and indicated that the volunteers did not have enough time to settle in.
4. The last theme covered the issues regarding the number of volunteers that visit. Interestingly, there was contradicting data. One educator indicated that she had experienced issues with too many volunteers, outnumbering the children at times. Another educator indicated more volunteers were needed.

Discussion

Currently, international volunteer interventions provide minimal influence on lasting change within the ECCE sector in Dharamshala, India. There are three main issues preventing the provision of effective interventions in Dharamshala that have been identified in this study. These issues include that volunteer interventions do not address the underlying issues facing the implementation of ECCE (involving lack of capacity building and task overload), volunteers are unreliable due to communication and engagement issues, and volunteers may perpetrate neocolonial tendencies.

The most significant issue is that the volunteer interventions are not assisting in improving the most important problems faced by ECCE in Dharamshala: lack of

Unpacking the Relationship Between International Development and Early Childhood Care and Education in Dharamshala, India (Gushue)

capacity building and task overloading. Currently, educators are lacking the training, skills, resources, and motivation to implement effective programming. Training of educators for both governmental and non-governmental programs (i.e. public and private) is inconsistent, meaning some educators have received little to no education on ECCE. When one educator was asked if she had completed any training or schooling for the job, her answer was no. She continued to explain by saying, “her [sic] baby was three months old so they waived her [sic] training for now.”⁴ In the face of these problems, educators receive little support from higher authorities to implement programs. Juxtaposed against this low level of required training, educators, especially working under ICDS, are given more tasks from the government, resulting in a high administrative burden and work overload. When asked to describe her typical day, one educator under ICDS answered, “welcome kids, prayer, snack, teach following the curriculum, hot meal, she [sic] is also a BLO [booth level officer] and registers voters, provides rations to BPL [below poverty line] families, makes Aadhar Cards [identity cards].” The translator explained that some of these are new jobs she had been given by the government. She continued to explain her other responsibilities, “...to provide zero to six year olds complete care- immunizations, nutrition from pregnancy to six years. Second, adolescent girls, 11-18 years have to be made aware of malnutrition, anemia, provide sanitary napkins, and provide pregnant mothers about health, and to reduce infant mortality rates.” Due to a lack of capacity building, educators are often ill-equipped to manage the high number of responsibilities.

Based on the findings from this study, short-term volunteers do little to alleviate the challenges of inconsistent training and work overload faced by local educators tasked with providing effective care. Further, volunteers often do not have the ability to assist with the educators’ administrative roles. One educator indicated that she did not talk with the volunteers a lot as she had a lot of paper work. When she was asked if there was a way volunteers could help with the administrative work, her response was no. The role of short-term volunteers in the ECCE setting is to interact with children. One educator outlined that the tasks volunteers completed during their stay was to, “teach and draw and play.” Therefore, there is little direct support provided for educators, meaning educators will continue to struggle with or without the presence of volunteers.

Additionally, many volunteers lack the qualifications to build the capacity of the educators (Barnhart, 2012). Although volunteers are seemingly alleviating some of the educators’ responsibilities by working with the children, volunteers are

often also underqualified to assist in teaching. It cannot be expected that volunteers who have not been trained as ECCE educators would have the skills or ability to bring meaningful technique or pedagogy⁵. Many of the educators indicated that the volunteers taught through play, yet, teaching through play is different than free play. Therefore, even with the presence of international volunteers, many of the consistent barriers preventing the provision of quality ECCE in Dharamshala remain.

Although short-term volunteers do not have the ability to assist in these systematic issues, the data illustrates that volunteers have the potential to provide short-term benefits. Unfortunately, there are issues associated with the reliability of international volunteers, even while offering short-term improvements. The greatest barrier involves communication. When asked, “what do you think is the best way to build a relationship with a volunteer?” one educator indicated, “first of all, language. What I say and what they understand is important.” However, this educator had indicated earlier on in the interview that, “she [sic] cannot communicate as her [sic] English is bad and she [sic] had no idea how to communicate.” She said, “she [sic] doesn’t have the confidence to speak, but she [sic] is trying to overcome it.” Additionally, volunteers often come with even less comprehension of Hindi or other local languages, meaning communication primarily occurs through a translator. As the educator above indicated, without effective communication, it is difficult, if not impossible, to establish a meaningful working relationship between the local community and the volunteers. Oversimplifications or misinterpretations through communication can impede on volunteers’ ability to make any notable difference or improvement. Additionally, the very nature that a short-term interaction does not facilitate relationship-building. One educator indicated that, “the group should stay for long time [sic] as new volunteers take time to settle in.”

Additionally, the underlying objectives or motivations of the volunteers can conflict with the needs of the local community, meaning the reliability of volunteer support is lacking. One educator told a story of two volunteers who came to her centre for 10 days. She said, “...[they] were completely not interested in their work and would just pass time and leave. She [sic] did not like it. They were nice and polite, but had no interest in the kids. They were interested in the clothes we wear, the bindi...” Volunteers like these provide little benefit, if any at all, to the local community; any benefit is for the volunteer alone.

As a result of these first two issues, volunteers make minimal short-term or lasting change. However, there is also a third and more subtle issue related to short-term

⁴ Many of the translations made in the transcripts presented the interviewee’s answers in the third-person point of view. In order to maintain accuracy, the quotes were taken verbatim from the transcriptions, even though the translations appear inaccurate. Errors in the transcript will be indicated with the abbreviation, [sic].

⁵ Volunteer training is only one aspect concerning volunteer qualifications. The volunteers’ cultural competency should also be taken into account. The volunteers’ lack of local cultural understanding would also prevent effective teaching.

interventions that prevents change from occurring. Through informal conversations, the primary investigator noticed that ECCE has a relatively poor reputation in Dharamshala, as the local community is aware of the poor output many programs, especially governmental programs, were providing for their children. This also became evident through the interviews as the teachers and parents expressed negative perceptions of local ECCE. In contrast, parents and teachers had a high regard for volunteers. When asked about the contributions volunteers brought, one teacher indicated, “the kids get happy and parents send their kids.” Another said, “foreigners coming here attract more kids.” The primary investigator observed the same trend during the one-month placement in the preschool before conducting research. The sheer presence of volunteers improved attendance, yet the actual increase in quality of the education was questionable, based on the barriers indicated above.

Without meaningful intervention, this high reputation of volunteers may be perpetrating neocolonial tendencies. One teacher told a story, saying, “[a volunteer] wanted to adopt a girl and really worked hard to make it happen but it did not happen... She gave a lot of material to the handicapped boy who paints very well.” The teacher continued to praise this volunteer for her work, although her actions followed that of a “helping imperative”, with the expectation of fixing and solving the community’s problems (Tiessen & Huish, 2014). Through conversation with local community members, the investigator learned the family was looked upon poorly for not agreeing to allow this volunteer to adopt their child. As identified in the findings of this study, both educators and parents were reluctant to openly identify challenges or issues associated with volunteers, bringing into question the possible dependency created, where international volunteers are only seen as helpful instigators of change.

Conclusion & Next Steps

India is considered ahead of other low- and middle-income countries, as the government has identified ECCE as a priority on a political level through “Education for All” movements and ICDS programming. There is an understanding of the need to coordinate the different aspects of ECCE: care, health, nutrition, play, and early learning. However, there is a difference between coordinating and overloading, which is one of the major issues presented in ECCE improvement in India. The gaps between policy development and program implementation are causing challenges in improving ECCE. Currently, techniques for programming like the play-way method are addressed in ECCE policy, yet educators in Dharamshala have little knowledge on how to integrate this technique into their teaching. This gap can be detrimental, as poor implementation of emerging techniques can be even less effective than outdated techniques. Additionally, ICDS is being praised for being a venue for exhaustive and inclusive programming, yet the unreasonable expectations placed in Anganwadi workers

to cover all aspects of ECCE presents a worrisome gap. Even if educators gain better training and support, successfully performing all the roles these workers are expected to fill is unlikely. The poor reputation of ICDS childcare has resulted in an increase in privatized childcare institutions as well, as many families believe private ECCE will provide better education. Yet, the private sector is faced with similar problems: lack of capacity building and task overloading. In conclusion, both public and private ECCE are often lacking the capacity to effectively care for children. Without regulation of both sectors through appropriate inspection and evaluation of whether or not the policy is being properly implemented, new challenges will continue to present themselves.

Dharamshala is experiencing issues related to ECCE: work overload coupled with questionable training and skill comprehension. On a national level, this is considerably more concerning as Dharamshala is urbanizing compared to many of the more rural and isolated areas across the country, meaning the educators in Dharamshala are likely to have greater access to resources, supplies, and training than others. Therefore, more research should be conducted in more remote areas to evaluate if the barriers are magnified. Additionally, there should be a study conducted nation-wide to gain a greater understanding of Indian ECCE as a whole (i.e. including both public and private sectors), with interviews conducted by fluent speakers of the educators’ first languages. Building educator capacity is a crucial step in creating change. This can empower educators to become local advocates for ECCE improvement, be better prepared to utilize visiting volunteers, and provide greater education and care to break the perpetuating cycle of poverty.

Based on the findings presented in this study, one of the first steps that should be taken to generate sustainable effectiveness of ECCE programming in Dharamshala is through community involvement and participation in improving the current ECCE situation. Too much weight has been given to international volunteers, which has taken ownership away from the most important stakeholders: the community members that will be influenced by the quality of the programming. These interventions are not addressing the more prominent issues faced by educators and may be creating more challenges than alleviating them.

Currently, there is little research that has been conducted to gain a greater understanding of local attitudes towards internationally-led education-based interventions. Perceptions are positive, but limited. The data collected from this study demonstrated the same issue through international volunteering. However, it is important to consider how the data collected through self-reporting should be interpreted. Especially in this study, positive responses may have been influenced by a lack of knowledge on different options, feeling as though personal ideas are inadequate, or simply not wanting to offend the interviewer based on their position as a former international volunteer.

Unpacking the Relationship Between International Development and Early Childhood Care and Education in Dharamshala, India (Gushue)

The Geographic Context Education Development Matrix (Figure 3) has been developed to illustrate the main themes in each category based on the literature and the current study. When analysing the model, it becomes evident that there are significant gaps in the literature regarding the local perspectives in international development. Due to the current top-down approach to policy development and program implementation used by both multilateral organizations and the GOI, the opinions of educators and parents are rarely asked for or considered.

Using the Geographic Context Education Development Matrix (Figure 3), this study has provided a new perspective that has not received due attention across the literature. By reintegrating the four sections of the matrix, this model illuminates the importance of taking a truly interdisciplinary perspective on any global issue. In respect to this study, addressing the intersection of ID and ECCE through both globalized and localized perspectives exclusively has provided a new understanding of the intersectionality of these concepts. By referring to Figure 3, a full assessment of the local context of international volunteer intervention in ECCE in Dharamshala and the influences of global perspectives in these disciplines are evident. Moving forward, there needs to be a greater understanding of other international interventions practices across the ECCE sector.

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Figures

Figure 1. The Geographic Context Education Development Matrix: a 2x2 matrix used as a visual representation of the scope of the research study.

	Global	Local
ID	- Focus on global collaboration & partnership - Increase in international volunteering - Advantages of international volunteer intervention: increased cross-cultural connections, gaining new perspectives & skills, bringing credibility to work - New focus on possible disadvantages of intervention - Need for context-sensitivity in hosting communities (participation, equity, sustainability, active citizenship, cultural-sensitivity)	
ECCE	- Switch from quantity to quality - <i>Global Learning Crisis</i> - Need for political prioritization - Primary focus of research on infrastructure and individualized learning – new field of understanding overarching systematic issues - Effective learning requires: prepared learners, effective teaching, learning focused inputs, skilled management	- Inclusivity & holism of ICDS – is this evaluation accurate? - Gaps across programming - Work overload - Poor regulation - Undertrained, unsupported, unmotivated ICDS workers - Negative community perception of ICDS

Figure 2. The Geographic Context Education Development Matrix illustrating the gaps in the literature: Local Perspectives of International Development.

Unpacking the Relationship Between International Development and Early Childhood Care and Education in Dharamshala, India (Gushue)

	Global	Local
ID	- Focus on global collaboration & partnership - Increase in international volunteering - Advantages of international volunteer intervention: increased cross-cultural connections, gaining new perspectives & skills, bringing credibility to work - New focus on possible disadvantages of intervention - Need for context-sensitivity in hosting communities (participation, equity, sustainability, active citizenship, cultural-sensitivity)	- International short-term volunteers do not effectively promote development - Improvements are minimal - Cannot combat major problems with time restriction - Volunteers can be unreliable - Language barriers - Volunteer dissociation - Volunteers can perpetrate neocolonial tendencies
ECCE	- Switch from quantity to quality - <i>Global Learning Crisis</i> - Need for political prioritization - Primary focus of research on infrastructure and individualized learning – new field of understanding overarching systematic issues - Effective learning requires: prepared learners, effective teaching, learning focused inputs, skilled management	Indian Context: - Inclusivity & holism of ICDS – is this evaluation accurate? - Gaps across programming - Work overload - Poor regulation - Undertrained, unsupported, unmotivated ICDS workers - Negative community perception of ICDS Context in Dharamshala: - Wide range of educator educational attainment - Work overload - Issues in space - Low regulation - Low community perception of ECCE

Figure 3. 2x2 The Geographic Context Education Development Matrix illustrating the persistent gap in the literature while providing guidance for future research based on this study.

Appendix A: Key Terms

Early Child Development (EDC): the process of growth and development during the stage in the lifespan from conception to age six.

Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE): a widely-used concept in Indian literature encompassing a holistic approach to early childhood development. ECCE consists of care, health, nutrition, play, and, early learning. This is comparable to the Canadian concept of Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC).

Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS): India's nationwide program developed in 1975 by the Government of India in hopes to universalize early child development programming, especially for marginalized groups. This program has not yet reached its goal of universal, free and quality ECCE.

Millennium Development Goals (MDGs): A set of eight goals put forward by the United Nations in 2000 to be achieved by 2015.

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): A set of 17 goals put forward by the United Nations in 2015 to be achieved by 2030, with a prominent commitment to 'leaving no one behind.'