



Abstract:

Research has provided ample support for the assertion that, even though the family remains as the major stimulus on children's outcomes, the superiority and steadiness of the child care that young children obtain, also have imperative effects as well (Barbour and Scully, 2014). Childcare is a common difficulty for the majority of parents who labor for income or wish to engage in employment. With the various needs of childcare for the Kenyan working parents, and the need for capital causing them to labor for longer hours, entrepreneurs and companies are capitalizing more in day care centers to meet the demand for specified child care services. A spot check in the major towns in Kenya discloses outrageous trends where some centers are even run in faintly lit rooms in apartments. Most of the child-care centers are being run in retrofit buildings that were not initially designed with the child in mind. The buildings require greater spatial articulation so as to fully engage the growing child.

As such, the main aim of this study is to examine how the current day care centers in Kenya, fit in with the developmental needs and growth factors of the child; mainly physiological and psychological needs of children between the ages of 3 months -3 years. Other objectives include an assessment of the spatial configurations, the examination of user comfort and also to establish the quality of the perceptual environments in the day-care centers.

Study parameters are drawn from literature written by reputable architects such as, Christopher Day, Anita Olds and Mark Dudek who have done tremendous research on child-care environments in relation to the developmental needs and growth factors of the child. Literary work of respectable psychologists such as (Berk, 2013) and Celia (2016) was also deemed important in finding children's development stages. Arising from this, three parameters are obtained for the purpose of the study. These include, the physiological environment, entailing the need for child-sized furnishings customized to meet the age-specific needs of the child and maintaining visual and audible links between the care-giver and child. The perceptual environment involves use of appropriate colors and textures both indoors and outdoors and finally user comfort comprising, appropriate lighting, background noise and indoor air quality standards.

The case-study method is employed in a descriptive study so as to compare the case-studies with parameters obtained from the literature review. This was used so as to understand the phenomena unfolding within the selected case-studies. The cases include: Little Steps Child-care Center for Working Professionals, a work-based center found in Westland's, Nairobi and Little Smiles Play-group and Child-care center, a community-based center, situated in Kileleshwa, Nairobi.

The findings drawn from the field-studies reveal a great deal. With regards to the physiological environment, many of the furnishings in both centers fall out of the standards, however both cases are able to facilitate audible and visual contact to an extent. The cases also attempt to provide a perceptual environment that stimulates both visual and tactile cues in children, nevertheless, feeling and mood in relation to these matters are not extensively addressed. Lastly, user comfort is achieved only partially, as seen in the lighting, background noise, temperature and relative humidity readings obtained.

Grounded on the research findings from the cases studies, the author concludes and then goes on to recommend strategies that could enhance the cases studied along with upcoming day-care centers with regards to the parameters outlined above. Recommendations for future research are also identified, enlightening areas for further research and study.

