An exploration of early childhood educators' and parents' experiences during the period of school closures caused by the COVID-19 pandemic in Peru

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the University of Greenwich for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Declaration

I certify that the work contained in this thesis, or any part of it, has not been accepted in substance for any previous degree awarded to me or any other person, and is not concurrently being submitted for any other degree other than that of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy which has been studied at the University of Greenwich, London, UK. I also declare that the work contained in this thesis is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise identified and acknowledged by references. I further declare that no aspects of the contents of this thesis are the outcome of any form of research misconduct. I declare any personal, sensitive or confidential information/data has been removed or participants have been anonymised. I further declare that where any questionnaires, survey answers or other qualitative responses of participants are recorded/included in the appendices, all personal information has been removed or anonymised. Where University forms (such as those from the Research Ethics Committee) have been included in appendices, all handwritten/scanned signatures have been removed.

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Abstract

Access to quality early childhood education (ECE) is a key driver in addressing social inequality and achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. There is limited qualitative research which has explored the lived experiences of ECE stakeholders during the extended period of school closures caused by the COVID-19 pandemic in low-middle income countries. This study addresses this gap by analysing the challenges faced by parents and early childhood (EC) educators in rural and urban Peru between March 2020 and August 2021.

A multiple case study research design generated context specific data, which were examined through a cross-case analysis. Purposive sampling led to four case studies with contrasting geographical (urban/rural) and socioeconomic (private/public school) characteristics. Data collection involved 33 semi-structured interviews with parents, leaders and EC educators across the case studies. To supplement these and provide a broader country context, interviews with 10 Peruvian ECE experts were also conducted. An integrated approach of Bronfenbrenner's (1917-2005) and Bourdieu's (1930-2002) theoretical frameworks provided a nuanced lens to investigate the social structures and dynamics across the cases.

The findings reveal how access to economic, social and cultural capital shaped the experiences of parents and EC educators. Inequalities across contexts have been exacerbated as parent participants who were economically secure, possessed digital literacy, leveraged social networks and had access to technology in the home were able to provide either frequent interactions between home and school or their own personalised programmes to support their children's educational development. Across all contexts, ECE stakeholders believed children's educational development had been negatively impacted by the school closures and that their own well-being had suffered.

The implications for education policy highlight the necessity of strengthening parent-teacher relationships and collaboration, developing parenting support programmes and enhancing teacher training to include digital literacy skills and developmentally appropriate distance learning pedagogy.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Introduction to the study

This study aimed to explore early childhood education (ECE) in Peru during the period of school closures caused by the COVID-19 pandemic with a focus on the challenges faced by early childhood (EC) educators and parents/guardians of young children in rural and urban areas. It further explored how these challenges differed or were shared across contrasting private and public-school contexts within the country. The research is influenced by my professional background as an EC educator and leader in private urban settings in Peru both prior to and during the period of school closures, along with my experiences as a volunteer at non-governmental organisations supporting vulnerable families with young children. These professional experiences are complemented by my upbringing and cultural understandings of life and education in the UK. The combination of these factors provides the reader with a unique comparative perspective and interpretation of findings within this unprecedented context. In this chapter I explain the rationale for this study and where it fits within existing research, introduce the choice of theoretical frameworks which underpin the study, present the research questions which were addressed, provide a country profile of Peru, explore my how my development as a researcher was influenced by the unique context of the pandemic and outline the thesis structure.

1.2 Rationale and context for the study

On 11 March 2020, the World Health Organisation (WHO) declared a global pandemic (WHO, 2020a) which was followed by governments around the world implementing measures to control the spread of COVID-19. Restrictions on movement and social distances measures meant that everyday life for many was affected. As a consequence, education services were disrupted affecting an estimated 1.6 billion children across more than 190 countries by August 2020 (United Nations, 2020a). Muñoz-Najar et al. (2021) note that less affluent countries lagged behind richer countries with regards to the 'scale and scope' (p.4) of the remote learning measures they were able to implement and therefore felt these effects to a greater extent. Alongside the loss of access to education services, children of all ages are also believed to have suffered from the effects of isolation, exposure to toxic stress at home and a lack of physical movement (Adegboye et al., 2021; Araújo et al., 2021; Hoffman & Miller, 2020; Larsen et al., 2022). Indeed, restrictions imposed by governments and subsequent policies may be perceived

as neglecting to protect children's rights as set out in The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN General Assembly, 1989) as 'Decisions were being made about children's lives that affected them but did not involve any attempt to listen to them, respect their views, or invite them into decision-making processes' (McNair et al., 2022, p.167).

The government restrictions in Peru required that all schools be closed to in person learning for 34 weeks; they were subsequently partially open for some students for a further 43 weeks, totalling 77 weeks of disruption (UNESCO, 2022). This period of full school closures is significantly longer than in neighbouring countries like Chile (14 weeks of full closures), Argentina (22 weeks), Colombia (23 weeks) and comparable to Ecuador (40 weeks) and Bolivia (43 weeks) (UNESCO, 2022). These figures are particularly relevant as recent research has found that learning losses were greater for students in schools which were closed for longer periods (De Witte & François, 2023; Jakubowski et al., 2025). Furthermore, the quarantine restrictions in Peru also resulted in children under the age of 14 being unable to leave the house from March 15, 2020, until May 18, 2020, after which children were permitted to leave the home for periods of no longer than 30 minutes, between 12pm and 6pm whilst being required to stay within 500 metres and accompanied by an adult (El Estado Peruano, 2020). These restrictions on movement for children were eased and re-established in response to surges in COVID-19 cases at local and regional levels.

The combination of school closures and restrictions on movement within a country where the quality of education was already perceived, before the pandemic, as being poor and unequal (Bing wu et al., 2000; Cueto et al., 2016; Cueto et al., 2017a; Hardgrove et al., 2014; OECD, 2018a; Saavedra & Gutierrez, 2020) suggests that there would be difficulties for ECE stakeholders. The perceived lack of quality in the education system in Peru is illustrated further by the OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) scores for 15- to 16-year-olds where Peru ranked last out of 64 countries in 2012 (OECD, 2014) and students scored lower than the OECD average in all areas in 2018 (OECD, 2018a). Although these tests have been criticised for their cultural bias, translations, and sample sizes (Fischbach et al., 2013; Froese-Germain, 2010; Mortimore, 2009) they are recognised throughout the world.

This study focuses on ECE because it is critical, both in terms of an individual's learning and educational development (OECD, 2020a), but also as part of wider societal goals to address

poverty and encourage social mobility (Bendini & Devercelli, 2022; Britto, 2017; Denboba et al., 2014). Indeed, improving access and quality of ECE services in Peru has been a focus in recent years (Castro & Rolleston, 2018; Josephson et al., 2017; OECD, 2025; UNICEF, 2014, 2021; Villalobos et al., 2019), reflecting wider regional and global development objectives such as the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal Four (United Nations, 2015a).

ECE was particularly vulnerable to the effects of the pandemic with some estimating that 167 million children worldwide had lost access to services (McCoy et al., 2021, p.e890). Although the precise consequences of disruption to ECE during this time are not yet known, there is already significant evidence of learning losses (Bartholo et al., 2022; Naufal Arzaqi & Faizah Romadona, 2021; Uğraş et al., 2023; Jakubowski et al., 2025; Betthäuser et al., 2023; De Witte & François, 2023). The learning losses associated with pre-primary school closures have the potential to have both short-term and local effects but also longer term and wider impacts in the form of significantly reducing individuals' trajectories and future earnings as adults (Nugroho et al., 2021), and negatively affecting a country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (Lopez Boo et al., 2020).

There are arguments against focusing solely on learning losses and that we should look to the opportunities for learning gains afforded to children such as the potential positive consequences of additional time spent as a family (Chen & Krieger, 2022). What is undeniable though, is that historically and across international contexts, children who have been behind the expected level of child educational development in those early days of life struggle to catch up with their peers later in their schooling (Rose & Alcott, 2015; UNICEF, 2019). This phenomenon is particularly true for children from vulnerable or disadvantaged backgrounds (Heckman, 2006) with UNICEF (2023) reporting that 'threats to early child development often cluster together, and so exposure to one risk usually means exposure to many' (p.12) highlighting how multiple risk factors combine to compound the impact on children's educational development.

Research within Peru has previously highlighted that children living in rural areas, attending public schools and from indigenous groups have been identified as being particularly vulnerable (Arteaga & Glewwe, 2014; Behrman et al., 2017; Saavedra & Gutierrez, 2020), with Alcázar, et al. (2020) emphasising this point as they report that 'poor, rural, indigenous girls are 91% more likely to be left behind in access to quality education than their wealthier, urban,

non-indigenous peers' (p.vi). Poverty, education level of parents, home language, ethnicity and socioeconomic group have also been identified as further significant risk factors in accessing quality ECE in Peru (Cueto et al., 2016; Young Lives, 2012). Furthermore, educational developmental gaps that appear in Peruvian children before primary age are maintained throughout schooling (Arteaga & Glewwe, 2014; Cueto et al., 2014, 2016) emphasising the impact of such delays in development.

Across the world there is concern that in many cases a child's socio-economic background determines their access to quality education (Guveli & Bayrakdar, 2021; Markowitz, 2020) and that the pandemic caused the attainment gap between children from disadvantaged families and their peers to widen (Spiteri, 2021; Spiteri et al., 2023; De Witte & François, 2023; Jakubowski et al., 2025). The contrasting access to quality ECE for children from poorer rural backgrounds compared to their peers in more affluent usually urban contexts prior to the pandemic coupled with the unprecedented restrictions and school closures in Peru, therefore, signify a context worthy of study.

This study offered an opportunity to explore the experiences of those on the front line of ECE during the period of school closures in Peru. To date there are few qualitative studies which give a voice to both parents/guardians and EC educators from vulnerable and non-vulnerable communities in this context. In light of the importance attributed to ECE, this study was conducted to better understand the challenges for key stakeholders in order to inform policy and practice in terms of future emergency/crisis planning, implementation of interventions to address any learning losses, but also more widely as a way to make a more resilient and robust ECE system in Peru and further afield.

The multiplicity of education, and in particular what quality ECE meant for different stakeholders across Peru was a consideration when undertaking this study. Research from low- and middle-income countries demonstrates that children who have access to high quality ECE perform better in formal schooling than those who do not (Rose et al., 2024; Simpson et al., 2024). The recognition of the need for high quality ECE has led to globally sustained efforts with policies and reports actively promoting increased access (OECD, 2019a; World Bank, 2019; UNESCO and UNICEF, 2024), indeed the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4.2 explicitly states its aim 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. (UN, 2015)

The Peruvian national curriculum (MINEDU, 2016) emphasises holistic child development as a key component of quality ECE, but as yet there has been little research which has examined how this was manifested during the significant period of school closures.

1.3 Research Questions

The study explored the impact of the pandemic on ECE in Peru focussing on the experiences of two groups of key stakeholders: EC educators and parents/guardians of young children. Having direct contact with and securing evidence from these two groups was important as they play vital roles in children's lives and educational development. Therefore, by better understanding the factors that influence their interactions with children and their capacity to be involved or provide access to ECE we can learn how to support children. Considering this the following research questions (RQ) were developed to guide and centre the study:

- **RQ1. What were the challenges for EC educators in Peru during the period of school closures caused by the COVID-19 pandemic?**
- **RQ2. What were the challenges for parents/guardians of children enrolled in ECE in Peru during the period of school closures caused by the COVID-19 pandemic?**
- **RQ3. How were challenges for EC educators and parents/guardians of children enrolled in ECE in Peru during the period of school closures caused by the COVID-19 pandemic different across contexts?**
- **RQ4. What are the implications for ECE considering the challenges faced by EC educators and parents/guardians during the period of school closures?**

1.4 Theoretical Considerations

Through the following section I will explain the theoretical frameworks which underpinned and influenced my research and justify their suitability in guiding this study.

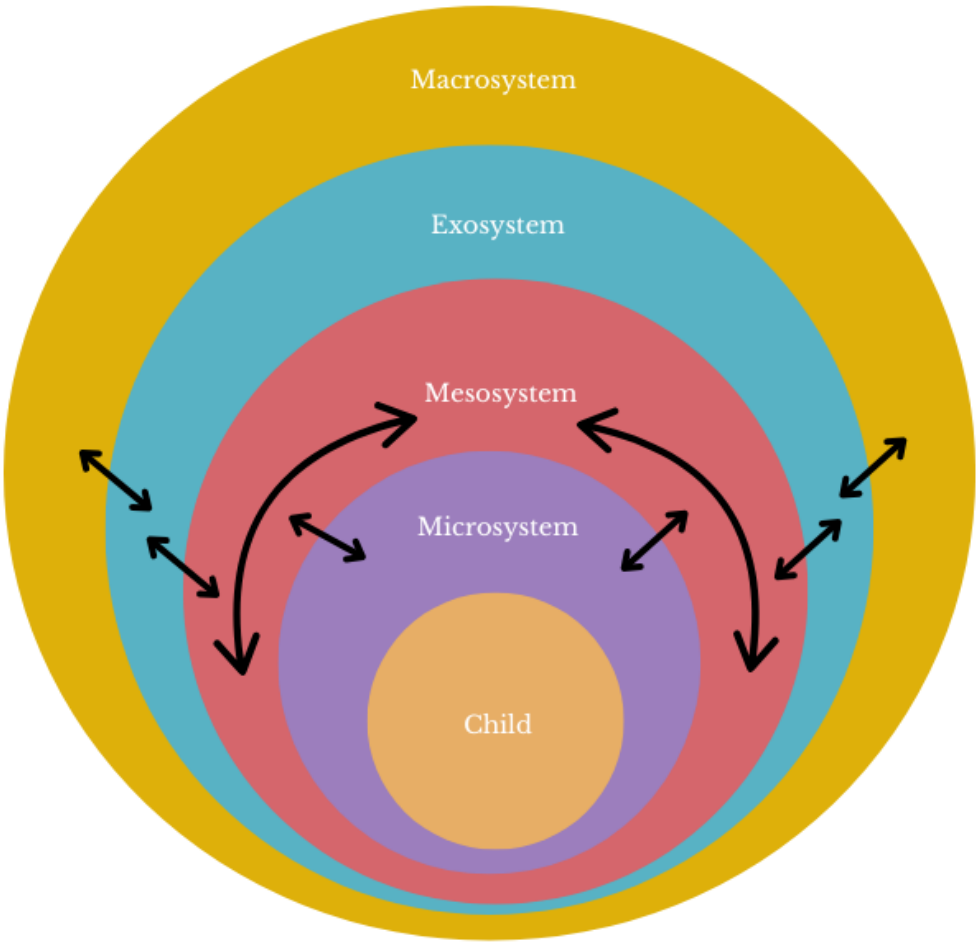
1.4.1 Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979) assumes that child development is influenced by environmental factors which can be categorised according to their proximity to the child. Established in the 1970s, and subsequently modified Urie Bronfenbrenner's views

and perspectives are thought to have 'had a profound effect on the way we think about child development and our approaches to working with young children and their families' (Hayes et al., 2023, p1). Indeed, Bronfenbrenner's work has significantly influenced ECE policy and practice (Anning & Ball, 2007; Baldock et al., 2013) drawing attention to the environmental influences and the dynamics between them.

The original Ecological Systems Model was based on four 'nested hierarchy of contexts' (Albrecht & Hill, 2022, p.253) representing environmental influences on the child as seen in figure 1.

Figure 1. Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Model (1979)



The child is located at the centre of the model signifying their importance and the active role they play in interacting with the environment. The inner most system and the immediate environment around the child, termed the microsystem, is made up of the child's family,

primary caregivers and educational setting. The second 'layer' of the model is the mesosystem which captures the interactions and communication between two or more of the varying elements in the microsystem. Moving further from the child within the exosystem, we find government policy, parents' workplace, teachers' emotional state and public health campaigns. These are external factors which indirectly influence child development compared to those direct influences in the microsystem. The outermost layer represents the ever further distant influences such as cultural and societal values and norms. The arrows within the model illustrated in figure 1 signify the interactions that occur between the elements which are situated across or within each of the different layers of the model.

The Ecological Systems Model is therefore entrenched in the position that human development cannot be seen in isolation and that context is crucial in understanding how a person grows and develops. However, to propose that Bronfenbrenner's work relates only to contextual influences on human development is an oversimplification (Tudge et al., 2009). Instead, the theory goes further and encourages a deeper analysis of the dynamic interactions between the context, environmental influencers and the changes which take place over time in both. The theory has evolved through the years (Rosa & Tudge, 2013) and took on a new form as the Bioecological Model of Human Development, defined as 'an evolving theoretical system for the scientific study of human development over time' (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006, p. 793). This adaptation took into consideration individuals' biological and psychological differences and how they interact with their environment and contexts in determining the conditions for human development (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994). Furthermore, the crucial addition of time to the existing model, in the form of the chronosystem (see figure 2 on the following page), is highly relevant to my research as the pandemic was an historic event which lasted for a significant period. The passage of time affected various elements across the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem and macrosystem in differing ways at differing periods, with the brown arrows in figure 2 signifying these interactions across systems. The model provides a holistic framework to explore the contextual and interconnected influences on child development during the pandemic period.

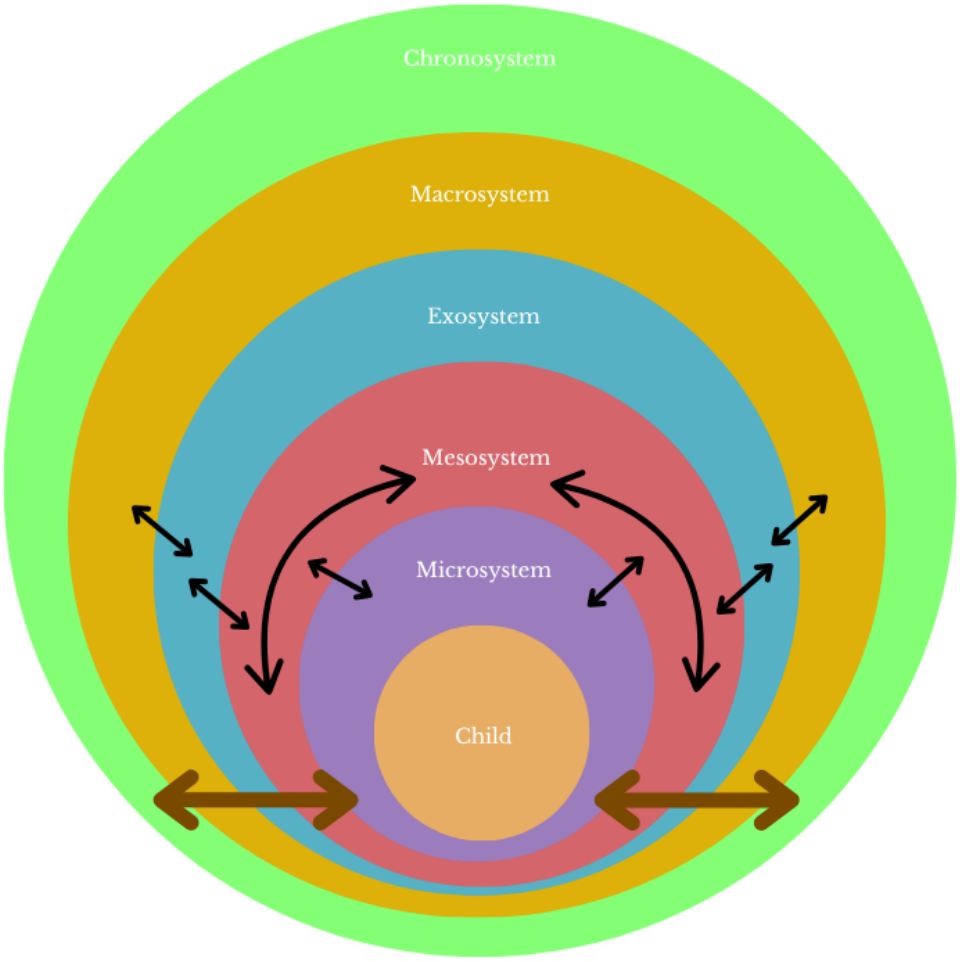


Figure 2. Adapted Ecological Systems Model based on the work of Bronfenbrenner and Ceci (1994)

As Tong and An (2023) note, whilst Bronfenbrenner's framework has been utilised 'to understand the complex interactions between individuals and their environments in diverse cultural contexts' (p.14), there have been occasions where it has been misused (Tong & An, 2023; Tudge et al., 2009, 2016). One such misuse is highlighted by Rosa and Tudge (2013) who state that when using Bronfenbrenner's model researchers may focus solely on the influence of the context on children's development and thus omit the mechanisms behind the reciprocal interactions between individuals' personal characteristics, the passage of time and environmental factors. These interactions are collectively referred to as 'proximal processes' (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994, p.568) and are considered key elements of the most recent iteration, or 'mature form' (p.244) of the Process, Person, Context, Time (PPCT) elements of Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological model (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006).

Despite the evolution of Bronfenbrenner's theories and the focus on proximal processes of his later work, early models are frequently used in educational case study research (Feriver et al.,

2022; Ishimine, 2011; Li & Huang, 2023; Richard et al., 2023). Additionally, Bronfenbrenner's early concepts have been influential in the development of ECE policies and curriculums such as the Head Start programme in the US where there was a focus on comprehensive access to ECE for low-income families (Zigler & Styfco, 2010), and in the UK with Sure Start and the Early Years Foundation Stage framework which emphasised enabling environments and positive interactions (Anning & Ball, 2007; Department for Education, 2017). These align with Bronfenbrenner's ecological perspective of the child and child development as they focus on parent involvement as well as fostering collaboration and interaction between stakeholders at varying levels in the environment. The widespread use of Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Model suggests that previous iterations provide appropriate depth and guidance for how we view interactions between individuals and their environments. Given the scope, cross-case nature and focus on the broader contextual understanding of my research it was decided to focus on an adapted version of Bronfenbrenner's early work as seen in figure 2.

A final consideration when using Bronfenbrenner's model as a lens through which to view my research was the emphasis the model gives to the child. Whilst not directly involved as participants, children were considered fundamental and a key driver for this research project. Therefore, the positioning of the child at the centre of Bronfenbrenner's framework was deemed appropriate and applicable to this study, with ECE stakeholders' experiences and perspectives informing our understanding of children's lives and access to quality ECE during the period of school closures. The positioning further emphasises the impact that context and interactions between elements across layers of the model have, both directly and indirectly, on children and their experiences.

1.4.2 Bourdieu's Theory of Social and Cultural Reproduction

Bourdieu's Social and Cultural Reproduction Theory is a framework which helps explain how society is shaped, highlighting the structures and processes which are available to individual members and communities. It can be useful in highlighting where inequalities exist between groups and how they can be bridged or widened. Indeed, the three concepts of field, habitus, and capital, which are explained later in this section, provide a framework for understanding the underlying conditions and mechanisms behind educational attainment disparities (Edgerton

& Roberts, 2014). The framework was useful in exploring these inequalities within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic as noted by Frohn (2021):

> Bourdieu's capital theory allows illustrating and analyzing the complex situation arising from the pandemic-related school closings, especially when investigating socially deprived settings. It shifts the focus to the system rather than individual players, preventing deficit-orientated attribution, and instead facilitates an exploration of the dynamics and accumulations of social and educational inequalities. (p.670)

These words resonate with my research due to the inequality that was evident in Peru, both in general terms in society (Ford et al., 2021), but also with respect to education before and during the pandemic (Alcázar et al., 2020; Arteaga & Glewwe, 2014; Cueto et al., 2017b; Diaz, 2006; Ford, 2021; Kin Bing Wu et al., 2000). Bourdieu's Capital Theory therefore provides a framework through which to examine these inequalities and explain how societal structures and contextual factors were significant in the ECE stakeholders' experiences during the pandemic.

One of the fundamental assumptions of Bourdieu's framework is that there is a link between family background and academic success, most notably when he writes:

> The scholastic yield from educational action depends on the cultural capital previously invested by the family. Moreover, the economic and social yield of the educational qualification depends on the social capital, again inherited, which can be used to back it up. (Bourdieu, 1986, p.244)

Whilst the nature of this relationship has been criticised for a lack of empirical evidence (Kingston, 2001), it has consistently been found to be true for families and children in Peru. For example, the Young Lives longitudinal study (De Los Ángeles Molina et al., 2025; Favara et al., 2021; Young Lives, 2025) which has followed two cohorts of Peruvian children's progress over more than 20 years has identified characteristics such as mother's education level, household wealth and area of residence as being key determinants in children's development and their life trajectories (Arteaga & Glewwe, 2014; Cueto et al., 2011, 2014, 2018; Young Lives, 2025). Therefore, using Bourdieu's theoretical lens provided a basis for deeper analysis of the family context, in addition to be used to support organisation of thought and as a tool for exploration.

As previously stated, Bourdieu's work focussed on field, habitus and capital, three main concepts which will now be explained in turn. Field was a term Bourdieu used to describe the

social spaces that exist around us, each being 'a relatively autonomous domain of activity that responds to rules of functioning and institutions that are specific to it and which define the relations among the agents' (Hilgers & Mangez, 2014, p.5). Therefore, these socially constructed arenas have their own rules, norms and structures where interactions take place within them. For this study, I will explore the 'field' of education, with the power dynamics between parents and educators particularly relevant to the Peruvian context due to society's historically negative perceptions of the status of the teaching profession (Saavedra & Gutierrez, 2020), and the high proportion of fee-paying parents at private schools in Peru.

A second key concept of Bourdieu's theory is that of 'habitus' which refers to the skills, preferences and dispositions that an individual learns through their experiences. These are thought to be 'rooted in family upbringing' (Edgerton & Roberts, 2014, p.195) and as Harker (1984) defined as 'the way a culture is embodied in the individual' (p.188). In terms of my research habitus refers to how context and past experiences influenced ECE stakeholders' responses and lives during the pandemic.

The third key concept of Bourdieu's theory is based upon the assumption that individuals can have access to three forms of capital: economic, social and cultural. Economic capital refers to the immediate capital that is directly convertible to money (Bourdieu, 1986). Social capital is associated with the capacity to access a social network, either formally or informally. Cultural capital comprises of three forms as noted by Bourdieu when he wrote:

> Cultural capital can exist in three forms: in the embodied state, i.e., in the form of long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body; in the objectified state, in the form of cultural goods (pictures, books, dictionaries, instruments, machines, etc.), which are the trace or realization of theories or critiques of these theories, problematics etc.; and in the institutionalized state [. . .] of educational qualifications. (Bourdieu, 1986, p.243)

Critically, all three of these forms of cultural capital are applicable to this study and can help improve our understanding of the way in which social origin in the Peruvian context may or may not provide advantages in social selection (Lamont & Lareau, 1988). The suggestion from existing research is that inequalities have widened during the pandemic, this framework will look at the causes and influences of this from a social and cultural reproduction perspective.

1.4.3 Bronfenbrenner and Bourdieu as Integrated Theories

Bronfenbrenner and Bourdieu's ideas and perspectives have been used independently of each other in recent studies to explore the impact of the pandemic on a range of issues (Albrecht & Hill, 2022; Chachar et al., 2021; Edwards et al., 2024; Erdreich, 2024; Jiang et al., 2024; Kallander et al., 2021). There is also precedent in the literature for their application to studies exploring the impact of the pandemic on the experiences of ECE stakeholders, for example Atiles et al. (2021), Stites et al. (2021) Nowicka et al. (2022) and Stienwandt et al. (2022) have used Bronfenbrenner, whilst Frohn (2021), Hagenaars et al. (2022) and Sanders-Smith et al. (2024) have used Bourdieu.

The two frameworks are also thought to be complementary and have been integrated in several recent studies to help provide a deeper understanding of the phenomenon being studied (Chen, 2024; Houston, 2017). I combine them in this study by using them to analyse how access to different forms of capital at different environmental layers impacted the experiences and perspectives of ECE stakeholders during the period of school closures. By combining these theoretical frameworks, my research provided unique insights that offer a nuanced portrayal of ECE stakeholders' perspectives through a deeper exploration of their intricate social-cultural interactions, addressing the gaps in existing literature.

1.5 Introduction to Peru: A Country Profile

The purpose of the following country profile is to provide a general overview of Peru in the years leading up to, and then during the period of school closures caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. This background information is essential in providing context to the experiences of the participants from this study. The profile also highlights how the pandemic has uniquely affected the people of Peru and why the study was needed.

1.5.1 Geography

Peru is a South American country which shares borders with Brazil, Colombia, Bolivia, Chile, and Ecuador. It is the third largest country in South America in terms of total land area at 1.280,000 sq. km. To put this into context, Peru is approximately five times larger than the UK (241,936 sq. km) and 2.3 times larger than the largest European country, France (547,557 sq. km) (all land area figures from The World Bank, 2022). The country is organised into 25 regions which are spread across three distinct geographically determined regions (coast, Andes mountains and the Amazon jungle) which have unique culture, geography, ethnicity and

economic development (Castillo et al., 2019). This study draws on data collected from two case studies situated within the coastal region and two case studies from the mountainous region.

The pacific coastline stretches for more than 2,400km from Ecuador in the north to Chile in the South. The National Census of 2017 found that 58% (INEI, 2018a, p.17) of the total population lived on the coast, the majority of which was drawn to Lima, the capital city. The population in Lima showed an average yearly increase of 2% from 2000 to 2018 (United Nations, 2018, p.27) which reflects an overall trend of migration from rural to urban regions. This is further illustrated in data from the United Nations (2015b) which shows that the urban population increased from 41% in 1950 (p.211) to 78.6% in 2015 (p.213), with this trend predicted to continue with 86.2% of the population living in urban areas by 2050 (p.213).

The mountainous Andes was home to 28.1% (INEI, 2018a, p.18) of the total population in 2017, a figure which has fallen sharply from 65% in 1940 (INEI, 2018a. p.18), representing significant migration of people away from this rural area. The third region is that of the Amazon jungle which makes up the nearly half of Peru's land area and was home to just 13.9% of the population in 2017. Due to the scope of this study and the relatively small population dwelling in the jungle region the decision was taken to focus on the coastal and mountainous regions of the country.

The map in figure 3 on the following page shows the geographical location of the four case studies conducted during this research project. They were selected as they represent a mix of contrasting characteristics, i.e. both urban and rural locations, and private and public funded schools. Each case study context is outlined in more detail in Chapter 5.

Figure 3. A Map to show the geographical distribution of case studies.

1.5.2 Population

Population density (people per sq. km of land area) had increased from 21 in 2000 to 26 in 2020 (World Bank, 2025a) reflecting overall population increase in Peru from 26.60 million in 2000 to 32.84 million in 2020 (World Bank, 2021b) and most recently estimated in 2024 as 34.038 million (INEI, 2024, p.10). Many factors are interacting to cause this population growth, for example, life expectancy at birth has increased dramatically from 51 years in 1960 to 76 years in 2019 (World Bank, 2025c); the death rate per year per 1000 people has fallen from 17 in 1960 to 6 in 2019 (World Bank 2025d); and infant mortality per year per 1000 live births has fallen from 154 in 1960 to 14 in 2019 (World Bank, 2025e). Increased immigration is certainly a cause for population growth in recent years with estimates ranging from 800,000 displaced Venezuelans entering Peru by 2019 (United Nations, 2019) to over a million by 2021

(US Embassy, 2021). The majority of migrants settled in Lima and Callao (a district of the Lima Metropolitan area) affecting many areas of life such as public health (Mendoza & Miranda, 2019) and the economy (Morales & Piérola, 2020).

During the pandemic period 26% of the population was between the ages of 0 to 14 years old and 9% was over 65 years of age (World Bank, 2025f) demonstrating that Peru had a relatively young population when compared with countries such as Chile for which 13% of the population was over 65 years old, Argentina 12%, Brazil 10% and the UK 19% (World Bank, 2025f). The proportion of the population aged 65 years and over in Peru was, however, growing and had in fact, more than doubled between 2000 and 2019 from 4% of the total population to 9%. To further illustrate these population characteristics 9% were under five in 2020 (NCFECD, 2020) although this shows a slight decline from 10% in 2018 (NCFECD, 2018) it still represents a large percentage of the total population when compared with other countries such as the UK (6%), Colombia (8%) and Chile (6%) (NCECD, 2020).

National Census data from 2017, three years before the period of school closures, the main language of communication in Peru was Spanish and was spoken by 82.6% (INEI, 2018a, p.197) of the population who learnt this language during childhood, the remaining 17.4% of the population spoke a mixture of 47 indigenous languages (MINEDU, 2017), the most frequent of which was Quechua (13.9%) (INEI, 2018a, p.197). Quechua speakers were more likely to live in rural areas and made up 30.3% (INEI, 2018a, p.199) of the population in these regions. Ethnic identification and language are linked closely in Peru and during the 2017 National Census the population aged 12 and over were asked to identify which ethnic group they identified as, 60.2% responded they saw themselves as from a mixed ethnic background, 22.3% as Quechua, 5.9% as White, 3.6% as Afro-descent, 2.4% as Aimara, 0.3% as Asháninka, 0.2% as part of another Indigenous people, 0.2% as Awajún, 0.1% as Shipibo Konibo, 0.1% as Nikkei, 0.1% as Tusan, 1.1% as other and 3.3% not responding (INEI, 2018a, p.214).

1.5.3 Economy

According to The World Bank in the years leading up to the pandemic Peru's economy had grown swiftly due to a number of reasons such as strong macroeconomic policy and structural reform (World Bank, 2015). This rapid economic progress was demonstrated by the country's GDP rising from 51.74 billion US dollars in 2000 to 228.35 billion dollars in 2019 (World Bank, 2021a). This rise was consistent with other South American countries which although starting from different bases have experienced significant increases over the same period, for

example GDP in Chile rose from 78.34 to 278.29 billion dollars, Colombia 99.88 to 323.03 billion dollars, Ecuador 17.54 to 107.6 billion dollars and Brazil from 655.45 billion dollars to 1.87 trillion dollars (World Bank, 202a1). Overall, these GDP values and those of Peru are dwarfed by economic superpowers such as The United States which recorded a GDP value of 21.35 trillion dollars in 2019 and China which recorded a GDP value of 14.56 trillion dollars in 2019 (World Bank, 2021a). These comparisons show that although Peru has experienced economic growth the overall value of its economy is small within the global context.

A consequence of the growth in Peru's GDP in the 15 years prior to the pandemic saw a reduction in poverty from 58.7% of the population living in poverty in 2004 to 20.2% in 2019 (World Bank, 2023, p.18). During the same period the percentage of people living in extreme poverty fell from 16.4% to 2.9% (World Bank, 2023, p.18). Although poverty reduction occurred across Peru there were regional differences, for example those in coastal regions were more likely to have moved out of poverty in the 20 years before the pandemic as poverty had fallen from 67% in 2004 to 19% in 2018 (IMF, 2020, p.38) and in rural areas from 80% in 2004 to 36% in 2018 (IMF, 2020, p.38).

Total external debt stood at 34.7% of GDP in 2019 (IMF, 2021, p.3) but had dipped as low as 18.4% in 2013 (World Bank, 2021b) this reflects the rapid economic growth that occurred between 2004 and 2013 when Peru had an annual GDP growth rate of 6.6% which allowed high growth and low inflation (World Bank, 2023, p.19). The following years continued to see growth but not at such an extreme rate as GDP rose at a steady average rate of 2.2 to 4% between 2014 to 2019 (World Bank, 2021c). The IMF (2020) suggested that this slowdown may have been due to a combination of the adverse effects of the El Niño phenomenon (changes in weather patterns and surface temperatures of the Pacific which occurred in 2017), reduced global growth and the volatile global financial market.

It is thought that up to 68.5% of workers in Peru were engaged in informal work in 2018 (INEI, 2019a, p.27). According to Peru's national statistics office there are two dimensions of this informal economy, the first is that of unregistered business and enterprise and the second is that of informal employment which refers to employments that do not include the benefits set out in employment law such as holiday pay and social security. This distinction is important as up to 16% of the working aged population working in informal employment are employed in the formal sector (INEI, 2019a, p.28). This shows that many workers although employed by registered companies in the formal sector are still classified as informal workers as they do not

receive many of the benefits, this reflects the gradual process and nuanced process of formalisation (Díaz et al., 2018; Salazar-Xirinachs & Chacaltana, 2018). Informal workers are particularly vulnerable to the effects of individual, household or macro-economic changes as they are usually in low skilled jobs which are associated with low social protection and volatile changes to their pay (OECD, 2020b).

Peru has an abundance of natural resources, and industries associated with these such as mining and agricultural allow the country to export significant levels of commodities and produce. The IMF (2020) reports that mining, oil and gas make up two thirds of all exports and contributed 22% to overall GDP (p.38). While agricultural makes up significantly less of the overall exports, it is an industry that has grown in recent years, for example seasonal fruit and vegetable exports rose from 0.4% of GDP in 2001 to 2.7% in 2019 (IMF, 2020, p.38).

1.5.4 Covid-19 in Peru

The pandemic had a profound impact on the daily lives of nearly everyone across the globe. For several months entire populations were instructed to remain indoors and not leave their homes and lived with varying restrictions on movement, curfews and physical distancing measures for extended periods. The first official case of COVID-19 recorded in Peru was on 6 March 2020 (MINSA, 2020) and a few days later on 11 March a national state of health emergency was declared. This declaration allowed the Peruvian government to redirect resources and personnel to help face the pandemic. On 16 March 2020, a national state of emergency was invoked which enabled the government to enforce a period of obligatory social isolation. This involved closing all non-essential businesses with only food markets, banks and pharmacies remaining open whilst forcing the population to stay at home for an initial period of 15 days. Borders were closed and all non-essential travel was prohibited. This initial period of quarantine lasted for 107 days, during which time different measures were explored such as alternating which days of the week men and women could enter supermarkets and banks, allowing the population to leave their homes for periods of daily exercise and the gradual relaxing of measures after the number of cases and deaths had peaked in June 2020. There were several waves of infection which led to the reintroduction and lifting of restrictions.

Despite the restrictions put in place, Peru is thought to have been one of the most severely affected countries (Carreras et al., 2021; Dyer, 2020; Herrera-Añazco et al., 2021; Schwalb & Seas, 2021; Villar et al., 2024) with one of the highest COVID-19 mortality rates. The combination of an overwhelmed health system (Fraser, 2020), an informal workforce (Carreras

et al., 2021; Lust, 2021), political instability, large scale internal migration and immigration (UNICEF, 2021a), and existing poverty and social inequality (Castillo, 2020; IMF, 2020) compounded the effects. It is with an awareness of these varied aspects and the wider country context that the case studies in this research were conducted, and data were viewed.

1.6 Research context and my development as a researcher

Whilst this study focusses on the experiences of EC educators and parents during the pandemic period, it is also noteworthy that the research was undertaken within this context too. This had a direct impact on the investigation, influencing aspects ranging from the interviews being conducted online to additional ethical considerations. While the details of these methodological adaptations are further explained in chapter 3, it is here that I will explore how the research context impacted my own experiences and professional development as a researcher.

The unprecedented nature of the pandemic brought with it a set of unique challenges that I faced as a researcher. The restrictions on movement put in place in efforts to control the spread of COVID-19 meant that I was unable to attend in-person meetings with my PhD supervisors and peers or access the physical resources available at the university. These logistical difficulties were mitigated through the use of technology, and in many respects, this experience provided the opportunity to advance my digital literacy skills, develop my awareness of online resources and build online support networks. Utilising technology to overcome these circumstances and work collaboratively online provided first-hand experience into the significance of capital in relation to the challenges faced by participants, allowing me nuanced insights into their lived experience. Furthermore, the isolation, uncertainty and apprehension I faced were significant and required that I learned strategies to manage my own well-being. Sharing this context helped me to relate to and empathise with participants, strengthening the trustworthiness and credibility of the research.

As the restrictions on movement were eased and then removed, I attended and presented at two in-person educational research conferences in the United Kingdom. By attending these events I was able to meet and speak informally with fellow students and researchers who shared their recent work and, in several cases, their perspectives on my research. Whilst I had been able to network online and hear from peers, the spontaneity, quantity and quality of interactions were far greater when attending conferences. These in-person events developed my thinking and reasoning, capacity to articulate findings and provided opportunities to hear about different methodological approaches. The pandemic, therefore, impacted my professional development

as a researcher in a variety of ways providing a set of unique challenges along with significant opportunities.

1.7 Structure of thesis

This introduction is followed by the following chapters:

- Chapter 2: Literature Review

This seeks to examine the existing research from both international and Peruvian contexts highlighting the key challenges and environmental considerations for EC educators and parents/guardians of young children during school closures and the shift to distance learning models.

- Chapter 3: Methodology

Through the methodology chapter I explain the approach, methods, data analysis and data collection instruments used along with justifications and evaluations for each. Ethical considerations are also reviewed within this chapter, highlighting the adaptations and considerations necessary for research during the pandemic and with vulnerable participants.

- Chapter 4: The Experts

Chapter 4 provides the broader perspective findings from interviews with expert participants. It helps contextualise the findings from the individual case studies found in the following chapter.

- Chapter 5: The Case Studies

In this second findings chapter, I take each of the four case studies in turn, reporting the significant contextual details of each, participant details and then the findings.

- Chapter 6: Cross-Case Analysis, Findings and Discussion

In chapter 6 a cross-case analysis and discussion of the study's main findings is presented. This includes an integration of my findings with the existing literature and directly addresses the RQs previously outlined.

- Chapter 7: Conclusion

The conclusion and closing chapter of my thesis provides a summary of the main findings from the study, the contribution these findings make to our existing knowledge, limitations of the study and the identification and exploration of areas for future research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction to Literature Review

The following introduction serves three main functions; firstly, it will outline the importance of this chapter in the development of this study; secondly, it will explain how and why sources were selected and used; and finally, it will outline the subsequent sections of the main body of the literature review giving the reader a strong framework to understand the significance of each section and how it is relevant to this study.

The process of constructing this literature review began early in the development of this research as I read a range of material much of which may not be directly cited here but was crucial in guiding my thinking and later reasoning. Examples of this broader reading included delving deep into the political history of Peru to examine how a variety of factors had combined to influence and shape the current education system. A second example was exploratory reading about how the pandemic impacted societies and individuals around the world not just from an ECE or Peruvian perspective, this later allowed me to consider how my research fits within a much broader context. Over time this process of wider reading formed the basis from which I developed the aims of the research which then allowed me to refine the focus of the study helping me to 'develop sharper and more insightful questions about the topic' (Yin, 2018, p.47). What followed was then more focused reading and synthesis of information that were directly related to the aims of the study which in turn led to further refinement of aims and questions in an ongoing and dynamic process.

As the aims of the study were clarified there was a greater emphasises on ensuring rigour and validity of my thinking and writing in terms of the type of sources used. Therefore, whilst synthesising previous research findings, definitions and ideas efforts were made to include peer-reviewed sources such as journal articles, published reports from recognised international development organisations (i.e. UNICEF, UN, OECD, etc.), and government published reports or information. Where these were not used such as online blogs or media reports the type of source was clearly stated within the text. Primary methods of searching for sources of information came directly from organisation and government websites and journal search engines such as EBSCO, JSTOR and ERIC. As this was and continues to be a new developing field of research, I also utilised alerts and notifications from Google Scholar and periodically checked within university depositories, particularly in Peru, for grey literature in the form of

dissertations and theses which could provide insights and also references to other relevant key sources.

What follows in this chapter are several sections which demonstrate how the existing literature both guided and shaped my research. I first discuss why ECE is a global focus, how ECE is defined and how the quality of ECE is measured. As this research took place in a country where vulnerability to poverty was, in 2023, at 'its highest level in two decades' (World Bank, 2023, p.10), the concept of vulnerability is then explored and discussed. The focus then shifts to distance learning programmes adopted in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, where I will discuss the relevance and recommendations of such programmes in ECE. I will then explore the challenges experienced by parents/guardians of young children and EC educators during the period of school closures. Considering the wider implications of ECE in society previously outlined in the introduction chapter, I will then discuss the impact on inequality with an emphasis on ECE. Finally, a conclusion to the literature reviews offers an overview of the key studies and research along with a conceptual framework which forms the basis for this study.

2.2 Global Focus and Defining ECE

Through the following section I explore the literature which puts ECE on the global agenda as a way to address poverty and social inequalities and share definitions of ECE from various international sources.

2.2.1 A global focus on ECE

Over the last 20 years there has been an enhanced focus on the importance of ECE from governments, policy makers and international organisations such as UNESCO, OECD, WB, UN and UNICEF who have developed policies such as The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) (UN General Assembly, 2000), Sustainable Development Goals (SGDs) (United Nations, 2015a) and Starting Strong 2017 (OECD, 2017) and channelled funding to support growth and improve quality. Indeed, ECE appears prominently in the SDGs agenda, a set of objectives developed by the United Nations in 2015 as part of a wider global project to improve the lives of every person on Earth by providing them with the skills and resources to live prosperous lives (United Nations, 2015a).

The SGDs built on the successes of the MDGs; a similar set of global objectives aimed at helping the most vulnerable in society from 2000 until 2015. Although some have criticised the usefulness of such targets as they do not 'accurately reflect with-in country variability of

progress towards the targets' (Gyorkos et al, 2009, p. 645) and that there is the potential for goal orientated cultures to develop whereby assessed outcomes become the only focus, they are still perceived to be key in driving international development policy (Migiro, 2007).

MDG 2 aimed to ensure universal access to primary education and was assessed using enrolment and completion data in primary and secondary education as well as literacy rates in 15 - 24-year-olds. Results in Peru show that there were various advancements made in these areas between 2000 and 2015 with Benavides et al. (2016) reporting that net enrolment rates in primary schools rose from 92% in 2002 to 96% in 2012 (p.28), that the percentage of children who completed the sixth grade rose from 38.5% in 2011 to 69.4% in 2012 (p.28) and literacy rates reached 98.7% among 15-24 year olds (p.28). These data suggest that Peru progressed in each of the criteria used to measure MDG 2 with relatively high scores across the three indicators. However, as previously stated by Gyorkos (2009) these indicators cannot solely be used to describe the situation within the country. For example, The British Council (2015) identified quality as a key component that needed to be examined as although enrolment was high, quality was considered low. This has been a familiar story throughout the last 50 years of education in Peru, with enrolment rates and completion rates in primary education high but educational quality considered low (World Bank, 2007; Schwab, 2017).

SDG 4 was critical for education policy development in Peru as it highlighted the need to focus on quality education and that this should begin in ECE, two areas not identified by the MDGs. Indeed, SDG 4 states that every child should have access to quality ECE and that this will not just benefit each child but the wider community too, as ECE is used as a driver for social change and a way of breaking the cycle of poverty.

For some, improving ECE is seen as one of the 'smartest investments' (Sayre et al., 2015, p. 1) in a country, community or family as it provides an opportunity to drive economic growth, affect social change and eradicate poverty (Alderman, 2011). Investing in high quality ECE programmes is also associated with higher graduation rates in high school and a 'substantial' decrease in the need for, often costly, special education programmes (McCoy et al., 2017, p.475). The process of investing in people forms the basis of human capital theory, the modern version of which was developed in the early 1960's and proposes that education is treated as an investment with the consequences of education or improved productivity treated as capital (Becker, 1964; Mincer, 1958; Schultz, 1959, 1960). The improved human capital leads to increased earning potential associated with social change (Campaña et al., 2017). It is

important to note here that human capital theory relates primarily to individual effort and achievement and should not be confused with Bourdieu's Theory of Social Reproduction which highlights how societal structures are influential in determining individuals' opportunities.

Although there have been limited long term studies that have attempted to financially calculate the effectiveness of ECE programmes, a study by García et al. (2016) in the US used multiple tracking data for individuals in their mid-thirties who had been enrolled in ECE programmes when they were children. The study found that along with many long-term benefits they estimate a monetised rate of return of 13.7% per annum. While this is based on a series of predictions and estimates it adds weight to the viewpoint that ECE programmes and social policies have the potential to generate sizeable gains. Despite the fact that human capital theory has been criticised for being too simplistic (Marginson, 2019) and too focussed on developing commodities rather than young children (Auld & Morris, 2019; Skinner, 2018), it forms the basis of many education policies and initiatives targeted at global development. Indeed, many ECE policies and reports openly cite the improvement of human capital as one of their objectives (Alderman, 2011; Campaña et al., 2017; Denboba et al., 2014).

ECE rather than any other stage of education has been targeted to improve human capital and change society as investment in young children has bigger returns than later in life (Denboba et al., 2014). At this stage of life, the brain is developing at a quicker rate than at any other point (Grantham-McGregor et al., 2007) as the child is quickly improving their cognitive, linguistic, social, emotional and motor skills (Denboba et al., 2014; Sayre et al., 2015; Sylva & Wiltshire, 1993). Children who have gaps in development and fall behind their peers at this stage remain behind their peers throughout their schooling and into adult life (Castro, 2017; Schady et al., 2014) suggesting that the gaps are best addressed when children are young through ECE.

2.2.2 Defining ECE

As I will be exploring the provision of ECE in Peru during the pandemic, it is necessary to examine how this term is understood and recognised both internationally and within the ECE system in Peru. By breaking the phrase down, we can first see that early childhood is a culturally constructed concept that changes in meaning over time and across societies (Sonu & Yoon, 2020; Woodhead, 2006). It is argued that it is in essence a 'cultural invention' (Wood, 2008, p.3) and can therefore be difficult to universally define. The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (2006) accepts this difficulty when it states that 'Definitions of early childhood

vary in different countries and regions, according to local traditions and the organisation of primary school systems' (p.2), as a result they put forward a very general definition of early childhood as being the period of a person's life from birth until eight. This is then extended to include education as seen through the following definitions from various international sources:

> 'ECE has become an umbrella term, used with varying intent by people concerned with the care and instruction of children from birth to eight years of age.' (Law, 1979, p.200)

> 'Early childhood care and education (ECCE), covering the period from birth to 8 years old, is crucial because it leverages a time of significant brain development in children. Quality ECCE can set the foundation for good health, nutrition, learning success, social-emotional development, and economic productivity throughout life.' (UNESCO, 2021).

From the definitions above we can see that there is common agreement that ECE covers the period from birth to eight years of age and includes the concepts of care, education, and holistic child development. The definitions are broad and could potentially cover a variety of services and providers, such as schools, community centres, nurseries, playgroups, kindergartens, and day care centres as well as informal family settings. These could be managed, funded, and influenced through a variety of social, education, and welfare government departments, private sector companies or non-profit organisations. In Peru the definition shares many of these characteristics as demonstrated below.

> Early education is the first level in regular basic education. It serves children under the age of six and is provided in formal or non-formal settings under the terms set out in the regulations. The State also undertakes to provide for children's health and nutritional needs within a framework of intersectoral action. Early education is coordinated with primary education, ensuring educational and curricular consistency and preserving identity, specificity and administrative and management autonomy.
> With family and community support, early education aims to promote childrearing practices that contribute to children's all-round development, encompassing their socio-emotional and cognitive growth, oral and artistic expression and psychomotor development, as well as respect for their rights. (UNESCO, 2006, section 1.1)

In this definition we see how in Peru there is a focus on children under the age of six and how it is not limited to formal schooling or educational institutions but includes family and community as more holistic elements of child development are identified. These elements were considered important for this study as school closures disrupted both the formal schooling and

the home environment (to varying degrees depending on context). Therefore, I will now discuss what ECE looks like in greater depth through the following sub-section.

2.2.3 What does ECE look like in Peru?

In Peru, ECE is approached from within an intersectoral framework as early education, health and nutritional needs are supported jointly by the state, with programmes and policies encouraging government departments to work together (UNESCO, 2006). To limit the scope and breadth of this research project in this thesis I will focus on the services of providers that correspond to the early educational development of children aged three to six years old (rather than including health and nutrition). However, there is an acknowledgment that educational development forms only part of early childhood development.

By Peruvian law children are required to attend at least one year of pre-primary education (Guadalupe et al., 2018) with pre-pandemic estimates that over 80% of three- to five-year-olds were enrolled in some form of ECE programme (Josephson et al., 2017) and by 2018, 97% (UNESCO, 2019, p.29) of children were participating in organised learning one year before entry to primary education (aged 6). In Peru, ECE is divided into two distinct phases, Cycle One runs from 90 days old to two years and 11 months and Cycle Two for children three to five years old (DRELM, 2015). The national curriculum (MINEDU, 2016) for Cycle One and Cycle two is based upon seven key principles of respect, health, safety, autonomy, movement, communication and play.

Cycle Two consists of two main types of programme; more formal preschools in both public and private sectors often referred to as ‘jardines’ (Hanno et al., 2020, p.3) and ‘PRONOEIs’ (Independent Infant Education Programmes) (Diaz, 2006). The ‘jardines’ are centre based preschools which are run by teachers (Cueto et al., 2016); there are around 34,000 in Peru with approximately 70% run by the public sector (Guadalupe et al., 2018). In urban areas the majority of children attend centres close to their home (Araujo et al., 2017) although those in Lima do have an open enrolment policy, meaning that children are able to attend centres that are outside their local neighbourhood. The PRONOEIs are less formal, run by community leaders, parents with some training, or teachers and are usually located in rural communities (Cueto et al., 2016; Diaz, 2006). They often pull together other community projects that help the overall living situation of the child as they have wider societal aims such as reducing child mortality rates, improving access to water and ensuring that food is available to prevent stunting and malnutrition (Llanos Zuloaga, 2016).

The children who attend PRONOEIs are generally from poorer communities and historically achieve lower results in primary school than their peers who attend 'jardines' (Diaz, 2006). Since ECE was made compulsory in 1993 there has been a rapid rise in the number of providers, particularly in the private sector which saw a growth of 57% between 1998 and 2008 (Young Lives, 2012, p.2). In many cases insufficient attention has been paid to the quality of the services provided (Diaz, 2006) and this, coupled with programmes being underfunded has led to an unequal and low quality ECE system in Peru. In response to the need to improve quality of services several initiatives and interventions have been implemented which will now be outlined in the following sub section.

2.2.4 Improving ECE in Peru

Short-term interventions aimed at improving particular skills sets have been shown to be effective in ECE in Peru, for example a small study of 30 children of five years of age in an experimental group who received 16 hours additional targeted pre-reading support each week showed greater improvement than the 30 children control group (Velarde Consoli et al., 2011). This study took place in Callao, a mainly urbanised zone which forms part of the Callao-Lima Metropolitan area associated with higher crime rates than other parts of the country (Sataloff et al., 2017). Similar results have been found with the implementation of longer-term intervention programmes conducted in poorer rural regions such as Ayacucho, Huancavelica y Huánuco where the Programme to Improve ECE (PMEI) (MINEDU, 2012) aimed to provide safe and adequate learning environments for children three to five years old (structural quality) and improve teacher pedagogy, interactions and family engagement (process quality). The programme was developed to address the inequalities brought about by the extreme poverty in these three regions which exceeded the national average in 2012.

An evaluation of the programme conducted by Alcazar and Chinen (2018) included a total of 1339 five-year-olds and found that those who were enrolled in the PMEI showed significantly greater progress in cognitive development than those who were in the control group. Two further significant findings from the study were that parents demonstrated higher levels of engagement with their children if they were a part of the PMEI, with 80% of parents reporting that they read with their child compared to the control group figure of 55%, and fathers were more likely to spend time playing with their child (67%) compared to fathers of children in the control group (55%) (Alcazar & Chinen, 2018, p.11). The second finding of note was that the pedagogical training of teachers was well received but this did not have a significant effect on

the type and duration of activities that children participated in when compared to teachers in the control group. These findings led Alcazar and Chinen (2018) to highlight the importance of working with parents not only in transmitting messages about improving parenting practices, but also to explain and make them part of the school's pedagogical proposals.

This understanding of the importance of parental engagement with children for child development in Peru had previously been identified with the 'Cuna Mas' programme being established in 2012 'to support the holistic development of children under three living in poverty, improve families' childrearing knowledge and practices, and strengthen attachments between caregivers and children' (Josephson et al., 2017, p.5). The programme involves day care services in urban settings and weekly home visits and group sessions in rural settings for children aged six months to 36 months. By 2016, 85,000 families had been reached (Josephson et al., 2017, p.6) representing a significant proportion of the targeted population. A report by the Inter-American Development Bank (Araujo et al., 2018) examining the Cuna Mas programme found that process quality (interactions between facilitators and parents and children) was positively related with child development outcomes, but that more research was necessary to establish effective strategies to support the workforce responsible for home visits, particularly because the programme operates at scale in a low resource context. However, with home visits not possible during periods of the pandemic it is not clear how the relationship between the limited levels of process quality affected child outcomes. This highlights the importance of research exploring ECE stakeholders' experiences during the pandemic period such as in this study.

2.3 Defining quality ECE before and during the pandemic

Given the recent nature of the pandemic and the hurried manner through which governments, providers and educators adapted to remote teaching and learning there is little research with regards to what constitutes quality practice in ECE during this period. The purpose of this section of the literature review is to assess what is meant by the term 'quality' in ECE by exploring the reports and recommendations developed before the pandemic by international organisations. With these concepts in mind along with the latest recommendations I will explore what quality ECE in Peru looks like and examine the debates surrounding the appropriateness of using technology with young children.

2.3.1 Measuring Quality in ECE

Enabling access to quality ECE is critical as it has been shown to minimise the effects of long-term inequalities in low- and middle-income countries (Lu et al., 2020; Neuman & Powers, 2021; Cortázar et al., 2020) and reduce the need for more costly intervention programmes later in life (OECD, 2025; Young et al., 2021). It is vital that quality ECE is available for all children but particularly those most vulnerable so that the development deficits often seen in these groups are addressed at an early stage and not permitted to disrupt learning long term (Philpott, 2021). High quality programmes are necessary for achieving positive outcomes, underfunded low quality programmes cannot produce the same results (Barnett & Ackerman, 2006; Hartwig, 2020).

It is considered important to measure quality in ECE practices so that the best and most effective strategies and delivery of ECE curriculum are shared and promoted across settings and between countries. The World Bank published a tool kit that allows strategies and techniques to be adapted to measure early child development in lower and middle and income countries (Fernald et al., 2017). Within the toolkit it is explained that it is necessary to accurately assess child outcomes so that impact and effectiveness of specific policies or programmes can be evaluated. Identifying quality ECE is also an important consideration when assessing how countries are progressing towards SGD4 and in particular indicator 4.2.1 which assesses the 'Proportion of children aged 24-59 months who are developmentally on track in health, learning and psychosocial well-being.' (UNESCO, 2021, p.1). Of significance here is how professionals and researchers assess that children are 'developmentally on track', the term suggests that there is an international standardised approach to assessing child development and therefore quality of provision that all ECE providers are able to follow. Unfortunately, this is not the case as each country sets their own standards and performance levels defined in their assessments may not be consistent (UNESCO, 2018; Pushparatnam & Luna-Bazaldua, 2021). What follows are four of the different international approaches to measuring quality which have been developed and feature prominently in the literature explored under the following headings: a) Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys, b) International Early Learning and Child Well-being Study, c) Situational Judgement Questions, and d) Structure and Process Quality.

a) Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys

In recent years there have been initiatives that have set out to provide a more standardised approach to assessing quality to allow comparisons between countries. One such example is

the Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys developed by UNICEF, which assesses children's home environment, access to ECE and child development across the domains of literacy, numeracy, physical, and social-emotional development. The assessment surveys are linked to SDG 4.2.1 and can be used to provide general information with regards to how a child is developmentally on track. Using learning outcomes in this way is a common method for measuring the quality of ECE (UNECE, 2022)

b) International Early Learning and Child Well-being Study

The OECD also attempted to provide a framework for quality assessment through child outcomes in developing the International Early Learning and Child Well-being Study (OECD, 2020c). This study assessed children's development at age five across four domains 'Emergent literacy', 'Emergent numeracy', 'Self-regulation Social' and 'emotional skills' (OECD, 2020c, p.11) in England, Estonia and the United States. These domains were assessed as they 'are predictive of children's later education outcomes and wider well-being' (OECD, 2020c, p11) and therefore were seen as important developmental markers. The empirical evidence that the study yielded could in theory be used to assess deficits in children's learning and in turn assess quality of ECE programmes. For example, the study found that children in the United States were further behind their peers in Estonia and England when it came to emergent numeracy; we can therefore infer that the quality of ECE is lower in this area in the United States and that it may be beneficial to use aspects of practice in Estonia and England to improve their provision. This would follow the OCED's position that because of robust empirical evidence countries are able to make direct comparisons and then share best practices (OECD, 2020). However, when an inference such as this is based solely on child outcomes contextual information is discounted and we may not be fully understanding what is happening. This highlights the difficulty in creating a standardised measure of quality in ECE and also the need to explore environmental factors impacting ECE stakeholders and therefore children's environments, a key aim of this study.

The International Early Learning and Child Well-being Study (OECD, 2020) set out to build a framework which would allow global comparisons of ECE, proposing that information from early childhood assessments could eventually be used to track progress towards PISA scores at age 15. This would allow countries to identify weaknesses in children's development and address them through interventions. The reaction to this objective has not always been positive, however, as Urban, (2017) notes that this could encourage countries to give up their holistic

approach to early childhood learning and development to focus resources on areas assessed through PISA. The OECD study did also draw on indirect assessment data from parents, staff and those administering the tests in an attempt to gain a greater understanding of the child and their context. However, the concern about standardised testing in early childhood is shared by many as seen through the withdrawal of countries such as New Zealand and Japan who state that the OECD's approach is incompatible with their country's ECE philosophy (Urban, 2018).

The OCED's approach to assessing quality in ECE has also been criticised as it fails to take in to account national contexts (Sofou & Jiménez-ramírez, 2020), is too simplistic a tool to make judgements about complex ECE systems (Urban, 2017) and relies on testing young children, something which notoriously yields unreliable and inconsistent results (Urban, 2018). Regardless of these criticisms the following statement from an OECD report is a commonly held view:

> Monitoring and evaluating quality are, in general, perceived as important components of enhancing quality in ECE systems. It can point to strengths and weaknesses of systems and programmes, provide incentives for improvement of standards and practices, and can assist staff in enhancing children's early development (Litjens, 2014, p.5).

Urban (2018) would instead suggest that 'nuanced enquiry into the cultures, understandings, concepts, structures of early childhood systems' (p.91) would be more appropriate as a multiple perspective approach would protect children's rights and allow for diversity and complexity of practices.

c) Situational Judgement Questions

Recently the OECD developed Situational Judgement Questions (SJQ) (Nilsen et al., 2020) used as part of their Starting Strong Teaching and Learning International Survey (OECD, 2019b), which perhaps form a more useful tool for providing a consensus for what is considered high quality ECE. For example, Nilsen et al. (2020) found that:

> There was high agreement between and within the countries on what the best practices are: to support child-directed play by following the children's lead; to manage conflicts through behavioural management by directing children's attention to the classroom rules; and to support pro-social behaviour by encouraging sharing and collaboration among children. (p.45).

Whilst the SJQs are limited, as they rely on teachers and practitioners self-reporting behaviours (Nilsen et al., 2020) they have been useful in identifying general areas for bringing together practitioners' views of what they consider most important for child development.

d) Structure and process quality

Araujo et al. (2017) describe how assessing quality in ECE can be broken down into two elements: structure and process. Structural quality refers to factors such as infrastructure, learning environment and curriculum whereas process quality refers to nature, frequency and type of teacher-child interaction. This distinction can be seen in an OECD report (Litjens, 2014) which recommends evaluating and monitoring key areas such as staff quality (structural quality) by measuring teacher qualifications with the assumption that higher teacher qualifications may result in a higher quality of ECE (Sylva et al., 2004; Whitebook, 2014). In support of this assumption a systematic review of 48 studies across several countries between 1980 and 2014 found that there was a significant correlation between having lead teachers with higher qualifications and the quality of the ECE (Manning et al., 2017), however, this correlation has not always been found (Lin & Magnuson, 2018).

In her UNICEF report Hartwig (2020), refers only to essential competencies, training and support rather than qualifications, suggesting that personnel training and key skills are significant indicators of quality. This reflects more historical findings from studies which have highlighted the importance of teachers' perceptions of their sense of efficacy and capabilities, their understanding of curriculum, prior knowledge of how young children think and develop, the school infrastructure, the parental partnerships, leadership and the administrative and academic organisation in quality ECE programmes (Katz, 1993).

Whilst they can be useful, these four approaches to measuring quality in ECE highlight how difficult it is to create standardised measures of quality ECE emphasising how important it is to explore locally developed approaches which take into consideration local contextual information. In the following sub section, I will therefore explore ECE quality within the Peruvian context.

2.3.2 ECE quality in Peru

A recent study conducted by Hanno et al. (2020) in Peru encompassing 128 classrooms in 64 ECE settings compared the effectiveness of quality measurement tools against child outcome scores in the form of vocabulary test scores. The study used an international framework from

the US, Classroom Assessment Scoring system (Hamre et al., 2009), to assess the adult-child interactions (process quality) along with traditional tools to assess teacher ratios and teacher experience (structural quality). This was accompanied by a locally specified measure of process and structural quality known as 'vitrina' (showcase) (Hanno et al., 2020).

'Vitrina' was a standard or level of quality designed in Lima by the Regional Directorate of Education of Metropolitan Lima (DRELM, 2017) which assessed the most important features of ECE in context. It focused on 'the presence of features related to the center director, management's ability to improve staff capacity, the use of materials, teaching performance, and work with families and the community.' (Hanno et al., 2020, p.4). These features were assessed using interviews with teachers and directors as well as observations. The study found that there was little evidence to suggest that the quality measures used were related to each other, however, it did highlight the value of the locally derived measures as the vitrina measure was the better predictor of child outcomes. Whilst Hanno et al. (2020) note that the study 'does not capture the diversity of ECE programs or children across the country' (p.13) the finding does suggest that assessment of quality must consider contextual background, values, and features to be effective.

Schools in Peru are underfunded in comparison to its Latin American neighbours as just 3.8 % of GDP was spent on education in 2019 (World Bank, 2021d), less than the world average of 4.1% in 2019 and less than neighbouring countries such as Ecuador at 4.2% (2019), Chile at 5.6% (2019) and Brazil at 6% (2019) (World Bank, 2021d). The lack of investment has led to poor structural quality, with more than half of schools, especially in rural areas lacking basic services such as water, sanitation, electricity and telecommunications, and buildings which need repair as many do not meet seismic code requirements (Sataloff et al., 2017). Low investments are also seen in teacher salaries which, although these have increased, have not done so in line with average wage increases in the country. This is highlighted by the percentage of professionals who earned more than teachers rising from 70% to 80% between 2004 and 2014 (Sataloff et al., 2017, p.125). Low incentives to become a teacher, high rates of staff turnover and poor career paths are significant factors affecting ECE in Peru (Araujo et al., 2017).

2.3.3 Suitability of technology integration in ECE

The debate over whether young children benefit from using technology has existed throughout recent history as new forms of technology have been developed from the introduction of radio

in the 1920's and television in the 1940's parents and educators have both been concerned and excited about the prospect of engaging children through technology (Wartella & Jennings, 2000; WHO, 2019). Long standing concerns stem from the view that children need to experience active first-hand experiences in the physical environment, key elements of play-based pedagogy, and that even the most interactive of activities performed using technology are unable to enhance play-based learning opportunities (Hatzigianni & Kalaitzidis, 2018; Palaiologou, 2016). In recent years, this view has been challenged as some educators argue that young children can benefit from participating in a range of different activity types, that digital technology is a useful teaching tool and that familiarising children with technology is now a developmentally appropriate skill (OECD, 2023). For example, described as the largest education-technology intervention to date involving more than 100 million students in China, Bianchi et al., (2020) report that technology used in rural schools can be successful in addressing urban-rural inequalities. The study showed that between seven and 10 years after the intervention the children who participated demonstrated higher cognitive skills and were more likely to stay in education. Although this intervention was established in primary and middle schools and relied on technology and internet being installed in targeted school buildings as opposed to being used as a distance learning programme it is still relevant as it suggests that if the content is appropriate and of high quality there is the potential for technology to used effectively in education.

During the pandemic, this debate was reignited with some educators resistant to using technology as there was a perception that it may lead to more formal education being prioritised at the expense of socio-emotional development and well-being (Plotka & Guirguis, 2022). Furthermore some parents raised health concerns such as eye strain, a lack of physical movement (children are more sedentary) and limited opportunities to engage in social and emotional activities (Dong et al., 2020). The issue of eye strain had previously been highlighted by researchers because there was existing evidence that increased virtual activity was associated with sight problems in children such as myopia (Enthoven et al., 2020; Huang et al., 2015; Ku et al., 2019) and although further research is necessary to confirm whether this a causal relationship (Lanca & Saw, 2020) it is an area of concern and requires greater awareness from parents, schools and education bodies to prevent any potentially damaging long term effects (Wong et al., 2021).

Before the pandemic screen time guidelines from the WHO for children aged three to four years old recommended a maximum of one hour a day, with an emphasis on the key message that 'less is better' (WHO, 2019). However, this guideline has been criticised as not being based on evidence, overstating the harmful effects of screens and failing to distinguish between levels of interaction possible through screens (Boseley, 2019; Stiglic & Viner, 2019; Therrien & Wakefield, 2019). Instead, The Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health based in the UK recommends that parents should ensure that screen time does not diminish family interactions or opportunities for physical activities and that they should negotiate usage of screens based on the needs of the individual child (Viner et al., 2019).

During the pandemic parents of young children reported that children's screen time had increased (Vanderloo et al., 2020) and that managing the screen time usage had become more difficult (Dong et al., 2020). This led to the recommendation that parents should be encouraged to foster appropriate screen time habits that ensure children didn't miss out on social interactions or physical activities (Lau & Lee, 2020). Similarly, it was recommended that EC educators should attempt to deliver a more diversified approach to their distance learning programmes so that families are less reliant on screens (Lau & Lee, 2020) and careful attention should be made to ensure that technology is appropriate and specific for early learners (Coban, 2020; OECD, 2021). Informed understanding of what constitutes appropriate digital learning resources for young children can be limited (Livingstone et al., 2018). However, evaluative tools such as those developed by Kolak et al. (2021) to assess the value of educational apps for preschool aged children for example, highlight the importance of appropriate technology as containing: learning goals, meaningful learning, feedback for learners, social interactions, combined exploratory and structured activities, engaging narratives, high quality language and adjustable learning content.

This sub section highlighted that digital learning tools can be useful in ECE, but that care should be taken to limit screen time. Whilst parents may not be familiar what forms appropriate educational technology the literature shows that when technology is used with young children it should encourage active learning and interaction.

Having outlined what is considered to be quality ECE, what this means in the Peruvian context and how technology can be used in ECE, I will now shift attention to focus on a significant aspect of this study by exploring what it means for a child to be vulnerable.

2.4. Vulnerable Children

Reports by UNICEF (2020a) and the Children's Commissioner (2020) suggested that the disruption to life during the pandemic period was greater for vulnerable children and that this would have significant implications on progress towards the SDGs (Lancet Public Health, 2020). As we have learnt previously the SDGs were established in 2015 by the United Nations as a series of objectives to end poverty, protect the planet and improve the lives and prospects of everyone, everywhere. One of the goals identified was to ensure that all children have access to quality ECE, and that no child is left behind. With large groups of children in Peru already being identified as vulnerable and at risk before the pandemic it was perceived vital that disadvantaged groups were prioritised and that 'current conditions of inequality do not worsen' (United Nations, 2020b, p.14). As data collection involved meeting with individuals who may be considered vulnerable, and the research highlights the ECE experience for vulnerable children it is important to define the terms used.

2.4.1 Defining Vulnerability

In general terms 'vulnerability' refers to a person being at risk of harm and being unable to sufficiently protect themself or to be sufficiently protected by others (Mackensie et al., 2014; Schweiger, 2019). Straehle (2016) develops this idea and states that being vulnerable refers to moments in human life that we all feel at some point. Boublil, (2018) explains that:

> One can consider vulnerability as a multifaceted concept depicting our relational and embodied nature (ontological vulnerability) and our necessarily situated and unpredictable existence (situational vulnerabilities) (p.183).

Through this explanation we can see vulnerability as being affected by our own perceptions of how we relate to the world around us as well as direct situational events and life circumstances. The concept and our use of the term is changing also, whereas once it was used to refer to something specific such as an illness or violence, now it is more commonly used as a standalone phrase (Brown, 2015). Whilst the words 'vulnerable' and 'vulnerability' were derived from Latin meaning 'susceptible of receiving wounds or physical injury' or 'open to attack or injury of a non-physical nature' (Oxford English Dictionary, n.d.), it is now a much broader term affected by historical, political, and socioeconomic factors (Brown, 2015).

Mackensie et al. (2014) highlight the role that autonomy plays in how we as individuals feel about our own vulnerability, with the suggestion that if a person feels autonomous, they are more readily able to overcome any vulnerability. From the literature, to gain a greater

understanding of the term vulnerability one must consider the wider philosophical, ethical, moral and political elements of the subject and how complex and intertwined the various considerations are in making up this social construct (Mackensie et al., 2014; Hurst, 2015, Ferrarese, 2018; Schweiger, 2019).

When looking at defining the term 'vulnerable children', Subbarao and Coury (2004) state that: 'Vulnerable children are defined as those whose safety, well-being, and development are, for various reasons, threatened.' (p.1). This the authors note is a broad definition and includes a wide proportion of children, so they then go on to focus their understanding of the phrase on those most at need stating that it refers to 'those children who are most at risk of facing increased negative outcomes compared with the "average" child in their society.' (Subbarao & Coury, 2004, p.2).

In order to write policy focused on supporting children most at need and then to put into place action plans it is important to use general definitions like these to attempt to identify groups, find commonalities and track the progress of support. However, a report by the OECD (2019a) that seeks to address the inequalities and lack of opportunities that many individuals in OECD countries experience confirms that although the term 'child vulnerability' (p.16) is used regularly in the child development and children's rights literature it often lacks clarity with regards to the specific groups that are included. This conclusion is supported by several researchers (Schweiger, 2019; Jopling & Vincent, 2020; Brown, 2015) with each implying that an exact definition is difficult to formulate and use across wider populations. Subbarao and Coury (2004) make this point succinctly when they write 'Defining these categories of vulnerable children more narrowly is difficult because of differences across countries and cultures' (p.3). It is for this reason that we can conclude that the vulnerability faced by children is contextual because the risk patterns from one setting to another differ (Subbarao and Coury, 2004).

2.4.2 Children at risk

The OECD (2019a) supports the view that vulnerable children should be identified and points out that contexts are dynamic and change throughout a child's life. For example, infants are much more reliant on their parents than older children and adolescents. This is not to say that children are not any less vulnerable as they grow but that they are vulnerable to different risk factors which evolve and change throughout their lives (OECD, 2019a).

The complexity of identifying groups within any given context is highlighted through the identification of 9 domains of child vulnerability which were assessed based on a huge 32 indicators in a report published before the pandemic in England by the Children's Commissioner (2017). The number of indicators within this one (albeit large) context and the potential difficulties in identifying children in each group creates its own challenges as children may belong to more than one group or be in a group but not experience the same conditions as others. In April 2020, The Children's Commissioner (2020) identified groups in the UK who were considered particularly vulnerable at the beginning of the pandemic such as 'families under increased pressure' (p. 2), 'children at risk or suffering harm' (p. 3), 'children in care' (p.4), and 'children who are at risk of falling behind in education' (p. 5). Within these groups there are a number of factors that contribute to the children being considered vulnerable, for example for children at risk of falling behind in education, poverty, inadequate housing and a lack of access to basic educational materials and tools such as the internet are all contributing factors.

Schweiger (2019) identified two types of child vulnerability; inherent vulnerability which 'refers to natural – or ontological – features of children, which define them as children.' (p.289) and situational vulnerability which 'are the vulnerabilities that are based on social practices and norms.' This distinction is helpful when we consider Peruvian children's experiences of ECE during the pandemic as it provides nuance in that it accepts that perhaps all children to some extent were inherently vulnerable needing universal support as they were at a critical point of development and may not have the necessary resilience or coping mechanisms. Additionally, there may have been some children who were faced with greater situational vulnerability due to socio-economic status of their family, living in poverty and/or having access to technology. These factors may have been influential in how families and children were able access quality ECE during the period of school closures in the form of distance learning programmes. Through the following section I will explore this relationship further addressing how access to distance learning programmes can further add to the situational vulnerability of children.

2.5 Accessing Distance Learning Programmes

With both inherent and situational vulnerability potentially affecting young children in Peru during the period of school closures it is important to consider the challenges faced in accessing distance learning programmes. These programmes were vital in maintaining the delivery of

education in response to school closures caused by the COVID-19 pandemic (Cobo et al., 2021; Miao et al., 2020), therefore, through the following sub-section I will explore the inequalities that were highlighted and what this meant for ECE.

2.5.1 Inequalities and distance learning programmes

Remote learning in response to the pandemic, for many, was seen as an opportunity for innovative education reform as it had the potential to encourage the use of technology, embrace teacher creativity (Burns & Orne, 2021; Pangestu, 2021; Wilichowski & Cobo, 2021), reimagine education (Spiller, 2020; UNICEF, 2021b) and possibly as a way to address inequalities (UNICEF, 2021b). However, it has been another cause of growing inequality in the education system due to the unequal access to technology and a growing digital divide (Chauvin & Faiola, 2020). Whilst the term 'digital divide' has evolved in use and significance over the last 30 years it is commonly used when referring to 'a division between people who have access and use of digital media and those who do not' (van Dijk, 2020, p.1). These disparities during the pandemic were highlighted within the global context in a UNICEF factsheet published in August 2020 which stated that 31% (UNICEF, 2020b, p.1) of children worldwide were unable to access remote learning programmes due to either a lack of household assets (access to technology) or policies aimed at addressing their needs. The significance of both of these elements is that mere access to technology may not have been enough to ensure children were able to access learning opportunities.

Further to this point, The Lancet Public Health (2020) states that most of the world's children were not able to access formal education during the pandemic, the consequences of which put SDG 4 in serious jeopardy. Typically, children who could not be reached by educators via technology lived in rural areas and came from the poorest 40% of families in their country (UNICEF, 2020b). These are risk factors that can also be seen in Peru, as noted previously in the Introduction chapter, rural populations are generally more likely to be living in poverty and regions where internet access is most limited. Indeed, the average number of households in Peru which had access to internet and a computer was just 39.3% in 2019 (INEI, 2019b, p.5) and this figure was as low as 4.8% in rural regions (INEI, 2019b, p.5).

In England a report by the National Foundation for Education Research (NFER) (Lucas et al., 2020) examined the results of a national survey of 1,233 senior leaders and 1,821 teachers in May 2020. The report shows that there were many factors which affected student engagement with remote learning but that access to technology was a significant challenge 'with the vast

majority of leaders and teachers saying that at least some of their pupils had little or no access to IT at home.' (p.3). This finding is significant to consider within the context of Peru as it demonstrates that even in countries where a higher proportion of households have access to technology a digital divide still exists.

The digital divide in Peru is illustrated through an article in the Washington Post (Chauvin & Faiola, 2020) in late 2020 which describes an anecdotal account of how a young boy in Lima has 'seen his education reduced to a 30-minute [daily] lesson broadcast on state TV and phone texts containing brief instructions for the next day's self-study. He submits assignments to be graded through his family's one cell phone.' The article suggests that this is the case for many young children in Peru and goes on to contrast this situation with that of a young girl (also from Peru) who attends a private school, receiving online classes throughout the day from 9am until 4pm following her normal school schedule. Whilst she misses seeing her friends at school and having those day-to-day interactions with teachers, she is able to receive a level of education that is comparable to what she had before the pandemic. This perfectly illustrates how school closures have affected households differently highlighting the widening learning inequalities that existed. Indeed, digital 'readiness' in education during the pandemic was a term used to refer to the capacity that schools, teachers, parents and students had to adapt to using digital tools in distance learning programmes (Basto-Aguirre et al., 2020). It is thought that the slow incorporation of digital tools in particularly in the Latin America region exacerbated the existing social and educational inequalities (Basto-Aguirre et al., 2020).

Even when children are able to access distance learning programmes issues such as safety online (UNICEF, 2020b), a lack of student engagement (Lucas et al., 2020; Sellgren, 2020), limited staff training (Mega Safitri Nur et al., 2020) and parent perceptions of online learning (Cullinane & Montacute, 2020; Dong et al., 2020) can mean that programmes are less effective. These are factors which can exist between countries and within countries and if not addressed and improved have the potential to widen existing inequalities. An example of this is highlighted in a joint report by UNICEF, UNESCO and World Bank, (2020) based on the findings from the 'Survey on National Education Responses to COVID-19 School Closures' (p.4). The survey was completed by Ministry of Education officials from over 100 countries and found that whereas just 3% of higher income countries were not tracking the progress of students during school closures, this figure was closer to 25% in middle and lower-income countries (p.5). This finding is significant as tracking and monitoring of children's work by

their teacher is an indicator of higher quality and associated with higher levels of engagement in home learning (Guveli & Bayrakdar, 2021). This is an example of the learning inequality that occurred during the period of school closures, with middle- and lower-income countries being unable to provide the same quality of education that higher income countries were able to. The first round of surveys, conducted between May and June 2020 included 108 countries and the second round 149 countries representing a substantial sample size.

2.5.2 Distance Learning Programmes in ECE

Globally, young children have been disproportionately affected in respect to their educational development as 70% of children (UNICEF, 2020b, p.1) who were enrolled in pre-primary education before the pandemic were unable to access digital or broadcast educational programmes during school closures. This would suggest that a large proportion of young children have missed out on a significant period of their ECE experience and further research is needed to assess the impact of this. Similarly, in Peru the quantity of children who were enrolled in early childhood institutions declined, as seen by the fact that by November 2020, 300,000 (60%) children aged between three and five years old had dropped out of their private institutions (La Republica, 2020). Some of these students had enrolled in public schools which saw an increase of ECE aged children from 72% to 78% between 2019 and 2020 (ComexPeru, 2020). But despite this migration trend towards public schools there were 139,695 fewer children in total enrolled in any form of ECE by the end of 2020 (ComexPeru, 2020).

As previously explored in the chapter 1, ECE is seen as a key component in the fight to address inequalities and reduce poverty, and during the pandemic international organisations advocated that it should be prioritised (UNICEF, UNESCO and World Bank, 2020) however, it could be argued that in wider society it was not given the same importance (Neuman & Powers, 2022). This has particularly been true for Peru, as highlighted by Killa Miranda Troncos, the Vice Education Minister of Peru in 2021, during a UNICEF Peru Webinar when she stated that during the period of school closures parents no longer felt that ECE was a necessity, that it was more of a choice and that many of the gains made over the last 50 years in raising the profile and necessity of ECE had been eroded (Troncos, 2021).

The term ‘online learning’ refers to ‘learning that involves interactions that are mediated through the use of digital, typically internet-based, technology’ (Greenhow et al., 2022). This broad definition allows for variety in modality in the form of both synchronous and asynchronous learning opportunities. ‘Synchronous’ is defined as interactions where learners

and teachers are online at the same time and able to interact in real time (Hrastinski, 2008; Shahabadi & Uplane, 2015). This is in contrast to 'asynchronous' learning opportunities where learners access learning content and communicate with educators when they are not both online at the same time (Martin et al., 2020), such as tasks and activities designed by educators shared with children either online or through another method. A common approach in ECE has been a blend of asynchronous and synchronous approaches, for example live online sessions and pre-recorded story times (Tarrant & Nagasawa, 2020). Research that focused on older learners, states that this encourages learners to be active participants in their learning, receiving direct instruction and opportunities for exploration (Lapitan et al., 2021). Similar opportunities were experienced by younger learners as synchronous learning offered opportunities for social interactions (Timmons et al., 2021) and offline tasks provided hands-on experiences (Siu & Ng, 2024). Both modes had implications for parents of young children as they often required parents to facilitate connecting to the online tasks or supporting the hands-on activity.

Kim, (2020) notes that there may be an optimum number of children to attend and participate in live online classes in ECE as 'synchronous online teaching will work better with a small number of the children so that each child has enough opportunity to share and interact' (p.155), later Kim goes on to speculate that this small number equates to up to eight children for those aged four to five years old. A large-scale survey of 62,837 caregivers of young children in four Latin American countries led Naslund-Hadley et al., (2020) to suggest that up to 10 preschool aged children could be involved in online classes but they also stated that the lessons should last no more than around 15 – 20 minutes as young children lose interest.

The 'I learn at home' education programme was developed by the Peruvian Ministry of Education in March and April 2020 (MINEDU, 2020) and was implemented within days of school closures (Munoz-Najar, 2022). Although earthquakes, flooding and mudslides are common in Peru, major natural disasters had had little impact on children's education (Nguyen & Minh Pham, 2018) up until the COVID-19 pandemic. This meant that for all stakeholders, children, parents, teachers, schools and policy makers the shift to a distance learning strategy was new. Indeed, in many countries, systems were not in place and stakeholders were not prepared (OECD, 2020d). Despite the challenges of its development and implementation the 'I learn at Home' programme has been praised by UNESCO for its multimodal approach and its focus on providing access to rural and remote communities (MINEDU, 2020).

Munoz-Najar's (2022) review of the 'I Learn at Home' programme published in the OECD's report 'How Learning Continued during the COVID-19 Pandemic: Global Lessons from Initiatives to Support Learners and Teachers', outlines how in addition to providing daily lessons to children via television and radio, an online platform was created for teachers, parents and children to access. National solutions were also initiated with the government coming to agreements with internet providers to ensure that access to the online platform was free and contextualised curriculum content was developed, some from scratch and some through adapting content from similar programmes in Argentina and Mexico. Despite these developments there were still some 15% (Munoz-Najar, 2022 p.273) of children unable to access any of the programme leading to local interventions such as retransmitting radio broadcasts on loudspeakers in community centres. Extracts from Munoz-Najar's (2022) review of the Peruvian state-led distance learning programme including a general description of the programme and the main problems it addressed can be found in Appendix 1.

2.6 EC educators' experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic

EC educators are key components of quality ECE programmes bringing with them specialised skills and pedagogical knowledge that help children learn and develop. Indeed, Jane Murray in an editorial for International Journal of Early Years Education states that:

> Well qualified early childhood educators have potential to make an exceptional contribution to supporting young children and their families throughout the pandemic and to leveraging post-COVID-19 global recovery. These workers have knowledge and skills that can optimise young children's development and learning at the stage most likely to enhance lifetime outcomes, and they can share that knowledge with young children's primary caregivers. (Murray, 2020, p.300)

Their importance is further highlighted in the foreword of an OECD report into the ECE and Care workforce where it is stated that EC educators 'matter more than anything else in children's lives outside their families' (OECD, 2020e, p.3). The report builds on previous findings from the OECD Starting Strong Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS Starting Strong) from 2018 which was the first international survey to explore the self-reported perspectives of the EC workforce from nine countries (Chile, Denmark, Germany, Iceland, Israel, Japan, Korea, Norway, and Turkey). One of the key findings from TALIS is that policy and practice and should endeavour to 'attract and retain a high-quality workforce' (OECD, 2019b, p.31), with the subsequent 2020 report breaking this down by suggesting that efforts to build a high quality ECE workforce should focus on three pillars 'developing the skills of

ECEC staff, improving their working conditions and well-being, and strengthening leadership and managerial practices' (OECD, 2020e, p.26). I will now use these three pillars to categorise the findings from the literature related to EC educators' experiences and perceptions during the pandemic period.

2.6.1 EC educators' skills

The literature highlights how important EC educator skills were during the pandemic period summed up by the OECD in the following:

> Investing in ECEC professionals as the quality cornerstone of a country's ECEC system becomes even more primordial in the context of the global crisis triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting disruption of educational and social care services. (OECD, 2020e, p.26)

Due to the sudden nature of the pandemic an extremely quick shift to develop distance learning programmes was undertaken by educators across the world. EC educators were faced with unique challenges in this respect, as it is perceived that distance learning methodologies are ill suited for young children (Neuman & Powers, 2022). This perception was based on young children's shorter attention spans, limited ability to use technology and their developmental needs (Neuman & Powers, 2022). Additionally, educators were not only faced with learning new skills in managing technology (Dayal & Tiko, 2000) but to do so in a way which was engaging for children and families. This was complicated further by different levels of access to technology for both educator and families, particularly in disadvantaged communities (Atiles et al., 2021; Cooper et al., 2021; Timmons et al., 2021).

Atiles et al.'s. (2021) study was considered to be particularly relevant to the current study as it shares several similarities such as aspects of the research design, geographical location and use of Bronfenbrenner's theoretical framework. Atiles et al.'s. (2021) qualitative research took place in the United States and several Latin American countries revealing through interviews with EC educators that they lacked preparation for distance teaching and attributed this to deficiencies in the pre- and in-service training. Three of the 26 participants reported receiving preservice training in the basics of using online teaching platforms, while 44% of public-school teachers and 60% of private school teachers reported receiving in-service training. Significantly, the training did not include strategies to 'effectively engage in online or distance education with young children' (p.70), a factor also highlighted by Steed et al. (2022) who found that how-to videos were prevalent in training educators how to use online platforms but

there were few which directly addressed any new pedagogical approaches needed. Similar findings were reported in other international studies where teachers reported that learning how to manage technology and engage children and families through online learning was challenging (Inan, 2021; Kwon et al., 2022).

Alongside the need to rapidly adapt to using technology and engaging with children through distance learning programmes was the pedagogical shift that was required. This was particularly problematic for EC educators who faced having to move away from approaches which are entrenched in hands-on experiences and social interactions (Ford et al., 2021). A survey conducted by Gomes et al. (2021) examined the experiences of preschool teachers across five countries—Australia, Bangladesh, Norway, Singapore and India and found that despite cultural and contextual differences there was a collective shift in the educators' identities brought about by the adaptations they needed to make to create a digital learning environment. This evolving identity involved 'going beyond their regular roles as educators', demonstrating 'adaptability and responsiveness to the social situation' (Gomes et al., 2021, p.360). Further research demonstrates that whilst adapting to a digital approach may have been perceived as a challenge, EC educators were quick to respond, implement new strategies and show a positive attitude towards their own digital literacy (Crawford et al., 2021; Gomes et al., 2021; Jalongo, 2021; Timmons et al., 2021). Indeed, there were some educators who saw this shift to distance learning as an opportunity be more creative and innovative in their approach (Dias et al., 2020).

This section has demonstrated that EC educators may have faced significant challenges due to the perception that distance learning was perceived as ill-suited for young children, insufficient pre- and in-service training in the use of digital tools and being required to significantly alter teaching pedagogy. However, there is evidence to suggest that EC educators were capable and willing to adapt to these challenges, showing positive attitudes and responding to the demands placed on them. The following section now moves on to address the EC educators' working conditions and well-being.

2.6.2 EC educators' working conditions and well-being

In relation to COVID-19 and mental health, in 2020 The World Health Organisation stated that:

> Fear, worry, and stress are normal responses to perceived or real threats, and at times when we are faced with uncertainty or the unknown. So, it is normal and

> understandable that people are experiencing fear in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. (WHO, 2020b)

This statement emphasised the difficulty that all human beings may have experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that there is overwhelming evidence from across international contexts that EC educators experienced negative impacts on their well-being during the pandemic (Quiñones-Laveriano et al., 2022; Jalongo, 2021; Rogers et al., 2023; Swigonski et al., 2021; Bigras et al., 2021; Hanno et al., 2022; Kwon et al., 2022). However, Ozamiz-Etxebarria et al. (2021) found that educators of younger children suffered from higher levels of anxiety during the pandemic period than educators involved in later stages of education. They speculate that this difference was due to EC educators feeling a greater responsibility to take care of the young children they work with. The concern EC educators felt for their students and their families at this time is also reported in other studies (Blanchard et al., 2024; Crawford et al., 2021).

EC educator well-being is considered to be significant factor in influencing educator-child relationships as illustrated by Eadie et al. (2021) who conducted an online survey of 232 Australian EC educators in July 2020 from Victoria, a region considered to have faced the 'strictest' (p.810) lockdown restrictions in the country. They found that stronger professional wellbeing was associated with less conflict in educator-child relationships. They also found that the majority of participants self-reported negative impacts on their well-being suggesting that during the pandemic educator child relationships may have suffered. Whilst Eadie et al. (2021) point out the limitations of their study in that the majority of EC educators were from one State in Australia, educators were self-reporting their perceived well-being and that only participants with access to internet were able to respond to the online survey the study does emphasise the potential impact well-being has child-educator relationships.

A second study from Australia by Berger et al. (2022) which sought to assess psychological distress and well-being involving 205 EC educators and leaders found that over 30% of participants had moderate or high levels of post-traumatic distress and that decline in well-being was self-reportedly attributed to increased workload, feeling undervalued by government and media and the pressure felt in attempting to support colleagues, parents and children. In both studies Eadie et al. (2021) and Berger et al. (2022) the more experienced educators were less likely to have negative well-being scores leading which suggests that the more experienced educators were in some way better prepared or more resilient to some extent.

A mixed-methods study by Kwon et al. (2022) in the United States where a total of 1434 EC educators were surveyed and interviewed revealed that there were a host of challenges which affected educators' physical, professional and psychological well-being during the pandemic regardless of their demographic background and the modality of teaching that they were involved in (online or in person). Whilst there were some nuances across groups, all participants exhibited 'Feelings of social disconnection, depression, and sadness, financial concerns, and additional job demands' (p. 17). With EC educators' self-reported symptoms of depression known to influence the quality of their teaching practice and their interactions with children before the pandemic (Jeon et al., 2014; Sandilos et al., 2015) and with physical and behavioural symptoms of stress thought to be two-three times higher during COVID-19 compared to before (Swigonski et al., 2021), we can see how the conditions during the pandemic had the potential to substantially impact not only educators' well-being but the quality of educator-child interactions. These interactions are considered significant as they influence student attainment and well-being (Murray & Greenberg, 2000; Crosnoe, et al., 2004; Sabol & Pianta, 2012).

2.6.3 EC educators' perceptions of leadership and managerial practices

Leadership makes up the third pillar necessary to build a high quality ECE workforce and according to the OECD is critical in establishing the organisational conditions required:

> Leadership is key to supporting and sustaining quality in ECEC settings and for creating a stimulating environment for both staff and children. Effective leadership establishes organisational conditions that promote process quality, thereby fostering children's learning, development and well-being. The influence of effective leadership operates mainly through improved working conditions for the staff of ECEC centres, which includes measures to mitigate stress and facilitate engagement in continuous professional development. (OECD, 2020e, p.41)

In terms of the period during the COVID-19 pandemic the literature shows that leadership was crucial in adapting to the new circumstances (Fonsén, et al., 2023; Movahedazarhouligh & Jones, 2024). Whilst in some studies EC educators felt supported by leaders and that leaders were perceived to be trying their best to take care of their staff members (Dýrfjörð & Hreiðarsdóttir, 2022), in other studies educators reported feeling undervalued (Henderson et al., 2024) and lacking recognition (Quinones et al., 2021).

A study by Neilsen-Hewett et al., (2022), based in Australia, where one EC leader, final year pre-service teachers and one academic mentor participated in online focus groups to share their

experiences of the pandemic period highlighted how those in leadership positions faced 'stress and uncertainty' (p.289) as they managed the implementation of the changing policy and supporting staff, families and children. Neilsen-Hewett et al., (2022), went on to highlight how three key protective factors helped the leaders navigate this period: the development and prioritisation of relationships, high quality practice and strong service-based philosophy.

This concludes this section where the experiences of EC educators from the existing literature were explored under three areas: skills, working conditions and well-being, and leadership. The following section explores the experiences of the other group of key ECE stakeholders that are central to this study, the parents/guardians.

2.7 Parents/guardians' experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic

The pressures on parents were extreme, particularly for parents of young children as during the period of school closures they not only had to take care of their family's primary needs and parenting/caregiving roles, but they were also required to meet their children's educational developmental needs (UNIECF, 2020). Parental influence on child educational development was viewed as critical for children who didn't have access to formal ECE input appropriate to their stage of development (OECD, 2020f). Through the following section I explore what is known about parents' experiences during this period focusing on parental involvement in ECE distance learning programmes, parents/guardians' perspectives of child engagement in distance learning, parents/guardians' perceived stress and the impact on parent-child interactions, and parents/guardians' perceptions of their own knowledge of child educational development.

2.7.1 Parent involvement and engagement in ECE distance learning programmes

Parental involvement had previously been defined as the direct or indirect actions of parents on their children's learning (Pomerantz et al., 2007), however, Harris et al. (2009) identified that this broad term often included parent engagement. Frequently used interchangeably the terms parent involvement and parent engagement have subtle yet significance differences. The distinction Harris, et al. 2009 highlight is that engagement refers to parents' active role in supporting children's learning in the home environment, whereas involvement is the informal or formal actions of parents coming to school with their children. Despite these differences, there is often confusion with the use of the terms in the literature leading Goodall and Montgomery (2014) to develop a model demonstrating a continuum from parents' involvement with school to their engagement in children's learning. Research has shown that when

educators are explicitly provided with the differences between the terms, they are capable of shifting their school centric approach to develop opportunities for informal learning in the home that links to curriculum but also recognise the wealth of knowledge and experiences that parents bring (Baxter & Kilderry, 2022).

Evidence from recent international studies exploring EC educator-parent relationships have highlighted how this partnership had developed parent engagement during the pandemic (Byun et al., 2022; Keengwe & Onchwari, 2022), particularly as:

> …the remote learning demands during the pandemic has provided ECE teachers with a unique opportunity to learn more about children's lives outside of school and establish trusting relationships with parents. (Soltero-González and Gillanders, 2021, p. 974)

Parent engagement had been highlighted as an important factor in child development in the Peruvian ECE curriculum (MINEDU, 2016) and was a key objective to develop in parenting programmes in Peru such as Cuna Mas where support was provided to parents in the home. However, during the period of extended school closures caused by the COVID-19 pandemic parental engagement became another way in which learning inequalities deepened. In the UK, research shows that some children had benefited from spending quality time with parents whereas others from more vulnerable families may have received less interaction or experienced a stressful home environment (Pascal et al., 2020). As already established in this chapter and previously in the country profile many people in Peru lived in vulnerable conditions and therefore, we might expect that parent engagement varied across contexts.

Pre-Covid 19 there was evidence that linked education levels of parents with developmental outcomes of young children in Peru (Sabates & Di Cesare, 2019). For example, children whose mothers had completed secondary school or higher education were less likely to see developmental deficits such as stunting than children whose mothers who had completed only primary school (Urke et al., 2011). Stunting refers to impaired growth and development of children caused by malnutrition and is measured through expected height for age (Leroy & Frongillo, 2019; WHO, 2024). It can lead to poor cognitive development, illness and has long been seen as an indicator of child development (Black et al., 2008; Crookston et al., 2011). Despite recent successes of targeted nutrition programmes in Peru (Huicho et al., 2020; Marini et al., 2017) it is still associated with children from poorer rural communities (Castro-Bedriñana et al., 2021).

Early research from the pandemic suggests that physical violence in Peruvian households had increased during that period and that violence was more likely to have occurred in homes which had previously experienced domestic violence (Porter et al., 2021). International research often links shocks to employment and poverty as being risk factors for domestic violence (Béland et al., 2020; Bhalotra et al., 2019) which may explain the rise reported.

International research has shown that parents were vital during the period of school closures (Dereli & Türk Kurtça, 2020; Murray, 2021; Willinski et al., 2023) and some studies have found that many parents of young children felt that their role had changed as they were balancing different parenting tasks and responsibilities (Dong et al., 2020; Garbe et al., 2020; Hapsari et al., 2020; Levickis et al., 2023). Access to technology (Doll et al., 2022; Garbe et al., 2020; Timmons et al., 2021) and time constraints (Gromada et al., 2020) were frequently cited by parents and researchers as significant barriers or challenges as to why parents were unable to support children's learning and their engagement. Furthermore, some parents held negative views about the effectiveness of distance learning programmes as highlighted in a study from China (Dong et al., 2020) where a survey of 3275 parents revealed that while the majority (92.7%) (p.4) had access and attended online learning they largely held negative beliefs and attitudes about the value and benefits of online learning. Although greater triangulation of results could have explored individual experiences of parents further and cultural context makes the findings specific to China (the researchers suggest that there may be differences in parental expectations between China and western culture), this study gives us a valuable insight into how some parents viewed distance learning seeing it as an extra burden.

For parents who were able to access distance learning programmes two common difficulties were reported across contexts; a) the quality of parent-child interaction and b) lack of curriculum/pedagogical knowledge, each of which is now explored.

a) Parent/guardians' perceived stress and the impact on parent-child interactions

Research conducted before the pandemic period demonstrated that parental well-being has an impact on child-parent interactions and child development (Magill-Evans & Harrison, 2001; Huang et al., 2018; King et al., 2015; Ward & Lee, 2020). Several international researchers have since found that parents exhibited more symptoms of stress during the pandemic period (Gromada et al., 2020; Lopez Boo et al., 2020; Morgül et al., 2020; Yoshikawa et al., 2020; Adams et al., 2021; Feinberg et al., 2022) and that they were more likely to develop these the longer the periods of quarantine were (Brooks et al., 2020). The rise in reports of parental stress

is perceived to be significant as the capacity for them to deal with difficulties in the home shaped how they were able to support their children and act as caregivers (Morelli et al., 2020). Notably, parents considered to be self-confident were able to 'activate many personal resources that in turn seem to prevent their children's emotional dysregulation, even in emergency situations such as the pandemic' (Morelli et al., 2020), despite their own increased levels of psychological stress.

b) Parent/guardians' perceptions of their own knowledge of child educational development

Parents in several international studies reported that during school closures they perceived that they lacked curriculum/child educational development knowledge to support their child's learning (Dong et al., 2020; Novianti & Garzia, 2020). In his opinion piece in *Childhood Education* Coban (2020) states that:

> 'Parent education workshops ought to take on new significance as we tread into the future post-COVID-19, with a focus on at-home learning strategies complementary to school districts' curricula and developmentally appropriate practice. The science of early learning must not be kept secret among professional educators, but rather must be shared with mom and dad, grandma and grandpa, guardian and older sibling. Only then can we fully leverage the families' support'. (p. 68)

This reflects findings from Lehrl et al., (2020) who had previously recommended that educators should be providing greater support for parents to enable them to improve the quality of the home learning environment as it is important during the early formative years. In Peru, the government published guidelines and recommendations for parents to use at home to support their child's mental health (MINSA, 2020) alongside the national distance learning programme 'I learn at home' (MINEDU, 2020) but there is little research to show how these messages have been received by parents and communities. Through this section I have explored the nuance between parent involvement and engagement and how parents were seen as critical to children's educational development. The following section now goes on to explore the impact of the pandemic on inequality.

2.8 The Impact of COVID-19 on inequality

There is evidence to suggest that inequality grew across the globe with the wealthiest in society recovering any losses incurred within nine months of the onset of the pandemic (Berkhout et al., 2021) compared to the relative longer-term implications of weakened growth, persistent

income loses (Ohnsorge & Sugawara, 2021) and depressed interest rates (Jordà et al., 2020) which were encountered by the majority in society. The consequences of the pandemic mean that inequalities in society and education are likely to have widened and have long term effects (Donnelly & Patrinos, 2020; Hill & Narayan, 2021; Malik, 2020) particularly in low and middle-income countries (Hill & Narayan, 2021; Parth et al., 2020; Young Lives, 2020). These long-term effects of inequalities in education are illustrated through Hanuschek and Woessmann's (2020), predictions in an OECD report:

> While the precise learning losses are not yet known, existing research suggests that the students in grades 1-12 affected by the closures might expect some 3 percent lower income over their entire lifetimes. For nations, the lower long-term growth related to such losses might yield an average of 1.5 percent lower annual GDP for the remainder of the century. (p.3)

The quote is significant as it predicts that children of all ages (grades 1-12) will be affected by the pandemic through lost learning. Learning losses have been defined as deficits in new content and skill development that children would normally be expected to learn (Donnelly & Patrinos, 2020, 2021; Pier et al., 2021). It is thought that learning losses will exacerbate existing inequalities as those most affected are living in vulnerable conditions such as being unable to access education due to digital poverty (Ruiu & Ragnedda, 2024) or limited access to basic services during the pandemic (Lopez Boo et al., 2020).

The level of lost learning for all children from a global viewpoint is considered to be significant (Azevedo et al., 2020; Di Gropello, 2020; Donnelly & Patrinos, 2020) with early predictions in June 2020 based on school closures of five months suggesting children would lose on average 0.6 years of their schooling (Azevedo et al., 2020). While The World Bank, (2021e) estimates that after 10 months of school closures there will be an increase in the number of children in the Latin America and Caribbean region who fall below proficiency levels from 55% (pre pandemic regional average) to 72% and increase further after 13 months of school closures to 77% (p.9). With many countries such as Peru having experienced more than just five, 10 or 13 months of school closures these predicted figures are expected to rise even further. For this reason, many called for school closures to be a last resort and for children to return to classrooms earlier than they did (Saavedra, 2020, 2021; UN News, 2021). A UNICEF, (2020c) online article from September 2020 highlighted the seriousness of the situation for the most vulnerable children stating that if action was not taken to protect both children and their families the global pandemic might turn into a 'child-rights crisis'. Whilst this urgency was

recognised by the Peruvian government, the approach to reopening schools was that it must be done when safe for children, teachers and parents in a gradual and flexible manner (El Peruano, 2021).

During the peak of school closures in April 2020 it is estimated that 1.6 billion children were affected across the world (FCDO Research, 2021; World Bank, 2021e). The impact of such extreme action to control the spread of COVID-19 has caused global education, already said to be in crisis, to be much worse (Azevedo et al., 2020). Although, many countries implemented distance learning schemes these cannot replace the need for the human contact and interaction which is crucial to healthy development (Pascal et al., 2020) especially for the most vulnerable (Di Gropello, 2020).

The consequences for countries in the Global South such as Peru are predicted to be deeper and longer lasting (Hill & Narayan, 2021; Pfister et al., 2020; Letzing, 2020). Cugat and Narita's (2020) assertion in their IMF blog, that 'measures to contain the pandemic have had disproportionate effects on vulnerable workers and women' is particularly true for Peru where poorer members of society when asked to stay at home were prevented from obtaining an income, compared to those with higher incomes who were more likely to be able to work from home remotely using technology. This scenario has played out in many countries but had profound effects in Peru due to the high proportion of informal workers. This was evident as country's GDP contracted by 30% in the second quarter of 2020 (Central Reserve Bank of Peru, 2020, p.8) and the level of national unemployment increased from 3.9% in 2019 to 7.4% in 2020 (Central Reserve Bank of Peru, 2020, p.29). Additionally, the new cohort of workers entering the labour market obtained lower-quality jobs during the pandemic potentially negatively affecting individuals for the rest of their lives (World Bank, 2023).

Some of the consequences of this included an increased number of people living in poverty, with an estimated 3.3 million additional people living in poverty by early 2021 (INEI, 2021, p.39). This raised the total number to nearly 10 million and represented 31% of the total population (World Bank, 2023, p.18). By the end of 2020 up to 5% of the population were also considered to be living in extreme poverty (World Bank 2023, p.18) and two in five Peruvians were a risk of falling into poverty (World Bank, 2023, p.11). To compound these effects further, as the response to the immediate threat of COVID was prioritised over vital services and interventions which vulnerable communities relied upon previous successes were eroded.

2.9 Conclusion to Literature Review

Through this literature review I have highlighted how significant disruption to ECE during the period of school closures undoubtedly had an impact on child development and as a consequence potential progress towards eradicating poverty and reducing inequalities. The literature also showed that expected learning loses were not considered to be equal across contexts which directly led me to explore the within country differences in the experiences of ECE stakeholders from both rural and urban environments which have shaped ECE during the pandemic in Peru.

Furthermore, the assertion that disruption to ECE was not equal across differing contexts also emphasises different forms of vulnerability that children were faced with. As noted previously, all young children had 'inherent vulnerabilities' (Schweiger, 2019, p.289) to some extent during this time, as they were at formative stages of development, and as children, perhaps did not possess the necessary skills to manage or understand the abrupt changes to their lives. The literature also highlighted that there were children considered to be living with additional 'situational vulnerabilities' (Schweiger, 2019, p.289) for example, those with limited access to technology, living in poverty, education levels of parents and those from low socioeconomic backgrounds. Therefore, this literature review helped shape, develop and refine the aims of the study by focusing on understanding the experiences of ECE stakeholders in communities where children would be considered to have differing degrees of both situational and inherent vulnerabilities. Additionally, the literature review led to the decision to specifically explore the challenges faced by both EC educators and parents of young children was taken. Not only did this build on the existing trends in the literature, which commonly concentrate on this aspect for how the pandemic was experienced by ECE stakeholders, but it also provided the opportunity to compare how challenges differed across contexts.

By combining the theoretical frameworks of Bronfenbrenner and Bourdieu (as previously outlined in the introduction chapter) an in-depth exploration of underlying contextual factors and structures examines how the perceived challenges faced by EC educators and parents of young children were shaped by their environments and their access to capital in its various forms. This research, therefore, goes beyond the scope of the existing literature and offers an in-context exploration of how the structural and environmental factors are intertwined and influenced ECE stakeholders' perceptions and experiences during the period of school closures caused by the pandemic.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Introduction to the chapter

In this chapter I outline the methodological approach employed to conduct this research, justifying how the design was chosen and its relevance to the study. I begin by restating the research questions in light of the gaps identified previously in the literature review. This is followed by a discussion of the ontological and epistemological assumptions which informed and shaped my approach to this study, which leads into an explanation of the research design used. I then give details of the participants, procedures and data analysis, which includes considerations taken to ensure the trustworthiness of the data. These sections provide a description and justification of the methods deemed most appropriate and provide the reader with an insight into why each instrument was selected. Finally, I conclude with a summary of the precautions and protocols observed to ensure that the study followed the ethical guidelines set out by the British Ethical Research Association (BERA, 2018)

3.2 Research Questions

- **RQ1. What were the challenges for EC educators in Peru during the period of school closures caused by the COVID-19 pandemic?**
- **RQ2. What were the challenges for parents/guardians of children enrolled in ECE in Peru during the period of school closures caused by the COVID-19 pandemic?**
- **RQ3. How were challenges for EC educators and parents/guardians of children enrolled in ECE in Peru during the period of school closures caused by the COVID-19 pandemic different across contexts?**
- **RQ4. What are the implications for ECE considering the challenges faced by EC educators and parents/guardians during the period of school closures?**

3.3 Ontological and epistemological position

In the following section I outline how my view of the world shaped this research, defining key terms and broadly justifying the reasons behind choosing the research design and methods used. As noted in the introduction chapter my experiences as an educator and leader in Peru during the period of school closures influenced my decision to conduct this research. I was motivated by a desire to learn about the experiences of other ECE stakeholders in similar and contrasting circumstances to my own. Through my own upbringing and childhood and then

later work and study in the United Kingdom I brought with me cultural values and perspectives that influenced how I viewed and interpreted the data.

Coe et al. (2017) state that a researcher's philosophical position underlies the methodological choices they make when designing their study, this view builds on Newby's (2014) understanding that these fundamental views of reality can influence not only how the research is conducted but perhaps more importantly 'what is researched and how the data is interpreted' (p.36). This relationship cannot be overstated as Hitchcock and Hughes (1995) explain that 'ontological assumptions will give rise to epistemological assumptions which have methodological implications for the choice of particular data collection techniques' (p.21), in other words each position informs the following viewpoint and decision to be made. It is therefore considered important to explore my position and reflect on where it fits within the wider context of perspectives.

The term ontology is defined as 'issues concerning being' (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1995, p.19) or similarly, 'the study of being' (Crotty, 2003, p.10). In social research it is used to explore the assumption individual's make with regards to what constitutes the nature of the social world (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1995). Newby (2003) adds that ontology is a 'philosophical construct' and 'a specification of what exists' (p.35), suggesting that it is concerned with how we see the world. It prompts us to pose questions to ourselves and explore the repercussions of our response. For example, do we as researchers view the world believing that reality is 'of an objective nature, or the result of individual cognition?' (Cohen, et al., 2007, p.7). Are we willing to accept that past experiences will influence interpretations and decisions, and therefore also accept that research can be understood and interpreted in different ways (Newby, 2014), with the mind playing a central role in constructing realities? (Coe et al., 2017). Or, alternatively, do we wish to exclude social, cultural and political context, and gain absolute objectivity to present our research as fact, seeing the world as predictable and 'context free'? (Coe et al., 2017. p. 18).

From asking these types of philosophical questions regarding our understanding of the world, two perspectives emerge that exist at opposite ends of a continuum. The view that an objective reality exists, 'independent of individuals' perceptions of it' (Coe et al., 2017. p. 16), often referred to as 'realism' (Coe et al., 2017. p. 16) or 'scientism and positivism' (Newby, 2014, p.36) is located at one end of the continuum. At the other end of the continuum is the view that multiple realities are possible, which is referred to as a 'relativist or constructivist' approach

(Yin, 2018, p.47). This research is based on the ontological assumption that multiple realities are possible and seeks to understand the participants' experiences and contexts. From this viewpoint I accepted and embraced the influences of my background on the interpretations of data I made, acknowledging that alternate realities were possible.

Having established the ontological assumption that is the foundation of understanding the value and objective of this research, I now explore the epistemological approach taken in response. A researcher's epistemological approach is concerned with their understanding of knowledge (Cohen, et al., 2007), and being certain that this knowledge has value to them, as they ask, 'how can we be sure that someone else's interpretation is correct?' (Newby, 2014, p.36). As described in the introduction to this section, ontological assumptions directly influence the formation of epistemological assumptions, therefore, the researcher with a realism ontological assumption only accepts that knowledge is obtained by directly observing and measuring the phenomena being investigated, this is known as holding a positivist perspective (Coe et al., 2017). Whereas the constructivist ontological assumption only accepts that knowledge is developed through a process of interpretation, this is known as the interpretivist epistemological perspective (Coe et al., 2017; Cresswell, 2009).

For me, as an educator and researcher, I seek to understand the experiences of participants and provide them with the opportunity to share their ideas. In this respect my world view most aligns with the constructivist approach as 'The goal of the research is to rely as much as possible on the participants' views of the situation being studied' (Cresswell, 2009, p.26). The participant's interpretations are key in my research, and their views and experiences may or may not align with one another, even if they have shared the same context. There is no absolute truth, and I am not looking to gain findings which can be statistically generalised across larger populations, rather, the findings are analytically generalisable (Yin, 2018). This means that the lessons learned from this study will be generalisable but on a conceptual level and may potentially 'apply to a variety of situations, well beyond any strict definition of the hypothetical population' (Yin, 2018, p.73) identified in the study.

I saw my role in this study as an 'explorer' (Spradley, 1980, p.26), and in doing so, took on the interpretivist epistemological perspective focusing on qualitative methods. In order to understand the implications of what this means for the research it is first necessary to define what is meant by qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods research. Qualitative research refers to primarily obtaining non-numerical data through 'an iterative process in which

improved understanding to the scientific community is achieved by making new significant distinctions resulting from getting closer to the phenomenon studied' (Aspers & Corte, 2019 p.139). It is the outcome of an interpretivist approach to research as 'qualitative researchers deploy a wide range of interconnected interpretive practices' (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018, p.43). This form of research can be compared to that of quantitative research which refers to 'the collection and analysis of numerical data to describe, explain, predict, or control phenomena of interest' (Gay, et al., 2012, p.7) and is based on the 'philosophical belief that our world is relatively stable and uniform' (Mertler, 2015, p. 108). A mixed methods approach is defined as 'the class of research where the researcher mixes or combines quantitative and qualitative research techniques, methods, approaches, concepts or language into a single study' (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004, p.17).

For many years researchers from the two ends of the qualitative-quantitative continuum engaged in 'ardent dispute' (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004 p.14) as they argued that their view of what research should be compels them to dismiss research conducted from the opposite ontological assumption. In this respect a study which had elements of both realism and interpretivism (mixed methods) would have been dismissed as being uncredible and impossible by many researchers (Guba, 1990). However, more recently some researchers have begun to suggest that there are advantages to mixing the two approaches (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Cresswell, 2009; Yin, 2018). After considering these views my positionality and desire to gain a deeper understanding of participants' own perspectives and interpretations led me to reject the quantitative and mixed methods approaches and focus solely on rich qualitative data.

3.4 Case Study Research Design

In the following section I define what is meant by a case study research design, explore the different types of multiple case study designs and then go on to justify the decision to use it while collecting data using qualitative research methods.

3.4.1 A Case Study approach

The case study is one of the most frequently used approaches to social research (Tight, 2010) which enables the researcher to 'develop as full an understanding' (Punch, 2014, p.120) of a phenomenon as possible. Yin (2018) expands upon this idea when he says that case studies allow the researcher to explore, describe and/or explain naturally occurring phenomena within 'real world contexts' (p.45). Stake (1995) shares this view and proposes that case study research

looks ‘for detailed interaction with its contexts’ (p. xi). The essence of what makes and is the purpose of a case study from my understanding and interpretation of the literature is best illustrated through Stake’s (1995) assumption that case studies allow us to ‘enter a scene with the sincere interest in learning how they [people] function in their ordinary pursuits and milieus and with a willingness to put aside many presumptions while we learn’ (p.1).

Robert Yin and Robert Stake (1927 – present) are two key figures in case study research who have written extensively about the intricacies and complexities of the topic (Tight, 2010). Baxter and Jack (2008) report that their two descriptions of what defines a case study stem from the same philosophical social constructionist approach in that they are both concerned with understanding participants ‘social construction of reality’ (p.545). The social construction of an individual’s reality and our shared reality is a complex philosophical concept as outlined by Searle (1995) in his exploration of the subject. He explores the notion that some individuals’ judgements are subjective as they are based ‘on certain attitudes, feelings, and points of view’ (p.8), whereas others are considered objective as they are ‘independent of anybody’s attitudes or feelings about them’ (p.8). This distinction is significant as it allows us to focus an individual’s experience (subjective) within the context or environment (objective), the difficulty comes when our social constructions of reality differ which means that our objective ‘facts’ might be different for the researcher and participant (or between participants).

The constructionist approach which forms the foundation of Yin and Stake’s understandings of case studies assumes that understanding a person’s experiences will allow us to better understand the phenomenon (Flyvbjerg, 2011). Where Yin and Stake differ, however, is in their interpretation of how to apply a case study research design, with Stake thought to favour a more interpretivist paradigm (Bassey, 1999) as he suggests the use of purely qualitative data. Using a qualitative research design in this way enables the researcher to form a close relationship with participants which allows them to share their stories based on human interactions (Crabtree & Miller, 1999). Whereas ‘Yin’s writing tends towards the positivist (or scientific) paradigm’ (Bassey, 1999, p.27) as he proposes that there is room for quantitative data sources alongside qualitative.

The case study research design I used followed Stake’s purely qualitative approach as it allowed me to gain a deeper understanding of the experiences of the participants by forming relationships with them. For this to be a successful approach I attempted to mitigate the effects of some of the disadvantages associated with case study research designs. For example, Yin

(2018) states that cases studies are sometimes criticised as they lack rigour having allowed 'equivocal evidence to influence the direction of the findings and conclusions' (p.50). To combat this potential pitfall I ensured that I followed systematic procedures in collecting and analysing data (outlined in greater detail in the following sections). A second criticism of case studies is that they take too much time and result in lengthy and unreadable documents. To address this potential problem I ensured that the cases were clearly bounded and were written using 'creative non-fiction' (Caulley, 2008, p.426), that is the text tells a story delivered in a way that gives the reader a deeper understanding and provokes thinking (Caulley, 2008). Identifying explicit boundaries of what constitutes a case is an important aspect of case study design as they distinguish between services, experiences and people to be included in the case and those which help to build the context (Yin, 2018). Having a clear focus on addressing the research questions, concentrating on the experiences of EC educators and parent participants during the period of school closures and specifying the geographically location are three ways the four case studies in this study were bounded.

3.4.2 Multiple Case Study Research Design

Having explained the reasoning for using a case study approach, I now provide an exploration of the type of case studies available and a justification for the one chosen.

Through the following quote Yin (2018) identifies the different types of case study possible:

> 'four types of designs for case studies are (Type 1) single-case (holistic) designs, (Type 2) single-case (embedded) designs, (Type 3) multiple-case (holistic) designs, and (Type 4) multiple-case (embedded) designs.' (p.96).

I focussed on a multiple case design as by carefully selecting four cases I was able to replicate the case study but alter one or two contextual variables allowing me to either 'predict similar results (literal replication) or predict contrasting results but for anticipatable reasons (a theoretical replication)' (Yin, 2018, p. 103). For example, based on my experiences of living in Peru, the development of the country profile in Chapter 1 and the literature review in Chapter 2, I predicted that there would be differences in the experiences of ECE stakeholders according to their geographical location and/or socioeconomic status. I expected parents/guardians and EC educators to face different challenges during the period of school closures based on the characteristics of their environments urban/rural and private/public school. Whilst a multiple case study can be time consuming and require extensive resources (Yin, 2018), the evidence

from multiple cases is more compelling, robust (Yin, 2018) and reliable (Baxter & Jack, 2008) than for single case studies (Yin, 2018).

Yin produced two types of multiple case study: holistic and embedded. Yin's holistic design refers to where the unit of analysis is the case, for example it only draws on one unit of analysis. Whereas an embedded design describes a case that contains more than one unit of analysis (Yin, 2018). As I have identified more than one unit of analysis to be explored in each case (interviews with EC educators, school leaders, and parents), the study can be described as having an embedded design.

3.4.3 Target Population, Sampling Method, and Related Procedures

The case studies were selected using a purposive sampling technique, defined by Cohen, et al. (2011, p. 156) as when 'researchers hand-pick the cases to be included in the sample on the basis of their judgement of their typicality or possession of the particular characteristics'. For this research, the four case studies were selected based on their geographical location (urban, rural) and their funding status (private or public). The contextual variables were combined in the following way:

- Privately funded in a rural environment (Case Study 1: Rural Private Cusco)
- Publicly funded in an urban environment (Case Study 2: Urban Public Lima)
- Privately funded in an urban environment (Case Study 3: Urban Private Lima)
- Publicly funded in a rural environment (Case Study 4: Rural Public Huancayo)

These criteria were decided upon in response to the literature review which showed that existing inequalities and access to quality ECE had deepened during the pandemic. Therefore, the study sought to explore these inequalities and examine the experiences of the populations in each context. Further details related to the characteristics of each case study can be found in table 6 at the start of Chapter 5.

To gain access to participants, ECE institutions were formally contacted through 'gatekeepers' (Cohen, et al., 2011, p.152), defined as those who control access to targeted populations, in this study this meant headteachers, school directors or programme leaders. These individuals were identified through the professional network of contacts and associations I have developed during my time working as an educator in Peru. At this stage, details of the general outline of the project were shared including information regarding the number and type of participants that were needed, for example the ECE leaders were to hold a managerial position overseeing

teachers implementing ECE for children aged three to six years old and teachers were required to be EC educators working with children aged between three and six years old during the period of school closures. When gatekeepers agreed that their staff/associated parents could participate they were asked to share the Participant Information Sheet (Appendix 2a) and my contact details. ECE stakeholders were then able to volunteer to participate by contacting me to arrange times and dates for their participation.

The process of selecting the teachers and parents within each case study could be viewed as 'convenience' sampling as it involves 'choosing the nearest individuals to serve as respondents' (Cohen et al., 2011), that is those who were interested and available at each of the case sites. Cohen et al. (2011) point out that using this sampling strategy limits the generalisability of the results of the study but helps to build a context when examined alongside other data sources in the case study design. It should also be considered that requiring participants to volunteer resulted in reduced possibility of 'unwitting bias' (O'Leary, 2017, p.210) on my part when selecting participants.

Table 1. Participant type breakdown

Case Study	Participants			Total
	Leader	EC Educator	Parents	
Case Study 1: Rural Private Cusco	1	4	5	10
Case Study 2: Urban Public Lima	1	2	3	6
Case Study 3: Urban Private Lima	1	3	3	7
Case Study 4: Rural Public Huancayo	-	4	6	10
				33

Table 1 shows a breakdown of the participants at each of the four case studies according to the participant type (leader, EC educator and parent participant). Characteristics of the participants and further details are provided when introducing each of the case study contexts in Chapter 5. In addition to the four cases and to better understand the experiences and perspectives of these 33 participants within the broader context of ECE in Peru, 10 expert participants also took part in semi structured interviews. These participants were targeted from my professional network, providing a range of diverse perspectives. Including the views of expert participants provided me, as a researcher from another country, with a greater understanding of the broader picture of ECE in Peru. It also provided a further level of contextual information to add depth to the

experiences of the ECE stakeholders at each of the case studies. The following criteria were used to select participants:

- Consultants, teacher trainers and curriculum developers were required to have worked in the public or private sector influencing ECE practice either through consulting schools and leading teacher training or through policy/curriculum development.

- Parenting programme specialists were required to have delivered support and training to parents during the pandemic period.

- Researchers were required to be involved in conducting academic studies and investigations related to ECE prior to and/or during the pandemic.

Expert participants were contacted directly, provided with the Participant Information Sheet (Appendix 2a) and invited to participate. Further details regarding the characteristics of the expert participants can be found in table 5 at the start of Chapter 4.

3.5 Data Collection Instrument

Through the following section I discuss why interviews were selected as the principal research instrument for collecting rich qualitative data, the benefits that conducting interviews gave to the research, along with details for how I mitigated some of the weaknesses and common criticisms of using interviews. This is followed by a description of how the interviews in this research were structured and the protocols developed. Finally, I provide examples of the key questions asked to demonstrate the nature and form of the interview environment for each of the participant groups.

3.5.1 Interviews

Interviews can be defined as 'A method of data collection that involves researchers seeking open-ended answers related to a number of questions, topic areas or themes' (O'Leary, 2017, p.450). It is the idea of open-ended answers which many academics identify as an important characteristic of conducting interviews as they allow for an interchange of experiences and views between the participant and interviewer (Kvale, 1996; Cohen et al, 2011; Qu & Dumay, 2011). This interchange was extremely valuable in uncovering the perspectives of EC educators, school leaders, parents and local ECE experts in this study as it allowed the creation of new knowledge generated through conversation (Kvale, 1996). This conversational dynamic and 'human interaction' (Alvesson, 2003, p.16) describes what is known as the 'romantic' (Qu

& Dumay, 2011, p,241) approach to interviews where the interviewer plays a significant role in building rapport with the participant which fosters trust and allows them to 'reveal their authentic experiences' (Qu & Dumay, 2011, p. 241).

This romantic approach has, however, been criticised as lacking objectivity and being susceptible to biases by those with a 'neopositivist' (Alvesson, 2003, p.15) view of interviews. Indeed the neopositivist perspective is that interviewer influence should be minimal and the interviewer should maintain neutrality (Alvesson, 2003), whilst acknowledging this more standardised approach it was not considered appropriate for this study as the research questions focussed on ECE stakeholders sharing their experiences. For example, RQs1 and 2 focus on exploring the challenges faced by EC educators and parents/guardians of young children and the romantic approach to interviewing allowed these participants to discuss their experiences from their 'own point of view' (Cohen et al, 2011, 409), and I was there to react to their individual responses enabling them to elaborate on their opinions and their understandings of their experience (Silverman, 2006).

This research also aligns with what Fontana and Frey (2005) coin as the 'new empathetic' approach to interviews (p.696) which mirrors the characteristics of the romantic approach and takes a contrary position to that of the neopositivist one as it seeks to enable the interviewer to 'become an advocate and partner in the study, hoping to use the results to advocate social policies and ameliorate the conditions of the interviewee' (Fontana and Frey, 2005, p.696). Indeed, informing future policy and sharing productive ECE strategies were some of the motivations to conduct the research therefore it is entirely appropriate to have had the interviewer as an active participant in the interview process.

Yin (2018) also observes that the conversations about the lived personal experiences of participants during interviews give an opportunity for participants to provide detailed explanations. Whilst considered a strength of interviews, Yin (2018) also highlights that these conversations are cited as weaknesses by neopositivists as there is potential for interviewer bias. It was therefore deemed responsible to take steps to reduce interviewer biases by using a semi structured interview design and developing an interview guide. A further weakness of the interview design is that it relies on the participant recalling information or experiences which can be unreliable (Cook, 2008; Yin, 2018). To reduce the impact of this weakness interviews were conducted with a variety of ECE stakeholders to enable 'triangulation' (Fontana & Frey, 1994, p.373) of data.

3.5.2 Semi-structured Interviews

The 'semi-structured' (Cohen, et al., 2007, p.97) approach to interviews was selected for this research study as it allowed for informal conversation, but also for predetermined questions to be planned and asked to all participants. This reflects a balance and compromise between a completely 'unstructured' approach characterised by the interviewee leading the content of the interview (Cohen, et al., 2011) and an extremely 'structured' one, through which the interviewer asks the same questions in a standardised order to all participants (Punch, 2014). The structured interview offers little flexibility as the interviewer provides a standardised approach to all participants looking to gain information to clearly defined problems which are testing a hypothesis (Cohen, et al., 2011). This was deemed less appropriate for this research as the study aimed to explore a phenomenon rather than test a theory or hypothesis. The semi-structured approach also allowed me as the interviewer to explore tangents (O'Leary, 2017) and follow up on responses that were not anticipated (Hopf, 2004) when they occurred during conversation.

If we view the structure of interviews as being on a continuum with structured and unstructured being the extremes and semi structured to be in the middle, there is scope to suggest that the interviews conducted in this study were semi structured but shared more characteristics of the unstructured approach. For example, an 'interview guide approach' (Patton, 2002, p.343) was taken which involved themes 'specified in advance, in outline form' being incorporated into the interview as the 'interviewer decides'. This promoted the informal conversational nature of interviews whilst ensuring the key topics and issues were covered (Patton, 2002). Cohen, et al. (2011) label this same type of interview as 'unstructured' (p. 414) but are clear in stating that this is not 'a more casual affair' reflecting their assertation that they should be carefully planned to ensure high quality data are yielded. Cohen, et al. (2007) perfectly describe the type of interview conducted in this study when they state that semi structured interviews are those 'with a given agenda and open-ended questions' (p. 97).

3.5.3 Interview Structure, Questions and Quality

Following the recommendations of Rubin and Rubin (2005) a 'conversational guide' (p.147) was developed. This was deemed appropriate as by their very nature, interviews are tasks of 'daunting complexity' (Oppenheim, 1992, p.65) as they rely on the interviewers' skill in asking questions whilst building rapport, interpreting responses and enabling the conversation to flow (Oppenheim, 1992). Therefore, it was decided beneficial to develop an aid for the interviewer

which is not necessarily a script to be followed word for word but a protocol that allows the interviewer to focus on listening to the respondent and asking 'thought-provoking follow up questions' (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p.147) rather than be bogged down with thinking about the next theme to be covered and how to introduce it. The conversation guide followed a basic 'outline' (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p.150) that promoted the conversational flow of the interview but also ensured that the main themes were covered (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). As four different groups of participants were involved in this study four interview conversation guides were developed following similar questioning themes. The question themes and ideas were developed in response to the literature review and with consideration of the research questions. Table 2, on the following pages provides examples of the themes, key questions, probes and follow ups which are then explored in more detail on the subsequent pages.

Table 2. The interview conversation guides developed for each group of participants

Participant Group	Themes, key questions and probe/follow ups
Experts	• ECE before the pandemic (Q1) Key question: Before the pandemic what did early childhood education look like in Peru? Probe/follow up: Did this differ significantly across the country? If so, how? • Practical strategies for delivering distance learning (Q2-3-4-5-6-7) Key question: In your opinion, what have been the biggest challenges for ECE settings during the pandemic? Probe/follow up: What have been the barriers to providing distance learning for young children? • The effect on children (Q8) Key question: What have been the consequences of the pandemic on young children in Peru? Probe/follow up: What can be done to help young children? • Parents (Q9) Key question: What role do parents play in ECE in Peru? Probe/follow up: Has this changed throughout the pandemic? Why has this been problematic? • The future (Q10) Key question: In your opinion, how can the quality of ECE be raised for all in Peru?

Parents	• The parents' personal experience (Q1-2-3) Key question: What changed for you when children could no longer go to school? (followed by) How did you feel when you realised that your child would not be able to go to school due to COVID-19? Probe/follow up: Have your feelings changed over time? How have you coped? What other responsibilities did you have to take care of during this time? • Children's experiences (Q4-5-6-7) Key question: Has your child's behaviour changed? how so? Follow ups and probes: Why do you think your child's behaviour has changed? How have you coped with the changes of behaviour? • Support (Q8-9) Key question: What support has your child's school been able to provide you as a parent during this difficult time? Probe/follow ups: Did they offer or recommend parent courses or tips? How was this delivered? • Communication (Q10) Key question: How did you communicate with the school and class teacher? Probe/follow ups: How frequent was this communication? Were you happy with this level of communication?
EC educators	• The teacher's personal experience (Q1-2-3) Key question: What changed for you when children could no longer go to school? (followed by) How did you feel when you realised that you would need to adapt to a distance learning model? Probe/follow up: Have your feelings changed over time? • Practical strategies for delivering distance learning (Q4-5-6-7) Key question: What types of distance learning opportunities were you able to deliver?

	Probe/follow up: How did you decide how much of each was appropriate? What were the difficulties/benefits associated with each? How do you feel about using technology to teach young children? Has this changed since the pandemic? • Support (Q8-9-10) Key question: Were you able to receive any training before delivering online classes/tasks? Or at any time during the pandemic? Probe/follow up: Who delivered the training? How effective was the training? • Parents (Q11-12) Key question: How do you feel the role of being a parent has changed? Probe/follow up: Have parents been able to adapt? What have been the difficulties for parents at your school/nursery/early childhood centre? • The future (Q13-14) Key question: What new strategies that you have implemented will you continue to use when children are able to return to school? Probe/follow up: Communication with parents? Parent involvement? Technology?
Leaders	• The Leaders' personal experience (Q1-2-3) Key question: What were the biggest challenges you faced as an early childhood education leader during the pandemic? Probe/follow up: What have you learned from these experiences? • Practical strategies for delivering distance learning (Q4-5-6-7) Key question: What new resources have you invested in since the pandemic started? Probe/follow up: What new technology/learning platforms are you using? What benefits do these offer? • Support (Q8-9) Key question: What support/guidance did you receive from local and national government? Probe/Follow up: How do you feel about this support? Would you have liked more guidance?

	• Parents (Q10-11) Key question: How have you been communicating with parents and children? Probe/follow up: Have any new systems been put into place? How is this working? • The future (Q12-13) Key question: How can early years education improve going forward? Probe/follow up: What are the priorities for the children you have? How can regional/national/international organisations support this?

As a non-native Spanish speaker a key consideration for me, as the researcher, was the language the interviews with participants were conducted in. Whilst my linguistic skills do allow me to converse both in English and Spanish, language learning is an ongoing dynamic process and subtle nuances in language can be significant. The literature related to researching bilingually and multilingually has previously been an area under researched (Holmes et al., 2013; Svensson, 2024) but in recent years has seen growth (Ganassin & Holmes, 2020; Rolland et al., 2023) It has now been recognised that language choices in research can significantly affect the quality of data and the experiences for participants (Rolland et al., 2023; Schembri & Jahić Jašić, 2022). To navigate the complexities of the issue of language in interviews in this study they were conducted in the participants' preferred language (English or Spanish) which was established prior to meeting (Polo-Pérez & Holmes, 2023; Svensson, 2024). Furthermore, efforts were made throughout the research process to demonstrate 'linguistic reflexivity' (Rolland et al., 2023) by being transparent about the language choices made and the support sought and received during the process of translation and when analysing data.

The interviews began with the interviewer 'setting the interview stage' (Kvale, 2007, p.55) by providing a brief description of the purpose of the study outlined in the Participant Information Sheet (see Appendix 2a), a reminder of the confidentiality, right to withdraw, that the interview was being recorded and checking that the participant was ready (Kvale, 2007; Brinkmann & Kvale, 2018). This was followed by an introductory question such as: *Tell me a little about yourself?* This aimed to help the participant feel at ease and build rapport by giving them the opportunity to share a few details about themselves.

When I felt that the interviewee was at ease the first theme was addressed which was usually an 'easier and less threatening' (Cohen, et al., 2011, p.423) question which took the form of a 'what' question rather than a more challenging 'how' or 'why' question. For example, a 'what' question for a parent was: *What changed for you when your child could no longer go to school?* Followed by a related 'how' question such as: *How did you feel when you realised your child could no longer go to school?* This sequencing encouraged the participant to feel at ease and more likely to provide open responses. Each theme to be talked about was initiated through asking a 'main' question which was worked out in advance with the explicit aim to cover the research questions (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). Once the main question had got the conversation started I listened intently and at the same time began to formulate or adapt follow up questions. Follow up questions are defined by Rubin and Rubin (2005) as questions which 'ask for

explanation of themes, concepts, or events that the interviewee has introduced' (p.129) and were asked in the moment or jotted down to be asked later at a natural pause in the participants response. These follow up questions were asked alongside probing questions which were used to keep the conversation on track and signal the desired level of depth from the participant (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). They were also important in allowing the interviewer to interpret responses throughout the interview (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2018). Both the follow ups and probes took the form of asking a simple 'why?' (Cohen, et al., 2011, p.420), rephrasing statements or through nonverbal sounds and body language (Qu & Dumay, 2011). This cycle of main question backed up with follow ups and probes was repeated for each theme and area.

Structuring questions defined by Qu and Dumay (2011) as those which draw to a close one theme and open up the next were used to keep the interview moving and allowed for transition between main questions. Kvale's (2007) example of this form of question states 'I would now like to introduce another topic: … '(p. 61) which provided the basis for several structuring questions used in the interviews. Although the pace of the interview was considered important to manage so as not to take up too much of the participants' time, periods of silence were equally valued. Pauses allowed participants opportunities to reflect and respond in their own time to the questions, whilst also preventing the participant from feeling as though they were being cross examined (Kvale, 2007; Qu & Dumay, 2011).

Open-ended questions defined as those which 'call for the participant to determine the substance and length of response' (Allen, 2018, p.801) were preferred to closed questions as they elicited the views and opinions of the participants (Patton, 2002), are flexible, help develop rapport and importantly 'allow the interviewer to make a true assessment of what the respondent truly believes' (Cohen, et al., 2007, p.357). However, on occasion it was necessary to ask closed questions, (those which require a short confirmation or rejection), either following broader open-ended questions in order to narrow the focus or prior to open questions if the participants were reticent to talk (Allen, 2017). An example of how these types of questions were utilised can be seen in the following main and then probing/follow up questions for parents (also available with the conversation guide found in table 2).

Main Question: *Has your child's behaviour changed? how so?* (closed questions eliciting yes/no/descriptive responses).

Follow ups and probes: *Why do you think your child's behaviour has changed? How have you coped with the changes of behaviour?* (open questions eliciting views and opinions).

A debriefing rounded off each interview which as Brinkmann and Kvale (2018) describe allow the participants to talk further about an opinion or concern that they have been thinking about during the meeting. The debrief was initiated by a summary of what had been discussed during the interview and then concluded with the use of a question such as 'I have no further questions. Is there anything else you would like to bring up, or ask about, before we finish the interview?' (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2018, p.63).

All interviews were audio recorded which prevented the need for interruptions and pauses for the interviewer to write down responses and permitted attentive listening (Patton, 2002). The flow of conversation also allowed notes to be taken during the interviews which attained to interpretation of responses, tone and feelings rather than general descriptions of responses (Allen, 2017). Later, although it was time consuming, I transcribed the interviews which meant that I could incorporate those details previously noted during the interviews into the transcriptions. It was preferable that I did this task as I was familiar with the content and as Parcel and Lafferty (2018, p.802) point out 'transcription is an interpretive, creative, and theoretical process that is the first step in data analyses'. I was therefore able to begin analysing and drawing conclusions from the data in its rawest form before in-depth analysis.

3.5.4 Group Interviews

Until this point the semi-structured interviews discussed have been individual, with just one participant involved. However, in three incidences of data collection in this research project group interviews were employed, whereby more than one participants engaged in an interview. The first incidence of group interviews occurred at case study 1 whereby a husband and wife preferred to participate together in an online interview to save time. As awareness of respecting participants' time was an ethical consideration as set out in the BERA (2018) ethical guidelines (discussed further in this chapter), accommodations were made ahead of time and questions were adapted accordingly with examples presented in table 3. Additionally, parent participants at case study 4 were given the option to participate in group interviews as part of an ethical consideration as the participants were considered vulnerable and less likely to participate in one-on-one interviews (Barbour, 2014 and Creswell, 2014). Group interviews were, indeed favoured by participants and two group interviews were carried out.

Table 3. Examples of adaptations made to questions for group interviews with parent participants

Group interview consideration	Individual interview question example	Modified group interview questions
Ensuring that each participant's voice was heard.	What changed for you when your children could no longer go to school?	Can each of you share what changed when your children could no longer go to school? Were your experiences any different to X?
Mindful of not demanding overly personal or sensitive responses.	How did you feel when you realised that your child would not be able to go to school due to COVID-19?	We've talked about the challenges of the pandemic, without sharing personal details would anyone like to share how you felt when you realised that your child would not go to school?

Morgan (2001) notes a perceived difference in purpose between the two types of interview with individual interviews being preferred for studies that require detail and group interviews suitable for more limited applied projects. However, he goes on to state that 'both methods can be adapted to serve a wide variety of purposes' (p.154), a conclusion which guided my 'multi-method approach' (Gaskell, 2000, p. 9) to interviewing. By carrying out both approaches, when necessary, I was able to ensure the in-depth explorations of personal experiences were captured but also that individuals who preferred to participate as part of a group were also included. When adapting to the group format care was taken to ensure questioning would not require responses that were personal or sensitive and that each participant had the opportunity to contribute in a balanced manner.

3.6 Pilot Case Study

Between August and September 2021, a pilot case study was conducted to prepare for the main study. The pilot sought to address four aspects of the research project.

- To familiarise me with the use of the data collection tools and processes, in order to identify any gaps in my knowledge and skills as a researcher.
- To assess the appropriateness of the data collection instruments with regards to their ability to provide data to address the research questions.
- To observe the accessibility of participants and any potential issues with recruitment.
- To assess whether the data collection process is practical and manageable.

As with many pilot case studies a site was selected based on its convenience, ease of access and geographical location (Yin, 2018); it was a private school in Lima which I had access to through my professional network. The background and roles of participants mirrored those desired for the main case studies (O'Leary, 2017) in that they were ECE stakeholders who had lived and worked in Peru during the COVID-19 pandemic. Through my professional network, the ECE leader and gatekeeper at the school was contacted and details of the research project shared via email and an online meeting. The ECE leader shared the Participant Information Sheet (Appendix 2a) with five EC educators and 10 parents, and they were invited to volunteer to participate by emailing me directly. I was contacted by the ECE leader and two EC educators each of whom participated in online interviews lasting between 55 – 85 minutes each. After the interviews were completed EC educator participants were asked to note any difficulties they had in making sense of the language or terms used (O'Leary, 2017) and were asked to comment on the relevance of the questions (O'Leary, 2017) to improve the content validity of the instrument (Cresswell, 2009). Interviews were transcribed verbatim, and in one case translated from Spanish to English by me, before conducting a thematic data analysis (Braun & Clarke's, 2008, 2018).

There were no parents who volunteered to participate in interviews. To compensate for potential difficulty in recruiting parents and in response to the piloting of the study in general the following modifications were made to the research project.

- Interviews with local ECE experts to be included in the research project to provide a broader range of voices and perspectives. This would also help to compensate for limited parent participation in the main study and therefore efforts were made to include ECE experts who worked directly with parents.
- The interview guide was shortened and reworded with definitions included or alternative phrases used for several terms, for example, synchronous and asynchronous learning.

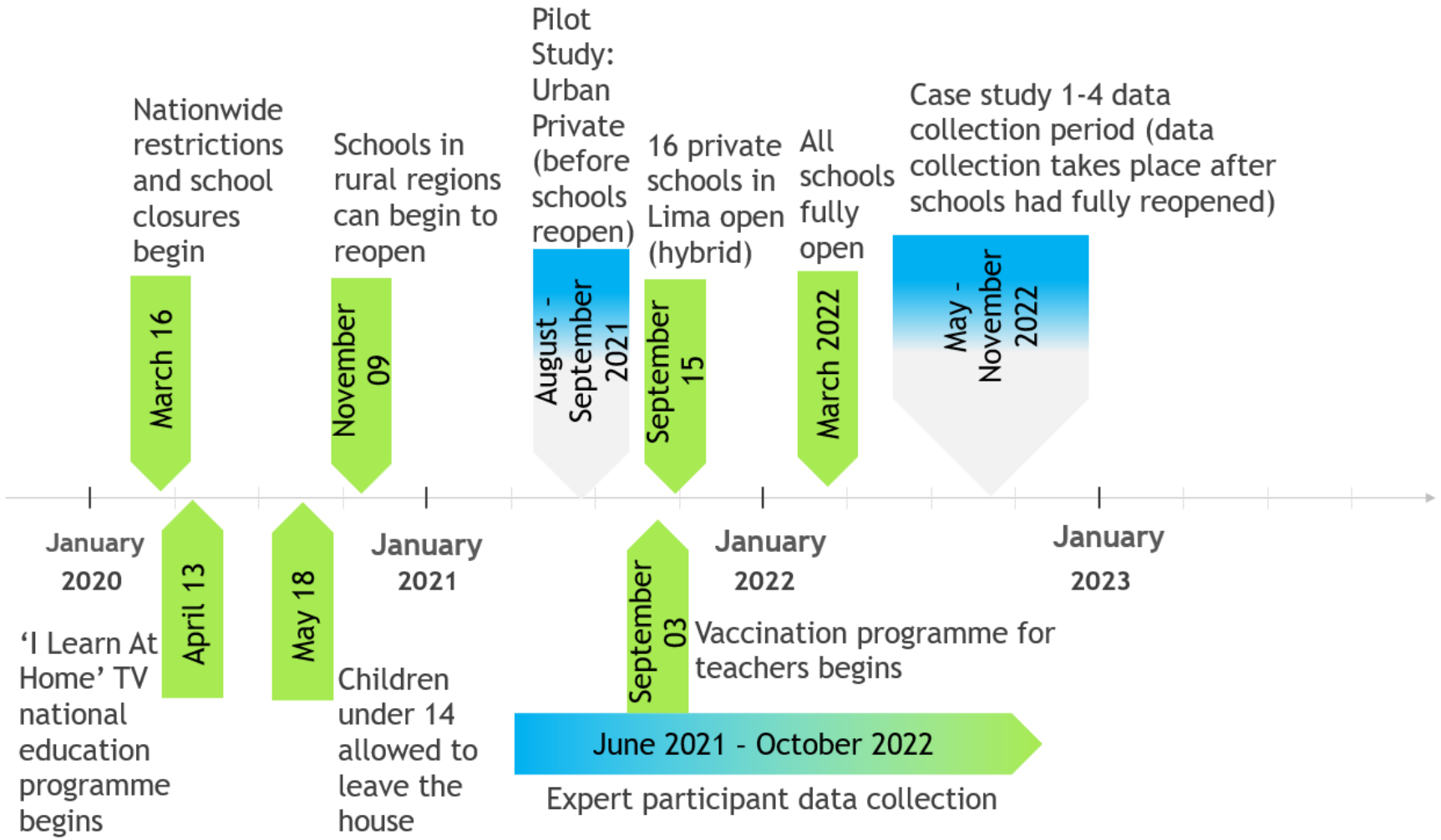
- A question for all participants to capture the perceived impact of the pandemic on children's educational development and/or behaviour was added to the interview guide. (What were the three main consequences for your child/children in your class during the period of school closures?)
- I undertook several training courses related to data analysis and the use of NVIVO.
- Time was built into the project to allow for the process of transcribing and in some cases translating interviews. Although these were considered to be time consuming it gave me valuable opportunities to listen to the interviews several times, noting significant pauses or changes in tone of voice which gave a greater understanding of the nuances of the data.

The testing of interview questions is considered to be important in order to ensure they are thoughtfully worded and clear to allow for the extraction of the type of information desired (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The revised interview guides were trialled after the pilot with two parents and two EC educators from my professional network to test the adjustments. Further modifications were made accordingly to further enhance the quality and appropriateness of the questions for the main study.

3.7 Data Collection

Data were collected for the main case studies between May 2022 and November 2022, whilst interviews with expert participants were conducted from June 2021 to October 2021. These periods have been contextualised within the significant events related to ECE in Peru in the information illustrated in figure 4 on the following page.

Figure 4. Timeline to show context for data collection period



Whilst interviews at the four case studies took place when schools had been reopened (see figure 4), COVID-19 was still a consideration when collecting data from case studies 1 and 2 between May and October 2022 and so it was decided that online interviews would be most appropriate. Later in November and December 2022 opportunities for in person interviews to take place were provided but there was no interest from the ECE stakeholders in these two case studies. By November 2022 the concerns regarding COVID-19 had been significantly reduced and the option for ECE stakeholders to participate in in-person or online interviews was provided at case study 3 with all participants choosing online interviews. Interviews were conducted in person during November 2022 at case study 4 due to the participants in the community not having access to technology. All interviews with expert participants were conducted online. The inconsistency in whether participants participated in online or in-person interviews was unavoidable due to the nature of the pandemic with safety for participants considered the primary concern.

The use of online interviews was commonplace in qualitative research during the pandemic (Lobe et al., 2022) and the literature shows that there were opportunities associated with this approach such as greater flexibility in scheduling (Keen et al., 2022), with several participants from this study commenting that meeting online was particularly convenient for them. Similarly, not having to physically travel to meet was also a favourable condition for participants. Challenges such as difficulties building rapport (de Villiers et al., 2022) and picking up on visual cues (Thunberg & Arnell, 2022) were also considerations when conducting interviews. However, rather than a new set of ethical principles for online interviews Engward et al. (2022) suggest that enhanced awareness of the existing principles in social research is sufficient. Those ethical considerations are now outlined in the section below.

3.8 Ethical Considerations

The research obtained ethical approval from the University of Greenwich (see appendix 2b) and followed the principles that underpin the BERA (2018) ethical guidelines as it was conducted with integrity, respecting privacy, and aiming to maximise benefit and minimise harm of participants. As the researcher I accepted my responsibility to treat participants with respect and dignity regardless of their age, gender, ethnicity, nationality, or cultural identity and was mindful of structural inequalities with regards to race, socio-economic status, and gender (BERA, 2018). As a qualitative researcher who was looking to construct knowledge through interacting with participants (Cohen et al., 2007) being aware of the differences between myself

and the participants was considered particularly important. In the context of my research, it would be reasonable to view my status as a privileged outsider (Kerstetter, 2012) due to my background and access to resources. Being aware of my outsider status and the potential for this to affect the dynamic between myself and participants was an important consideration throughout my research.

The main instruments of data collection were interviews, which Kvale (2007) notes as being permeated with ethical issues. The nature of the interview process 'creates power imbalances through a hierarchical relationship often established between the researcher and the participant' (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 57). To counterbalance the potential for such hierarchical relationships I attempted to build rapport with participants and put them at ease by starting each interview with the aims, purpose of the study, along with the confidentiality and right to withdraw reminders, before then sharing some information about myself. I then asked starter questions which were designed to encourage the participant to speak about something they were familiar with rather than starting with a challenging question. This approach allowed for participants to be at ease before engaging in the co-construction of knowledge and interpretation of experiences.

In line with BERA guidelines from 2018, informed voluntary consent was sought from all participants before they were involved in the research, and they were aware that they are able to withdraw their consent and data at any point up until March 2023. This information was provided to participants via a Participant Information Sheet and a Consent Form that they were required to read and sign before taking part in the research (Appendix 2a and 2c). This information was provided to participants in both English and Spanish. Gatekeepers and ECE experts were approached directly by myself as the researcher with one potential ECE expert choosing not to participate after an informal meeting to explain the study and a second expert responding to my initial request by passing my details to a colleague who they felt had more expertise in the area. Parent and EC educator participants were provided with the Participant Information Sheet and my contact details by the gatekeeper. To ensure that all participants who contacted me to arrange interviews were aware of the right to withdraw, confidentiality and anonymity the Participant Information Sheet was shared a second time and then again verbally at start of each interview details were repeated. During this time, I was also able to ensure that

each participant had a comprehensive understanding of the processes and aims of the research (Yin, 2018).

The privacy and anonymity of both participants and the institutes they are associated with were maintained through omitting real names (and using pseudonyms) and omitting details that make identities traceable. For this reason, only the name of the region was included in the case study name, only general geographical and demographical information is provided, and typical characteristics rather than actual descriptions of participants were shared at the beginning of each case study. It was also important to ensure that participants understood that their responses were confidential and that they would not be shared with employers or other ECE stakeholders. This is particularly important for the interviews with EC educators who may feel compromised if they criticise their school or parents. Therefore, alongside the written confirmation that each participant received in their Participant Information Sheet, they were also verbally reminded of this before the start of the interview.

The BERA guidelines are based on the premise of do no harm and although qualitative research may be considered low risk to participants (Hammersley & Traianou, 2012) the research took place during/shortly after the COVID-19 pandemic and so there were several significant factors with regards to minimising harm to others that need to be considered. The first aspect is the physical health and safety for both participants and me. Local government guidelines on restrictions of movement and biosecurity protocols were followed meaning that for the first three case studies data collection was conducted remotely through video calls.

A second related consideration was the negative impact that COVID-19 had on many aspects of people's lives. It was important to remain sensitive to the needs and feelings of participants for whom some will have seen friends and family members pass away and/or lost jobs, income, and experienced negative outcomes. Care was taken to not cause further anguish or stress and, although it did not happen, should a participant have experienced a strong negative emotional response during an interview it would have been stopped, the participant withdrawn and referred to local third-party support services.

Ethical considerations were assessed at the outset of the project and formal approval to conduct the research was granted by the University of Greenwich Research Ethics Committee (see

Appendix 2b). Ethical considerations were then assessed periodically and as they arose throughout the course of the research project as recommended by BERA (2018) when it is stated that ethical decision-making should be an 'actively deliberative, ongoing and iterative process of assessing and reassessing the situation and issues as they arise' (p.2). For example, adjustments were made to the length of the interview guide to ensure that it was not overly time consuming for participants after informal feedback reported during the pilot study. The amount of time required from participants in general is an ethical consideration and across all areas of the research project efforts were made to keep the time they volunteered to the minimum so as not to take them away from vital daily endeavours or cause disruption to their lives.

A second example of the ongoing assessment of ethical considerations were the modifications to the interview structures used with parents at Case Study 4: Rural Public Huancayo. As already stated, my presence as an outsider and how this affected the power dynamics between the participants and myself was a consideration with all participants across the four case studies. However, parent participants at Case Study 4: Rural Public Huancayo may be perceived to be particularly vulnerable to this power dynamic due to their socioeconomic status. With this in mind, when parents requested that three or four parents join the same interview, I was aware that parents may have been intimidated by the one-to-one interview structure and as such adapted to the format the parents were most comfortable with.

3.9 Analytic Strategy

As Yin (2018, p. 213) notes, 'case studies easily become stalled at the analytic stage' as there are few 'fixed formulas or cookbook recipes to use as guides', the nature of case study research relies on interpretations and an overall analytical strategy. As a starting point for this overarching strategy, I focussed on using data to address small questions, forming tentative or exploratory conclusions before addressing larger questions. Using this approach as a starting point encouraged me to 'play' (Yin, 2018, p.215) with the data, manipulating them to explore similarities differences and patterns. This process of data analysis began early during fieldwork as advocated by Miles and Huberman (1994), allowing me 'to cycle back and forth between thinking about the existing data and generating strategies for collecting new, often better, data' (p50). In my study this took the form of note taking during interviews providing opportunities for in the moment reflective thinking prompting follow-up and probing questions throughout interviews. Further notes were added post interview allowing for adaptations (if necessary), to

take place between interviews. Later all notes were reviewed and summarised to provide a record of how initial reactions and thoughts were developed through an ongoing iterative process.

As previously mentioned, all interviews were audio recorded, transcribed verbatim and where necessary translated from Spanish to English. Verbatim transcripts were developed with the 'aim to capture every utterance from the participant and serve as an accurate record of the conversation' (Lester et al., 2020, p.91) in an attempt to recognise and value the choice of words used by each participant. The process of translation was conducted by myself and as a non-native Spanish speaker I relied on the support of my professional and personal network (which included native Peruvian Spanish speakers) to help translate unfamiliar phrases, acronyms and expressions. Short, anonymised extracts were viewed jointly with colleagues to maintain participant confidentiality and also allow for discussion and back and forth to ensure the true essence of meaning was captured, a crucial and often challenging aspect of translated interviews (Abfalter et al., 2021; Mckenna, 2021). Where possible and convenient, participants also engaged in this process in a form of member checking to similarly ensure that interpretations and sometimes translations were accurate (Mckenna, 2021). Whilst this process of transcription and translation was time-consuming it was considered crucial in helping to familiarise myself with the data and the nuances of the language used.

These early stages of my analytic strategy (playing with data, ongoing reflections and modifications to interview questions, translations and transcriptions) provided me with prior knowledge and initial analytic thoughts. All of this served as a base from which to explore the data and conduct a six-phase reflective thematic analysis drawing on Braun and Clarke's (2008, 2019) recommended approach. The first phase involved the process of 'repeated reading' in an 'active way' (Braun & Clarke, 2008, p.87) by listening to audio recordings, checking translations and transcriptions, and general familiarisation with data. At this stage transcripts were uploaded to NVIVO for organisational purposes and to enable the data coding from phase two of the thematic analysis to begin. Initial coding which was manually performed using NVIVO software as a tool to develop codes, (see Appendix 3a for codebook example). This allowed me to firstly, explore the explicit phrases and descriptions of the challenges faced by ECE stakeholders and those reported by the ECE experts and then search deeper to identify the underlying, unspoken challenges. Secondly, coding both inductively and deductively provided the opportunity to code both openly grounding the coding in data and the future application of

alternative frameworks but also focused within some boundaries. For my research this resulted in Bronfenbrenner's framework being adopted early into the data analysis process enabling me to focus on layered environmental influences on the impact of the pandemic on ECE. Then, through reflection and data driven awareness, the inclusion of Bourdieu's framework helped to examine the nuanced power dynamics and social inequalities.

Braun and Clarke (2008, p.89) describe phase three of the thematic analysis as, 'starting to analyse your codes and consider how different codes may combine to form an overarching theme'. This process started by focussing on the development and 'generation' (Braun & Clarke, 2019, p. 593) of significant themes and subthemes following the identification of patterns within the data. At this point further reflection and review of themes occurred through phase four of the process, whereby extracts of data were reanalysed and checked to see if they did indeed form a 'coherent pattern' (Braun & Clarke, 2008, p.91) with the themes. This review was then repeated but after rereading the whole data set to ensure the theme reflected the data as a whole and also to add missed codes that matched the theme in the data. Phase five led to the naming and defining of the themes providing the essence of each theme in a concise and accurate way.

The final phase of the process was the write-up of the report found in Chapters 4 and 5 of this thesis, where I have used extracts of the data to provide evidence for the themes I have generated to illustrate the story of my findings. Chapter 4 begins by reporting the findings from interviews with expert participants. This provides additional context to complement the country profile outlined in the Introduction and adds to the triangulation of data from the four case studies in Chapter 5. Each case study was taken in turn and written up by first describing the context, followed by an outline of the challenges as reported by the EC educators, the challenges as reported by the parents/guardians and then the overarching themes (drawing on interview data from across all participant groups at the case study). Each case study followed this structure to directly address research questions, explore the wider aims of the research project and provide a logical breakdown of the data. Throughout, codes, themes and extracts were interpreted taking into consideration the participants' contexts and my own experiences in recognition of potential biases (Smith, et al., 2022). I moved between the six phases fluidly as my thinking and interpretation of the data developed both as a result of growing ever more familiar with my data and the accumulation of more data as I conducted each case study.

The six-phase thematic analysis approach described was used for each of the four individual case studies. This was followed by a cross-case synthesis with the aim of comparing or synthesising 'any within case patterns across the cases' (Yin, 2018, p. 246). This process provided an opportunity to explore the impact of the pandemic on ECE on each real-world context and then explore whether there were similarities or differences in other settings. This cross-case analysis is reported in Chapter 6 alongside a discussion of the main findings developed by looking across the whole data set. Throughout the data analysis process the theoretical frameworks of Bronfenbrenner and Bourdieu, as outlined in the introduction chapter, were integrated highlighting patterns in the data within and across the case studies.

3.10 Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness and rigour in qualitative research are essential to ensure high quality findings which provide insights into real world phenomenon. In an effort to provide trustworthiness I followed guidelines set out by (Miles et al., 2013) and table 4 provides examples of the steps I took to adhere to the categorised guidelines they set out.

Table 4. The categorised guidelines of trustworthiness (Miles, et al., 2013, p.277) and examples of steps taken in this study.

Guidelines	Example from this study
Objectivity/confirmability	• The methods and procedures previously stated and explained throughout this chapter. • Findings being explicitly linked to data through the use of quotes from participants in chapters 4 and 5.
Reliability/dependability/auditability	• Research questions that are clear and relevant to the research design. • Findings are drawn from a range of data sources.
Internal validity/credibility/authenticity	• Descriptions of each case study context are detailed and thorough. • Triangulation of data sources.

Table 5. continued. Guidelines	Example from this study
external validity/transferability/fittingness	• The characteristics of participants and contexts are detailed enough for the reader to compare with other populations.
utilization/application/action orientation	• RQ4 focusses on how the findings can influence policy and practice.

Whilst unjustified, case study research is often criticised as being 'ill-suited to analyses or evaluations' (Denscombe, 2010, p.63), therefore consideration must be given to the rigour of all aspects of the research by the researcher. In contrast to this view, case study research itself includes protocols which are built into the research design increasing the reliability of the research (Yin, 2018). Regardless, as all data collected in my research is qualitative it was considered important to pre-empt and minimise any potential criticism by contemplating to what degree my research could be considered authentic (Morse, 2018).

The details outlined throughout this chapter highlight the steps I have taken to ensure credibility of my research. For example, source data triangulation was achieved by including perspectives from three categories of participants from each of the four case studies. Indeed, including four case studies was in itself a form of triangulation with shared characteristics being features of each of the contexts (private, public, urban, rural). Additionally, ECE expert participant views were sought to provide the broader country context which supported the wider conclusions and the commonalities and differences of EC educators' and parents/guardians' experiences during the period of school closures. Furthermore, theoretical triangulation occurred through the combination of Bronfenbrenner's and Bourdieu's frameworks. Member checking at various stages was also conducted to verify interpretations of data and to 'validate concepts and their components (rather than raw data), and complete data collection' (Morse, 2018, p.1398).

Ultimately though, as Patton (2002) notes 'the trustworthiness of the data is tied directly to the trustworthiness of the person who collects and analyses the data' (p. 570) which encouraged me to reflect on my approach and biases at all stages of conducting this research project and ensure ethical transparent practices and reporting throughout.

3.11 Modifications to Original Research Design

My original research design included an online parent survey that aimed to provide more parents at each case study the opportunity to participate, and in doing so provide a wider, more diverse section of views and experiences that could be analysed alongside interviews. The survey would have added a further layer of triangulation and validity to my study as more participants would have contributed. However, after sending the survey on multiple occasions to the parents at case studies 1-3 there were very few responses. Alternatives such as opening the survey up to populations geographically close or from similar socioeconomic backgrounds to the three case studies were considered. It was decided that this would not have been appropriate as those parents were not enrolled at the schools where the case studies were based and this would have affected the integrity of each individual case. Before travelling to case study 4 in November 2022 to collect data it was decided that focussing on interview data was the preferred option. The purely qualitative approach yielded more than enough data to analyse and to draw conclusions from.

Findings: Chapter 4 and 5

Through the following two chapters, I explore the findings from interviews with expert participants before systematically reporting on each of the four case studies. The purpose of presenting findings in two separate chapters is to divide the macro-level perspectives provided by the experts followed by the micro-level lived experiences of the participants at each case study. The findings are, however, closely linked and those from the experts flow into those of the case studies. Utilising this structure enhances clarity whilst maintaining the depth and detail that is needed for each set of findings.

The findings are therefore reported through the following two chapters:

- Chapter 4: The Experts
- Chapter 5: The Case Studies.

Chapter 4: The Experts

4.1 Introduction to the experts

The following section focuses on exploring the perspectives of 10 individuals considered experts in the field of ECE in Peru who come from a variety of backgrounds. Including ECE expert participants in educational research is not uncommon (Huntington et al., 2023; Luo et al., 2023; Urban et al., 2023), helping to better understand a context or the phenomena being studied. The rationale for including the perspectives of ECE experts in this study arose in part as a response to my reflection and admission that as an outsider I could not fully understand the nuances politically, historically and structurally that exist in Peru and have both indirect and direct influences on ECE. The objective of including more voices was to build a context that would help me as a researcher better understand the participants' experiences (from the main case studies) and interpret their meaning and significance within each individuals' context but also as part of the broader societal picture. Secondly, the pilot study identified the potential difficulties in recruiting parent participants and so including the views of ECE experts, and particularly those who have knowledge of challenges faced by parents, was devised as a way to incorporate perceptions of their experiences (if parent recruitment continued to be difficult in the main case studies). Thirdly, the inclusion of participant perspectives outside of each of the four case studies allowed for greater triangulation of data and had the potential to demonstrate how the individual case studies fit in with the overall ECE landscape in Peru. Understanding the experiences of EC educators and parents/guardians was fundamental in addressing the research questions and the wider aims of the study. Therefore, the inclusion of expert participants provided an added layer of depth and the ability to explore the experiences of the participants with a greater understanding of the social, political and historical background of each participant. This was further enhanced by the experts' capacity to share insights from their own lived experiences of working with, supporting and researching parents/guardians and EC educators during the period of school closures.

Purposive sampling ensured that participants met the following distinct selection criteria:

- Consultants, teacher trainers and curriculum developers were required to have worked in the public or private sector influencing ECE practice either through consulting schools and leading teacher training or through policy/curriculum development.

- Parenting programme specialists were required to have delivered support and training to parents during the pandemic period.
- Researchers were required to be involved in conducting academic studies and investigations related to ECE prior to and/or during the pandemic.

The semi-structured interview approach (Cohen et al., 2007) allowed participants to provide details about their specific area of expertise, knowledge and unique perspective, but also ensure that some predetermined concepts/issues were explored by all participants. Interviews took place online via video calls that lasted between approximately 40 minutes to 90 minutes from June 2021 to October 2022. Five interviews were conducted in English and five in Spanish as preferred by the participant. Pseudonyms were assigned to each participant and general professional backgrounds of the expert participants can be found in table 5 below. More detailed descriptions of the experts' backgrounds, employers and roles have not been shared to protect the confidentiality of each participant.

Table 6. Names (pseudonyms) and areas of expertise of expert participants

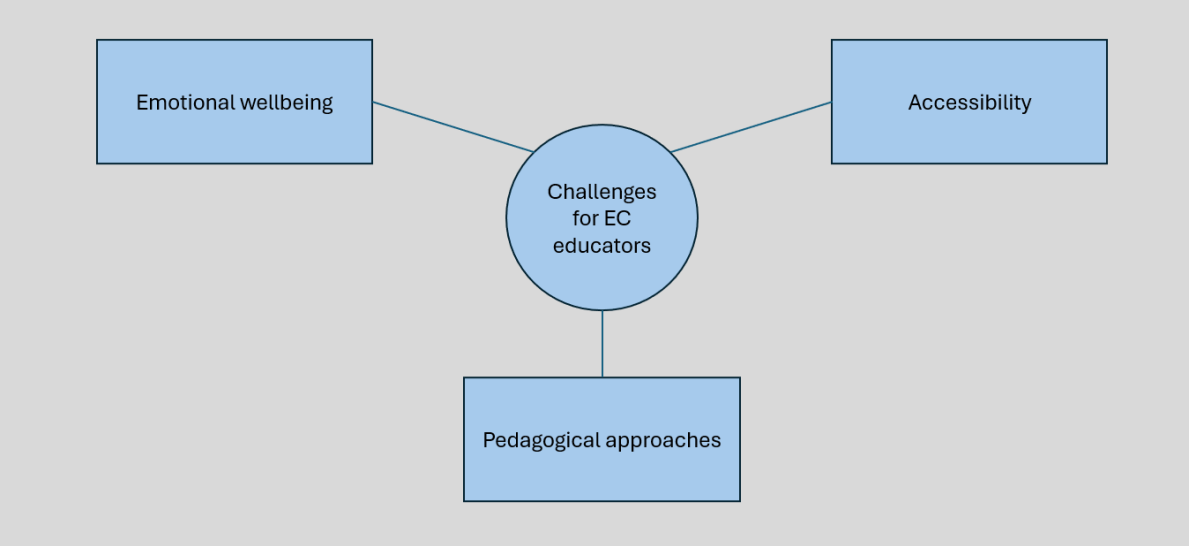
Name (pseudonym)	Area of expertise
Ana	Curriculum Developer
Milagros	Teacher and Teacher Trainer
Brisa	Consultant
Diana	Parenting Programme Specialist
Jessica	Parenting Programme Specialist
Vera	Parenting Programme Specialist
Julia	Researcher
Parker	Researcher
Martina	Researcher
Alejandro	Researcher

Through the following sections I will outline the challenges faced by EC educators and then parents/guardians as perceived by the expert participants. I then present overarching themes identifying underlying meaning and patterns from across the interviews with experts. I then conclude the section with a summary of these challenges and overarching themes.

4.2 Challenges faced by EC educators

Experts identified several challenges related to EC educators which are now reported under three main categories**:** a) emotional wellbeing of EC educators, b) accessibility and delivering ECE, and c) pedagogical approaches to ECE as illustrated in figure 5.

Figure 5. Challenges faced by EC educators - ECE experts



a) Emotional well-being of EC educators

Five out of the 10 experts noted that a significant challenge for EC educators related to how their emotional well-being was negatively impacted by the circumstances surrounding the period of school closures. The experts perceived that it was difficult for EC educators to manage the disruption to their home and personal lives. The impact of the pandemic on the emotional well-being of EC educators was highlighted by Ana, a Curriculum Developer, as she cited fear and the harsh realities of losing loved ones during the pandemic meant that many teachers were grieving for lost relatives and colleagues.

Tension existed because each teacher already had their own worlds, their own... many lost relatives, many lost colleagues also, even now they are still very scared. All of that creates an impact, doesn't it? (Ana, Curriculum Developer)

Experts linked the negative impact on well-being and the emotional strain of the pandemic on teachers' capacities to fulfil their roles as educators. The pandemic caused a blurring of lines between educators' personal lives and their professional ones. The following comment from Diana, a Parenting Programme Specialist, illustrates this point and comes as part of a response to a direct question about what she perceived to be the major challenges for EC educators during the period of school closures.

It comes down to how each teacher comes to fulfil their role as a professional, but above all, as a human being faced with a unique situation in life that caused a lot of fear. This went beyond being a teacher. As a woman who was suddenly either a mum 24/7 or was living in a difficult situation such as having someone sick at home. We cannot pretend that this can be seen only from a formal professional situation, but we really have to see ourselves as human beings. (Diana, Parenting Programme Specialist)

For Diana the personal challenges and experiences cannot be separated from the professional ones and there needs to be an awareness of educator well-being during crisis situations. She went on to point out that there was professional support available and incorporated into policy, but that many EC educators may not have had access to personal and emotional support to be able to 'fulfil their role as a professional'. Brisa, a consultant, highlights the benefits of such support as she recalled the experiences reported by an educator who participated in a mentoring programme that she was involved with during the pandemic:

[reporting the words of an educator] 'My mentor actually supports me to navigate the social emotional issues. That's what I love my mentor for because he could understand what I was going through. He could help me. He could be... He could listen to me'. (Brisa, Consultant)

The feedback Brisa reported receiving indicates the value the EC educator placed on having someone to talk to and feel listened to. Within the context of the pandemic in Peru this was particularly significant as restrictions on movement were in place for long periods of time and therefore the support systems that EC educators normally rely upon both personal and professional may not have been available, further compounding the negative impact on EC educator well-being.

b) Difficulties of providing access to ECE as a distance learning programme

In terms of logistical challenges experienced in delivering ECE during the period of school closures, the difficulty of having to respond to a diverse range of needs was cited by seven of the 10 experts:

So, there were different ways to access different kids, and I was impressed by how teachers could handle the diversity. I met with a teacher that said: "I have three groups of students I teach; ones I can connect to via Zoom, and I give them lessons via Zoom…There are students that I can connect with through WhatsApp, and I send them tasks and I communicate with them through WhatsApp and that's it. And the other group of students, it is the smallest group which I cannot connect with in any way, so I need to send them physical copies of things." (Brisa, Consultant)

For the teachers at the beginning, it was very difficult with the issue of how they manage to connect with the child. So, usually they sent things to the parents' cell phone so that the parent at some point could then do the activity with the child and then send a photo back to the teacher. (Jessica, Parenting Programme Specialist)

Adapting to meet the diverse needs within their communities meant that there was additional workload, organisation and planning to ensure children were able to access ECE in some form. Access to and use of technology were determining factors for individual teachers but even if they could connect, they were confronted with challenges in finding ways to access the communities they served highlighting the importance of access to technology on a wider level. Digital literacy too was a determining factor for both EC educators and the communities they worked with as highlighted by Martina, a Researcher, when she notes that 'even if they have the access, they have trouble using the technology'. ECE stakeholders' access to technology and the digital literacy skills to utilise it were therefore key factors to explore across the case studies.

However, it was not just access to technology and digital literacy that were the challenges for EC educators in relation to the delivery of ECE during the period of school closures. Experts noted that parents were required to play an active role in their child's educational development during this time and that it was challenging for EC educators to manage this involvement. Parker, a researcher, noted that 'teachers usually say you know, parents don't engage'. This was particularly problematic during the pandemic because if parents didn't respond and engage

then there was no way for the EC educator to ensure that children had access to ECE. Both EC educators and children relied on the parents to be active participants in this process. Therefore, how teachers fostered this relationship and the tasks they were invited to complete mattered. Vera, a Parenting Programme Specialist, spoke about this in great detail explaining that:

The first year they had this dynamic [whereby parents needed to send evidence of completed tasks to teachers] and for the teacher it was very difficult because the parents did not respond to them. You had adults who were stressed, overwhelmed with things, and then also having to answer the teacher. This was very frustrating. That was a challenge. (Vera, Parenting Programme Specialist)

The dynamic described by Vera involved parents being responsible for watching over children and then sending evidence of completed tasks to teachers. This process allowed interaction and feedback between children, parents and teachers and formed a crucial part of the Ministry of Education's distance learning programme strategy 'to foster effective use of educational resources and ensure learning' (Munoz-Najar, 2022, p.272). Teachers collated these materials to use as evidence of engagement in the distance learning programmes as required by the State and as a way to monitor and assess children's progress. Through Vera's teacher training programme, which was developed during the period of school closures, she described how EC educators were taught how to engage with parents to include them in their children's learning. One main way this was achieved was by making tasks collaborative and enjoyable. The example given by Vera is reading a book together for ten minutes a day, a sustainable and meaningful activity for both parent and child.

c) Pedagogical approaches to ECE

Milagros, a Teacher and Teacher Trainer, described the approach taken by top 'elite' private schools to distance learning programmes for young children aged three to six years old as including structured online classes two or three times daily, with small groups of about seven children, who were each usually seated beside an adult. For both family and teacher this approach relied on the use of technology and live, online interactions between teacher and child. In this respect we see how the online classes and schedules provided frequent, everyday communication and, in some cases, provided the opportunity for interactions between children. These routines and interactions show an attempt to replicate the in-person classroom experience. Whilst some schools in the private sector were able to utilise technology in this

way the experts varied in their opinions as to the appropriateness of this approach for young children. Ana, a Curriculum Developer highlighted this point when she stated:

I understand that there are private institutions that can [have online classes]. But it's like, are we really thinking about kids? I mean, that's what I'm telling you. I mean, classes, a break, then new classes. We're talking about five-year-olds, four-year-olds. What do we want them to do? (Ana, Curriculum Developer)

Ana's question 'are we really thinking about the kids?' strongly suggests that she feels children were not being considered when they were required to participate in online classes. Indeed, two other experts raised their concerns about an overexposure to screens having negative impacts on child development. When online classes were to be used, experts recommended the classes be short, broken up with plenty of breaks, and to include the presence of a parent or guardian.

The use of online classes described by Milagros in the private sector and the criticisms of this approach by Ana, a curriculum developer from the public sector may have reflected the wider difference between pedagogical approaches taken in the public and private sectors. Whether these approaches were adopted due to underlying philosophical beliefs or due to the pressures and realities seen in each context is unclear. However, those in the private sector, some experts speculated that parents expected online classes and therefore institutions felt the need to justify school fees.

The private [schools], they have had more pressure to have children connected with screens. Why? Because it will be a way to show the parents, I am here doing my job and you have to pay, because I am giving you the educational service. (Vera, Parenting Programme Specialist)

Vera explains how teachers and schools felt the need to justify school fees by being present online via live classes, providing an 'educational service'. This is something which would not have been achievable in many contexts but doesn't necessarily mean that the teachers were not working. Teaching virtually in ECE would have been unthinkable before the pandemic due to a hands on, experiential approach being favoured (UNICEF, 2018), but now according to Vera teachers needed to be seen to be teaching.

In the public sector, experts describe how the infrastructure to enable online classes may not have been that common due to limited access to technology. Online classes may have been utilised in some public institutions but the method of ECE delivery and therefore pedagogy was much more varied in this sector. In some contexts, teachers communicated solely with

parents (not with children), set paper-based tasks and/or utilised the resources from the Ministry of Education's distance learning programme, which was made available via television, radio and internet. Experts identified the potential difficulties in maintaining engagement and interaction between adults and children in the public sector:

I think what I've seen is just now you have kids that, yes, have access to learning on the television, but then they just sit in front of the TV all day. So, what I fear is that now parents say, "oh, I sit the kid in front of the TV and they're at school, they're learning". Whereas I think a lot of the important pieces of learning, if it is virtual [distance learning programme] is the engagement between an adult and the child, you know, doing it together. (Julia, Researcher)

Uhm, so [teacher-child interactions] were pretty hard to achieve, especially with students from low-income families that had issues with connectivity and just accessing the remote setting. So, what I learned from this group of teachers is that most of them were only able to connect with their students through WhatsApp, ... I mean they couldn't even speak to them. I mean, they could send a couple of audios and then [the parents could] send back pictures of the work [the children] were doing. But this human connection was basically lost, and it was pretty complicated for some of the teachers to even locate where their students were. (Parker, Researcher)

Whilst family and school context would be a determining factor in how ECE was implemented and accessed there were some broader shared beliefs evident from institutions and teachers in both the private and public sectors with engagement and interaction between child and teacher being considered the prerequisite for any learning to occur. As highlighted in the previous quote by Parker, often it was circumstances related to geographical location and socioeconomic group which determined the method available and therefore limited the interaction possible.

There was also evidence to suggest that EC educators had tried to learn new skills and to be able to adapt their approach to ECE to a distance learning model. Vera explains how her business was supporting teachers in developing the skills to work during the pandemic. Most teachers enrolled in her programme were from public schools who had, nevertheless, sought out and paid for the service:

There were public school teachers who were willing to set aside time to train, because it was a time when things became more complicated, because they were at home, they had to do

housework, they did not have support. Besides [all of that], they had to teach, but they took the time to train. And they invested…

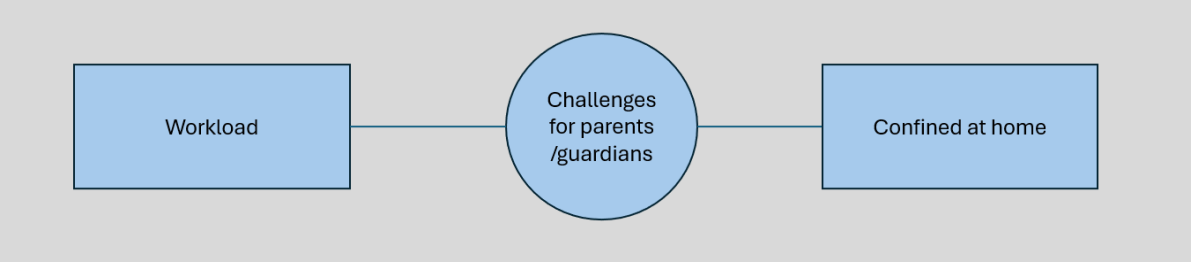
…but the fact is that our training is paid for by the teachers. It is they who arrive; they are really willing to contribute financially to their job. It is like people do value the role they have. So, it was the teachers who were really on that quest to deliver something for their children. (Vera, Parenting Programme Specialist)

Vera using phrases such as 'invested', 'contribute financially', 'time to train' and 'quest to deliver' emphasise that it was the teachers' desire and positive attitude that drove their behaviours to improve professionally and find new strategies to adapt their approach to a distance learning model.

4.3 Challenges faced by parents/guardians

The socioeconomic status of parents was reported as a determining factor in how parents were able to adapt and support their children. In many contexts parents had no option but to leave children at home alone or take them to their place of work. In contrast, at the same time there were also some parents who at different periods of the pandemic were able to hire teachers or instruct nannies to be beside children during online classes. With these differing contexts in mind, I now consider the changing and critical roles of parents reported, by the experts, under two categories: a) increased workload for parents, and b) time spent confined at home as illustrated in figure 6.

Figure 6. Challenges for parents/guardians - ECE experts



a) Increased workload for parents

Parents were seen as a key component in ECE during the period of school closures. Their roles changed from one day to the next and this change was referenced in nine out of the 10 interviews.

…if you are a parent of younger children, you are now also a teacher. So, I mean, there's no escape from that. (Martina, Researcher)

[In rural regions there were] mothers telling us, "we can't", "we need days with more than 24 hours to do everything we have to do now", "24 hours are not enough to be that teacher, take care of my other children and go to the 'chakra' [crop field] to take care of what I have to do there and to also take care of the household chores". And the same holds true for a mother in Lima with a better socio-economic situation but still facing the same increase in their workload. (Martina, Researcher)

Parenting tasks were varied and now involved the added role of being a teacher figure. Whilst this role would have looked different for families in differing socioeconomic contexts as well as depending on how they could access ECE (online classes, T.V., radio and internet resources from the state, WhatsApp messages from teachers, etc.) this was an additional responsibility. Mothers were identified as taking on this role in many families emphasising their importance in ECE whilst also highlighting the gender roles that exist in Peruvian society, particularly with regards to those fulfilling unpaid jobs (OECD, 2022). The role of mothers as teachers was also highlighted by Julia, a Researcher, as she confirms how:

…it's usually the mother that's with the child. There are some involved dads, but not as common. (Julia, Researcher)

This illustrates that mothers played a significant role in taking on this extra responsibility concerned with ECE, lead to extra stress and anxiety particularly as being a teacher means having a different relationship with one's child. This point is demonstrated by Milagros, a mother of two young children and experienced teacher who stated that:

But it was a little bit of a burden because even for me, like as a teacher-mum. At first, I was a little bit apprehensive about…doing these activities with my daughter as I didn't want to be, I didn't want to...how do you say, like strain my relationship with her. I was like, I'm a mum, I really don't want to, you know, start teaching her how to count and then fight because she eventually started fighting with me and I was being a teacher not a mum. (Milagros, Teacher and Teacher Trainer)

If having a 'strained' relationship was a concern for an experienced teacher it may also have been a concern for other mothers too, who were likely to have had less teaching experience if any.

b) Time spent confined at home

According to experts across all contexts there were potential opportunities for families to spend more time together as the restrictions on movement meant that the population was confined to their homes. The quality of this time largely depended on the individual families and their contexts. It could certainly be viewed as a positive experience, but at the same time, for some parents across a range of contexts, there may have been difficulties in adapting to being with their children all day every day.

So, [there are] parents who are not used to having to deal with children all the time. Whether it is because they were used to having nannies or whether it is because they were used to going to work every day and they have to leave their children with other carers. (Milagros, Teacher and Teacher Trainer)

Milagros went on to state that the new parenting role may lead to 'burnout' and in some cases incidences of 'violence' in the home, a concern mirrored by Julia, a Researcher who later questioned her original assertion and ponders whether increased time together as a family is positive or not:

I don't know if it's quality time. I mean, you read about like increases in domestic violence. I would assume the more time you spend with your family the more you probably fight at home. So, I don't know if it's necessarily a good thing. (Julia, Researcher)

The experts made connections between these new situations in the home, taking on the role of being a teacher and potential rises in perceived levels of stress and anxiety. Frustrations about not having the necessary skills to support children in their educational learning and having to form a different type of relationship with one's child due to being their 'teacher' were perceived to be particularly challenging for parents. Alejandro, a researcher, shared some unpublished reports which he explained demonstrate how widespread the indicators of anxiety, stress and depression were amongst the population.

...almost eight out of 10 [parents] have some indicator of anxiety, stress or depression. – (Alejandro, Researcher)

These statistics were contextualised to show increased signs of stress, anxiety and depression compared to before the pandemic and emphasise the magnitude of the challenges the parents felt. This finding is particularly significant as international studies since the pandemic have

drawn connections between parenting stress and child well-being (Spinelli et al., 2020; Ward & Lee, 2020). When parents are stressed, they may transmit their feelings through their behaviours to the children impacting their stress and potentially their development. This has wider implications for society as a whole emphasising the need to ensure that there is support available for parents in moments of difficulty but also that they are able to call on strategies for self-care and resilience.

4.4 Overarching Themes

Having outlined challenges for EC educators and then for parents as perceived by the ECE experts, the following section goes on to explore the underlying patterns in the data which examine the experiences of ECE stakeholders collectively. These are presented through two overarching themes as illustrated in figure 7: a) disparities in ability to access ECE and b) parent involvement and their critical role.

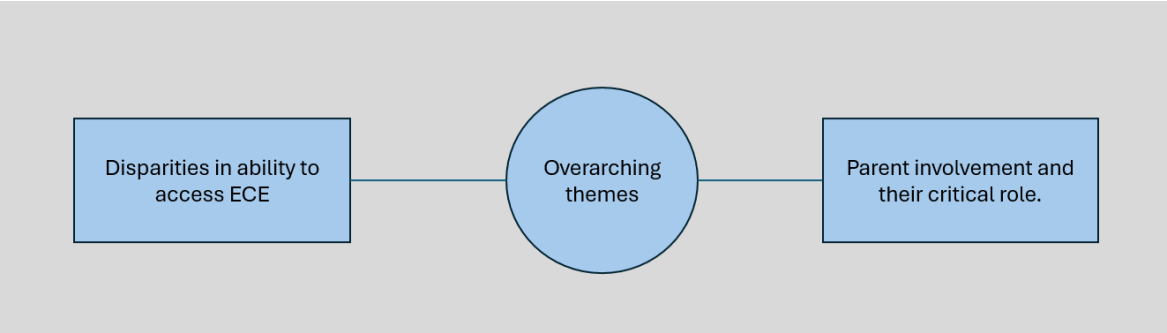


Figure 7. Overarching themes from interviews with expert participants

a) Disparities in ability to access ECE

Underlying many of the challenges that both educators and parents faced was the unequal access to resources determined by the preexisting societal structures and environmental circumstances across Peru. This was most evident in terms of expert participants referring to the differing levels of access to technology. When viewed through Bourdieu's Capital Theory, we can see that economic and cultural capital that was needed to afford and navigate technology was limited for certain sections of the population and this had a direct impact on the level of interaction that was possible between EC educators and children and families. To underline the significance of having access to this cultural and economic capital is that, either directly or indirectly, nine out of the 10 participants spoke about the importance of technology for schools and families. The experts reported that populations from low-income backgrounds and/or living in rural areas were less likely to have access to technology.

But the fact is that the best-case scenario is in the urban environment or context, but that [distance learning] has not been working at all for rural contexts where there's a huge connectivity gap, no? So, the reality is that for those students and families [in rural contexts], they have been without an education service for a long time. (Martina, Researcher)

The experts considered that the greatest difficulties were experienced by families on low incomes as, alongside the unequal access to technology, they were also more likely to have to leave the house to work (with their children) and were therefore unable to prioritise ECE.

They [young children] couldn't stay by themselves in their houses, so they went with their parents to work. You could see a lot of children in the market if parents were selling products or working construction, so kids weren't around [at home], and they were missing most of the things happening remotely in the classroom. (Parker, Researcher)

Therefore, according to the expert participants disparities in access to technology and economic security largely determined children's access to ECE during the period of school closures, as even if the local school was able to offer a distance learning programme, parents without the cultural and economic capital were unable to access it. This is in contrast to parents who were financially secure, often living in urban areas and were able to enrol their children in private schools where daily remote contact with teachers was offered. Significantly, participants emphasised that existing inequalities have been exacerbated during the pandemic.

b) Parent involvement and their critical role

A consensus underlying many of the responses and details shared by the expert participants was that for any form of ECE distance learning programme to be successful parents had to be involved in some capacity, their involvement was perceived to be critical and as one positive consequence of the pandemic as noted by Brisa, a consultant:

If there's a win in this pandemic, it's regarding families and the high involvement that they have now because they have to. There's no other way. (Brisa, Consultant)

The necessity for parents to be involved was true for economically insecure parents who were dependent on public schools and the state-led distance learning programme but also for more affluent parents who enrolled their children in private schools. Whilst socioeconomic status was a factor in determining if parents could afford resources and physically be there to help

their children access ECE, Parker, believed that value attributed to education was also significant in whether their children were able to access ECE:

I think for sure yes, the socioeconomic status was an important factor, but the parental education and the value they placed on education was actually more important than that. (Parker, Researcher)

In one respect the value parents placed on ECE, and therefore involvement, may have been influenced by parents' own experiences and level of education. This is significant as there is a consensus in the literature that those living in poorer, rural regions in Peru have historically had less access to quality education (Alcázar et al., 2020; Arteaga & Glewwe, 2014). This finding has wider implications as it suggests that parents from these communities would have been less likely to be involved in their children's learning thus compounding existing inequality.

However, knowing how to help their children was a challenge for some parents, with seven out of the 10 participants referring to the available parenting support in guiding them in this respect. The pandemic meant that some of the existing parenting programmes particularly in rural areas were disrupted. This all leads to a complex picture where a variety of factors influence the parents' abilities and desire to embrace the interactions and involvements with children and teachers necessary in making the distance learning programmes successful.

4.5 Summary of challenges and overarching themes identified from interviews with experts

The ECE experts highlighted several challenges for both EC educators and parents of young children during the period of school closures in Peru. For EC educators these challenges included their emotional well-being, difficulties in providing access to ECE as a distance learning programme and adapting pedagogical approaches to ECE. Whilst expert participants reported that increased workload and time spent confined at home had been the main challenges for parents. The triangulation of data from the different perspectives and roles held by experts provided a rich context to search deeper into their words and perceptions to develop two overarching themes related to unequal access to ECE and the critical role parent involvement in ECE. Interpreting these experiences and perspectives in collaboration with the ECE expert participants during interviews provided me, as a researcher, with the opportunity to learn both about the impact of the pandemic on ECE but also the underlying historical societal structures

which influenced this. Further details of ECE expert interviews are interwoven and synthesised throughout the rest of the research project to help build context around the case studies and the better understand the experiences of participants.

This chapter has focussed on the data from interviews with expert participants, I now go on to explore the data from interviews conducted at each of the four individual case studies in chapter 5.

Chapter 5: The Case Studies

Through the following sections I take each of the four case studies in turn, outlining the contexts by describing the characteristics of the school and local area, the response to COVID-19, the data collection period and the participant characteristics. The challenges faced by EC educators and parents are then reported, followed by overarching themes, and finally the main findings from each case study are presented. Table 6, found on the following page provides an overview of the four case study contexts side by side outlining significant details.

Table 7. Characteristics of the local area, school and type of participants at each case study.

	Characteristics of the local area			**Characteristics of the school**			**Types of Participants**		
Case	**Location**	**Average salary in region** (INEI, 2018b, p. 146)	**Percentage of homes in the region without information technology and communication** (INEI, 2018a, p.409)	**School type and monthly fees**	**Size of school**	**EC section of school**	**Leader**	**EC educators**	**Parents**
1.	Rural, Cusco	1064.7 soles (£220 GBP)	21.9%	Private 800- 1000 soles (£165-210 GBP)	500 students aged 3-18	64 children aged 3-6	1	4	5
2.	Urban, Lima	1921.1 soles (£405 GBP)	3.8%	Public No fees	300 students aged 3-10	100 children aged 3-6	1	2	3
3.	Urban, Lima	1921.1 soles (£405 GBP)	3.8%	Private 1600 – 3000 soles (£335-629 GBP)	700 - 800 students aged 3-18	150 children aged 3-6	1	3	3
4.	Rural, Huancayo, Junín	1135.7 soles (£240 GBP)	18.1%	Public No fees	A cluster of 4 schools/nurseries, 8-16 students at each, children aged 3-11	2 primary schools 3-4 children aged 4 to 6. 2 nurseries 8-12 children aged 3 to 4.	-	4	6

5.1 Case Study 1: Rural Private Cusco

In the following section the context of Case Study 1 is described enabling greater understanding of the lived experiences of participants in this case. The information was obtained from a pre-interview with the school leader, the school's website and government sources such as national census data. Firstly, the characteristics of the school and local area are set out followed by the school's response to the period of school closures and then finally, pertinent details of the participants are shared.

5.1.1 Characteristics of the school and local area

The institution is located on the very limits of the City of Cusco, one of 13 provinces that make up the department of Cusco, a vast region covering over 71,986,50 km² across the Peruvian Andes. According to the most recent census data before the period of school closures in 2017, the population of the department of Cusco was 447,588 (INEI, 2018a, p.30). The City of Cusco, located at 3,400 metres above sea level, was declared a World Heritage Site in 1983 and is of significant cultural importance (Branca & Haller, 2021). The region draws many visitors every year and had undergone a process of 'touristification' (Branca & Haller, 2021, p.1), whereby tourism had increased rapidly affecting the cultural and geographical characteristics of the region. This phenomenon also sparked immigration as people are drawn from surrounding provinces by the perceived opportunities for work and education, as well as people from further afield looking to expand existing tourism opportunities or build second homes. The result of these processes had led to 'deeply rooted inequalities in ethnicity and class' (Branca and Haller 2021, p.2).

The institution is a mixed gendered, private, bilingual school, geographically located in a rural area. Tuition fees are the highest in this region, although, they are up to five times less than those charged at the most expensive private schools in the country's capital city, Lima. The director of the school describes the community as a mix of families who own large businesses and have migrated from the capital, families who work in tourism and families who gain their income from working on the land. These three types of family groups are drawn from wide catchment area made up of those who are rural dwelling as well as some from more urban contexts in the nearest city. At the start of the academic year in March 2020 there were approximately 500 students enrolled at the school between the ages of three and 18.

In the ECE section of the school there were approximately 64 children between the ages of three to six in early March 2020, making up three different year groups (preschool - three to four years old, pre-Kinder - four to five years old, and kinder - five to six years old). Eight early childhood educators were employed at the school each teaching subjects within or across the three age groups and were supported by several teaching assistants and support staff.

5.1.2 Response to COVID-19

The academic school year runs from early March until mid-December at Case Study 1: Rural Private Cusco. The school had opened to in person teaching gradually from August 2021 with a hybrid approach first employed and the school functioning as normal with classes taking place at the start of the school year in March 2022.

Children enrolled in the ECE section of the school fell from the 64 previously mentioned to approximately 32 by May 2020 and had gradually risen to 62 children by May 2022. The initial drop-off in enrolment coincides with the implementation of the COVID-19 government restrictions and the distance learning model. The leader explained in a pre-interview how during the initial period of school closures in March and April 2020 some parents had made the decision to withdraw their children from the school and that some had retuned the following year. The school offered a purely distance learning ECE programme between mid-March 2020 and August 2021. From August 2021 until December 2021 there was a gradual easing of restrictions in the school which allowed for a hybrid approach and the school offered online learning and in person learning whilst following guidance from the Peruvian Ministry of Education and Ministry of Health to ensure preventative measures against the spread of covid were taken.

During a pre-interview the school leader outlined how the distance learning programme evolved over the course of the pandemic. Initially videos of EC educators giving instructions, reading and singing were sent to children. In April when it was clear that schools would not be opening synchronous online learning opportunities were developed. These took the form of small group, daily online virtual classes. Alongside these, asynchronous tasks involving online games, worksheets and other hands-on learning activities were set for the children to complete

at home throughout the day. Parents were asked to take photos and share evidence of the completion of tasks via various online platforms. Parents were invited to complete online surveys at several points throughout the year to provide feedback on how the distance learning programme was functioning and adaptations were made in response to these results along with consultations with the teaching staff. Financial support was offered to families during this period in the form of reduced fees, while several parent workshops were offered to provide guidance on the teaching methodologies used and how to manage child behaviours. EC educators participated in year group and subject planning sessions and meetings, alongside less frequent whole school meetings and training courses online.

5.1.3 Data Collection Period

Data were collected over a 5-month period between May 2022 and October 2022 after teachers and children had returned to the classroom. Participants took part in semi-structured interviews via video calls which lasted between 38 and 77 minutes.

Table 8. Case Study1: Rural Private Cusco – Leader and EC educator participant characteristics

Name (pseudonyms)	Participant type	Gender	Age Range	Years of Teaching Experience/working in education
Pilar	Leader	Female	45-54	16 +
Gabrielle	EC educator	Female	25-34	1-3
Rosario	EC educator	Female	25-34	10-12
Soledad	EC educator	Female	25-34	10-12
Teresa	EC educator	Female	45-54	10-12

5.1.4 Leader participant characteristics

Pilar was the cofounder and director of the school, having over 30 years of experience working in education as both an early childhood educator and school leader.

5.1.5 EC educator participant characteristics

Gabrielle, Rosario, Soledad and Teresa were pseudonyms given to the four EC educators who participated in interviews at Case Study 1: Rural Private Cusco. As shown in Table 7 they ranged in teaching experience from one to twelve years, all having studied at Peruvian universities. One educator joined the school during the pandemic, working remotely from Lima

from August 2020 before moving to the region for the start of the school year in March 2022. One of the educators (Teresa) took a sabbatical for personal reasons from May 2020 to January 2021. All EC educators had fixed internet in their homes.

5.1.6 Parent participant characteristics

Table 9. Case Study1: Rural Private Cusco – Parent participant characteristics

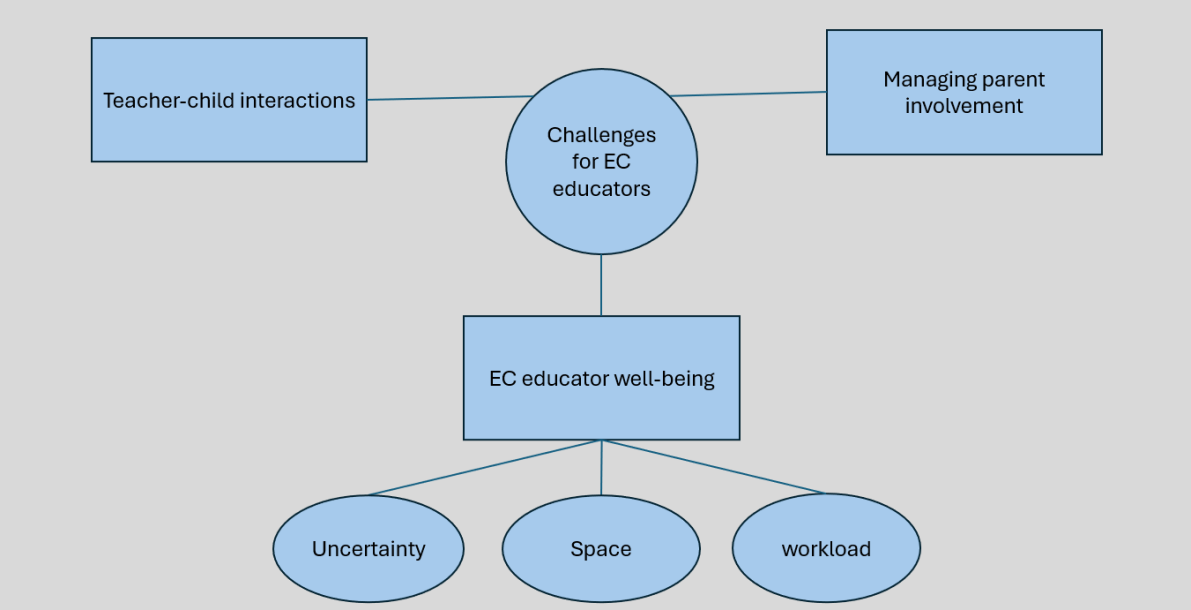
Parent (Pseudonym)	Gender	Age Range	Occupation	Children aged 3-6	Dual Parent Home	Education
Ximena	Female	18-24	Stay at home parent	2	Yes	University
Alba	Female	45-54	Travel Agent	4	Yes	Further Education
Luna	Female	25-34	Restaurant manager	1	Yes	Further Education
Isabella	Female	25-34	Psychologist	1	Yes	University
Carlos	Male	25-34	Management	2	Yes	University

Table 8 provides the characteristics of the five parents who make up four families, with Alba, Luna and Isabella all mothers who participated in individual interviews, whilst Ximena and Carlos were a couple who participated in a group interview. All parent participants were from dual parent families living together. One family spent three months during the initial school closures in a large rural home with extended family before returning to their normal home in the city, one family lived in the city throughout the restrictions and the two others lived in rural homes. Of the four families, three had at least one parent who was able to continue working throughout the pandemic and the other family had a period of three months where they were solely reliant on savings. One family withdrew their child (aged three) immediately from the school as soon as there were school closures in March 2020, and they returned in March 2021. The child attended online classes at a smaller private nursery in the same area from August to December in 2020.

5.1.7 Challenges faced by EC educators

The following section explores the challenges that were specific to the EC educators from Case Study 1: Rural Private Cusco and directly address Research Question One: *What were the challenges faced by early childhood educators during the period of school closures during the COVID-19 pandemic?* These challenges are broken down and examined through three categories as seen in figure 8: a) developing positive teacher-child interactions through a screen, b) EC Educators' perceptions of managing parent involvement during online classes and c) EC Educator well-being**.**

Figure 8. Challenges faced by EC educators at Case Study 1: Rural Private Cusco



a) Developing positive teacher-child interactions through a screen

Adapting to the use of online classes was a challenge faced by EC educators in other international contexts (Dayal and Tiko, 2000; Timmons et al., 2021; Atiles et al., 2021), particularly with regards to the difficulties associated with the adaptation to teaching through a screen and not being able to make in person connections (Steed and Leech, 2021; Jalongo, 2021; Gomes et al., 2021; Ford et al., 2021). Despite, the differences in the country contexts between these studies the common variable was the access and use of technology in ECE distance learning. This reliance on technology and delivering ECE through online methods was also found at Case Study 1: Rural Private Cusco, where extended government restrictions to protect the population from COVID-19 during the pandemic resulted in EC educators and children being unable to be in the same physical space. When directly posed with the question

‘What were the challenges you faced as an educator during the period of school closures?’ Three of the four EC educators at Case Study reported that it was difficult to build relationships with children through a screen. This sentiment is demonstrated through the comment:

It has been a very difficult time for me as a professional because in spite of having made every effort to bond with my students… it’s a dehumanising process; you are in front of a computer and have no [physical] contact with them. (Rosario, EC educator)

Rosario’s powerful, emotive use of language describing her attempts to bond with her students convey her feelings and frustrations with not being able to form relationships as she normally would in the physical classroom. The phrase ‘dehumanising process’ highlights how the human element of being an EC educator and the personal interactions with children had been removed or at least perceived to be affected. Not only are educator-child relationships with children of all ages considered crucial for student attainment and wellbeing (Murray & Greenberg, 2000; Crosnoe, et al., 2004; Sabol & Pianta, 2012) but they are also considered to be a critical aspect of high quality ECE (OECD, 2018b). A second example of the difficulty associated with online interactions with young children is from a description of the first time a three-year-old child joined an online class with three other children with Gabrielle an EC educator.

He was three... and I had this student that stuck his forehead to the wall like this [pushes palm of hand to her head] during the whole class and I was calling him, and it was the first class, he didn't want to see me, so I thought, oh man, this is going to be hard, right? (Gabrielle, EC educator)

The situation described demonstrates that engaging young children in online interactions could be difficult. Perhaps this child’s behaviour would also have occurred the same way in a physical classroom, but the online environment restricted the educator’s possible responses and behaviour management strategies. Gabrielle later went on to explain that she persisted over the following weeks and after close collaboration with the child’s parents she did experience positive interactions with the child. This example suggests that when teaching online it may have taken longer for relationships to form between EC educators and their students. This perceived challenge has wider implications, as if EC educators who were able to see their students, albeit through a screen, found it difficult to form bonds and engage children in

learning activities how would other EC educators who had fewer resources and limited access to technology have managed this challenge. This challenge also raises the question of whether online classes were an effective approach to distance learning programmes with three-year-old children.

b) EC Educators perceptions of managing parent involvement during online classes

All EC educators noted that it was necessary for a parent to be present during the online classes, however, two of the four EC educators noted their frustrations with what they perceived to be inappropriate input by the parents.

There were many kids when we were in virtual classes when you asked the children a question, and you saw the hands of the children, but suddenly their hand was raised, but it was not because they [the child] had raised [it], but because the mother wanted them to participate. So, you realise, and you ask him them, let's say, 'what colour can you see there?' And the mother said, 'white' and the child looked at her and looked at you and said 'white'. Then you realised that he had not given the answer, his own answer, as it was the mother telling him. (Soledad, EC educator)

But it was also difficult because there are some families that sometimes don't want their kid to fail. They don't want their kid to... I don't know, make a mistake so they sometimes just, kind of like sabotage the learning process because they complete all the activities for them, and I think that is also something that makes things really, really difficult. So, I think we had sometimes the involvement of the families, but sometimes it was much too much, yeah. So, that balance. (Gabrielle, EC educator)

Through these examples we see how EC educators perceived that parents' efforts to support their children's learning during online classes could in fact be a hinderance to the learning process. Whilst non-intentional, parents' actions were perceived to prevent children from making their own mistakes and thus learn from them. Therefore, EC educators were required to communicate more directly with parents to ensure that they were supporting children in the way they assessed to be appropriate, managing this new dynamic with parents was a challenge.

c) EC Educator Well-being

As explored in the literature review, studies (both internationally and within Peru) have highlighted the potential negative impact of the pandemic period on educator well-being

(Quiñones-Laveriano et al., 2022; Crawford et al., 2021; Swigonski et al., 2022). Furthermore, increased stress levels in educators have been linked to negatively impacting the quality of teacher-child relationship (Jeon et al., 2019). At Case Study 1, EC educators used phrases such as 'very scared', 'hard', 'frustrated', 'under pressure', 'I do not feel comfortable' and 'I had the sense of refusing, I wanted to deny the situation' when describing some of the challenges they faced. These are powerful reminders of the negative emotions experienced during the period of school closures both professionally and personally. The following three challenges: uncertainty, living and working in the same physical space, and increased workload are each explored in more depth below.

Uncertainty:

Not knowing how long the period of school closures would continue for or how to adapt ECE to a distance learning model prevented effective planning both on personal and professional levels for EC educators. This sense of uncertainty affected decision making as illustrated in the following two examples where Gabrielle, an EC educator, describes how she was waiting to see what happens with the period of school closures before deciding about moving schools and then in a comment made by the leader, Pilar as she explained how the uncertainty around school closures affected the form of distance learning that was implemented.

I was thinking that this needs to be over and then I can think about what I can do [with regards to my future and career] because I thought it was going to be over in... I don't know a few months. (Gabrielle, EC educator)

In nursery, we didn't expect a thing. OK, maybe sending some videos or something like for parents to feel that the day is not lost, but we have to work Saturdays in order to cover those days. So, when we were in that situation, we didn't know exactly what to do. (Pilar, Leader)

Pilar's explanation that initially the plan was for the EC educators to make up for lost days by working on weekends as they had done when previously faced with short-term school closures demonstrates that at first the distance learning programme was not seen as a replacement for ECE. Transforming to an online approach represented an unknown task and it took time to make the decision to invest in making the change and starting the process from the beginning by trialling different software, schedules and EC educator led and independent activities.

With the time period of school closures unknown, coupled with parents withdrawing their children from the school, two EC educators raised concerns about their own job insecurity. This

is highlighted by Soledad, an EC educator who at the time of school closures in March and as parents were withdrawing children was on maternity leave.

So, there were many changes in the school because they also fired people and that was my fear because I had already said I would go on leave, I had 3 months of maternity leave but then what is going to be happen? What comes after? (Soledad, EC educator)

Her comments reveal how job loses or a perceived threat to job lose contributed to a general feeling of uncertainty at that time.

Living and working in the same physical space:

The second source of stress and threat to well-being for educators involved living and working within the same physical space. With government restrictions limiting all but essential movement EC educators were forced to stay in their homes for long periods at a time. There was a blurring of lines between tasks normally completed at home and those at work which led to the challenge of separating the emotional responses to these environments as seen through the following quotes.

It was really, really hard because it was a small apartment and I taught the classes in the same space where I was having lunch, so sometimes I was with my computer and my food next to it and I was doing both things. So, kind of like, to be in the same space was really hard. I don't know if it happened to you, but for me it was like, my bed it's right here. I'm just gonna go in it. Who cares, no? (Gabrielle, EC educator)

I have two backpacks. The backpack from my work and the backpack from my house. I can't mix the things at home with work and the things at work with home. (Soledad, EC educator)

…we have to separate our emotional side to be with our children because our children are the ones who absorb everything. (Soledad, EC educator)

Soledad's comments demonstrate her awareness that her emotional state and well-being had the potential to impact on children who she worked with as they 'absorb everything'.

Increased workload

The potentially negative impact on EC educator well-being was compounded further with the perceived increase in workload, as all EC educators at Case Study 1: Rural Private Cusco spoke about having to adapt to using technology, find new resources and develop new teaching

strategies at the same time as delivering online classes. The following comments from Rosario and Teresa emphasise the perception that their day-to-day workloads increased significantly.

While it is true I was not in a class with the students, I had to keep working, planning, searching different tools to get to use in the class and make the class good for them, right? It has not been totally a balance; it has been a pretty full time. (Rosario, EC educator)

Many times, I have wanted to give up. To give up, I have to be sincere. It required me to surrender. I want to say no more because the working hours were very long, no? (Rosario, EC educator)

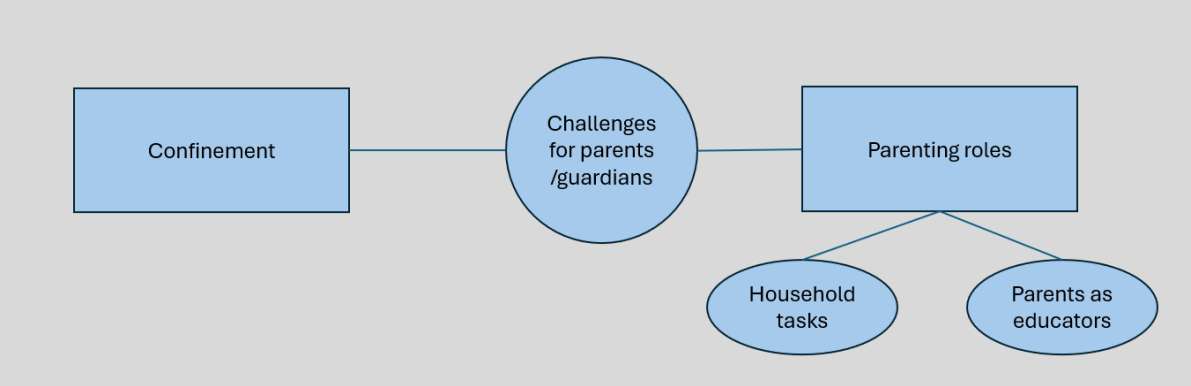
We have always been accustomed at [This School] to work under pressure, and the work is difficult, you know, you have also worked at a school, so you know the workload is heavy, there is a lot of pressure, and I do it, but that year I really couldn't, I collapsed. (Teresa, EC Educator)

As noted previously, Teresa took at sabbatical halfway through the 2020 academic year citing increased workload as a significant factor, she was an experienced EC educator having worked at the school for several years. Her words highlight how she felt that the difficulties faced were overwhelming in comparison to previous experiences and that they directly affected her well-being.

5.1.8 Challenges faced by parents/guardians

The following section explores the challenges that were specific to the parents from Case Study 1 and directly address Research Question Two: *What were the challenges faced by parents during the period of school closures during the COVID-19 pandemic?* These challenges are broken down and examined through two categories: a) confinement and physical space and b) parents taking on new roles in the home as illustrated in figure 9 on the following page.

Figure 9. Challenges faced by parents/guardians at Case Study1: Rural Private Cusco



a) Confinement and physical space

The parent participants reported vastly different experiences of confinement between households at Case Study 1. Two families note that they were confined to their city/town apartment building or house for the initial four months (March to June 2020) and felt restricted. Whereas the other two families were able to enjoy living in the countryside in large houses with gardens and perceived that they had more freedom to leave the house and be outside. Despite the government restrictions being consistent across this region the families' experiences were different as illustrated by the following comments:

We didn't go, we couldn't at first, we couldn't go out. It was like three-four months that we were stuck here, and we could not go out to do anything, except to do shopping. But not even that freely in fact, as only one family member could go out, so my son and I, for practically the first four months stayed inside. Because my husband was the one who usually went out to do shopping, we spent this time here at home. (Luna, parent)

We practically almost lived a normal life; it was only that we did not go to the city. But we had a quiet time, unlike other people who lived in apartments, I think it was completely closed, but we have not had that problem and thank God everything is fine. My son has not felt locked in, we were not with that fear of going out either because as I say, the space is wide and big, so we had no major problem. We only had contact with our family and our family didn't really have contact with other people so there was no reason to be afraid. So, in this aspect I think we have been calm, we have not had that major complication. (Isabella, Parent)

The contrast in experiences emphasises the impact of each family environment either rural or urban with the two urban dwelling families reporting that they did feel negative effects of

being confined to the home. Alba, a parent of one of the rural dwelling families, also explained that she and her husband chose to live in a larger house with extended family in the countryside at the beginning of the period of school closures. Significantly, Alba's family had the ability to choose where to live with their decision to move from their city apartment to the countryside influenced by two key factors: being closer to family and having access to open spaces.

Once they finished their class and did not have any homework, they went out to the garden to play. The same happened with my nephews. (Alba, parent)

Their decision allowed their children to play outside and interact with their peers, whilst both Alba and her husband had extended family to rely on for support. This was in contrast to experiences such as Carlos who reports feeling frustrated at not being able to leave the home.

We didn't go out, right? We didn't leave the house. As I say, it was tedious. We did not have that rhythm of life. (Carlos, parent)

b) Parents taking on different roles in the home

The restrictions of movement had an impact on not just parents' own movement but the workers they relied on for support in the home. When this support was limited or stopped completely, parents found themselves having to complete those tasks both in terms of household chores and childcare. Similarly, with children not being able to go to school parents found themselves taking on more responsibility with regards to their children's educational development. The challenge of taking on these roles is now explored through the following categories: parents taking on additional childcare and household tasks and parents as educators.

Parents taking on additional childcare and household tasks

All five parent participants reported that they found it challenging to take on tasks in the home which were previously completed by a cleaner, cook or paid child-carer. The tasks involved household chores such as washing clothes, cleaning, and planning and preparing meals. Whilst these individual tasks may not have been perceived as complicated or difficult their addition to their daily lives acted as a source of stress as illustrated in the comments by Alba and Luna:

But we were the ones who had a lot of work, my husband and I, not so much of 'work-work' [paid work], but of attending to [the children], because as we didn't have anyone else, we didn't

have two nanas [paid childcare], so it was all the time we had to be aware of the classes, of the tasks, of washing the clothes, of seeing what we were going to cook, buying food. (Alba, Parent)

Because before we had help from a lady who helped us in the house with cleaning, the kitchen, the home issues, but because of the pandemic she was no longer coming, either, right? (Luna, Parent)

I started to be here for much more of the day, playing more with him, interacting, doing things together and with my husband too and that has been maintained so far. (Luna, Parent)

From Alba's comments we can see how she shared these new household responsibilities with her partner and that together they completed tasks. Luna's use of the word 'we' and her reference to her husband suggest that her partner too was involved in completing childcare and household tasks. These comments suggest that whilst these new tasks may have been the source of an additional stressor in the home, they were able to be completed in collaboration between spouses. These interactions also challenge traditional gender roles with male members of the family involved in tasks traditionally associated with women.

Parents as educators

Three of the four EC educators stated that for online lessons to be effective a parent needed to be present at home during the classes highlighting the important role parents played in the online distance learning model at Case Study 1: Rural Private Cusco. The adoption of this role was also acknowledged by four of the five parents, with Carlos identifying that whilst he had always been part of his children's educational development, during the period of school closures, he was now a main contributor.

I am directly a part of the education of my children. I was always a part of it, always helping, always, but in this case, I am being the EC educator with the help of the EC educator. (Carlos, Parent)

Parent participants reported that their increased involvement in their children's educational development was both a challenge and an opportunity. Two parents perceived that they didn't have the necessary knowledge or skills to teach their children or manage their behaviour:

We are not EC educators. We can accompany them, we can guide them, but from our perspective no, no, I think that from the beginning or in any part of the year we had problems

with the little ones. Sometimes we were frustrated, because we did not know how to teach certain things. Maybe we raised our voices because suddenly, I don't know, something was happening, he would get up, he ran, and I had to be the one behind them. I think that has also been a problem. Little by little we have been working on this, and also our way of thinking, our work with them has already changed. And the rest of the year the work between us was more functional, more beautiful. (Ximena, Parent)

Here Ximena's narrative illustrates an initial struggle in supporting her child in terms of managing his behaviour and helping him to engage in online learning. Her account also demonstrates her willingness to persevere and her perception that she was able to overcome the difficulties of supporting her child during online classes. Similar reports were identified in interviews with all parent participants, for example, when Luna spoke about her experiences of supporting her son during his online classes:

I mean, he was sitting, listening, but not at first. At first, he didn't want to, he was like screaming, things that he didn't normally do with me. I mean, he looked different, didn't he? So yes, yes, it was difficult at first for me. (Luna, Parent)

I was frustrated to see him like that as I wanted to force him to sit down (Luna, Parent)

Twice we see how Luna refers to the difficulties she faced 'at first' with a strong suggestion that over time she and her son overcame the challenges together. The frustrations felt have the potential to add to the negative emotional responses that may negatively impact on the child-parent interactions and relationships. Both parents Ximena and Luna, did later explain that they were able to overcome these challenges with support and guidance from the EC educators, but within the context of an already stressful situation and environment there is a possibility that their own well-being and that of their children may have been affected. Conversely, two of the five parents reported that they viewed their role as an educator as an opportunity and enjoyed playing a more active role in their child's educational development as they had a greater understanding of their child's educational developmental stage and enjoyed spending more time together.

Well, let's see, as a benefit, I think I would highlight again the fact that I was in contact with him. I could support him in his tasks, and I could directly be aware of his difficulties. I could help him, so to speak, that would that be like a benefit, no, as a plus, to his development. (Isabella, Parent)

I stayed with him, and I was the one playing games with him. If he had homework, I did the homework [with him], we went to the park. I kind of have much more interaction with him right now. (Luna, Parent)

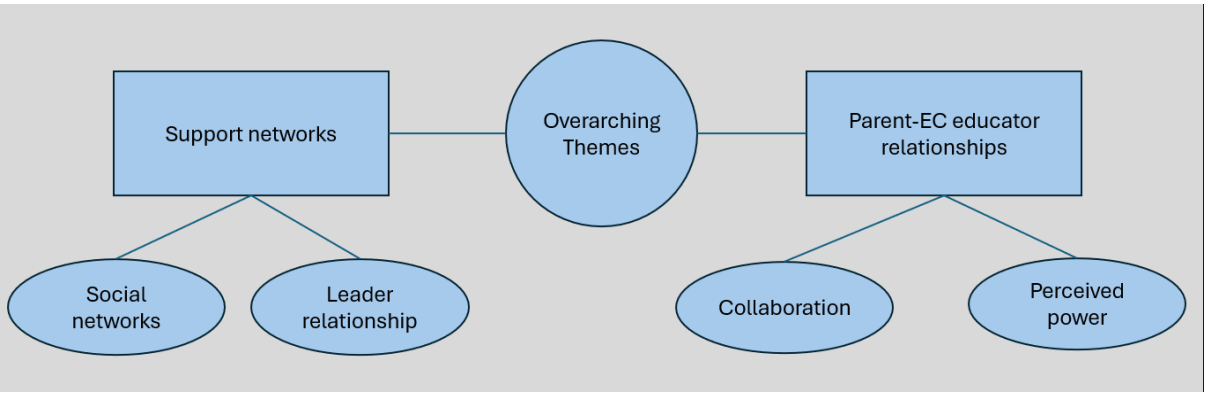
Luna's comments here and previously are particularly significant as she found having a more prominent role in her child's education a challenge but also enjoyed the opportunity to spend more time together.

Through this section I have outlined the perceived challenges faced firstly by the EC educators followed by the perceived challenges faced by the parents/guardians. Viewing these challenges separately provided in depth analysis of the experiences of each stakeholder group. What now follows are overarching themes which identify underlying meaning and patterns across all participants from case study 1.

5.1.9 Overarching Themes

The following three themes a) Support networks key to supporting children's learning, b) The complexity of the parent-EC educator/school relationship and c) Impact on children's educational development are illustrated in figure 10. They were developed from interviews with parents, the leader and EC educators from Case Study 1 and are now explored below.

Figure 10. Overarching themes at Case Study 1: Rural Private Cusco



a) Support networks key to supporting children's learning

Close working relationships between EC educators and a supportive leader were considered important in providing EC educators with the necessary environment and tools to overcome some of the challenges they encountered during the period of school closures. These social networks are now explored through the following subthemes: EC educators' social networks and partnerships and supportive leader relationships.

EC educators' social networks and partnerships

EC educators described how they worked collaboratively, coaching and advising each other through various aspects of the transition and delivery of the distance learning programme. The following comments were spontaneous and not addressing a direct question about relationships with peers. They reflect how a supportive network of educators can positively influence the capacity to overcome challenges.

Yes, in reality it is has been the work of all the EC educators at the school, because we have all been helping each other throughout these two years, no? With various platforms, so that children can also use them so they can keep learning. No? So, we had to implement the platforms that we have and have to have training and learn from each other because we knew absolutely nothing. (Rosario, EC educator)

I like technology and I can get along with it. So, if I had to search, and find tools I could also ask some colleagues, no, what new things they are implementing in their classes. For me to also learn from them and use them also in classes, right? Therefore, I have had two strong years learning a lot about digital tools. (Rosario, EC educator)

Maybe everyone was working in a group of 12 or so [at the school], so really, they were my friends, and we were like do you know this web page? Have you seen this this? I don't know this Google slide. It's awesome to work like this. It was really a chance to connect with EC educators as well, right? (Gabrielle, EC educator)

From these examples we can see that the EC educators perceived that social connections and collaboration were key in overcoming the challenge of adapting to the use of technology. This is a form of social capital that the educators at Case Study 1 had access to in a formal and informal workplace setting. Collaboration occurred within the mesosystem of Bronfenbrenner's model with EC educators interacting with one another but is also related to the structures put in place by the school within the exosystem through planned meetings which allowed and promoted sharing of this kind.

Supportive Leader Relationships

Positive relationships between the school leadership and educators were described by three of the four EC educators and was also something that was identified as important for the leader

too. The leader was aware of the hardships that the educators were facing and directly attempted to support them in a number of ways. For example, EC educators were offered school computers to use as soon as it was possible to leave the house to arrange it. This was a break from previous norms where EC educators provided their own computers to use.

So, in June we offered the EC educators a laptop. I guess five of them asked for a PC, a personal computer with screen and mouse, and the keyboard and everything. And we arranged that for them. (Pilar, Leader)

Educators too spoke directly about the perceived pedagogical support they received as illustrated through Terasa's, an EC educator, comment:

I am not alone; I am always accompanied. And the other staff too, we feel supported either by coordinators, or by colleagues, or the promoter, that is, we are always accompanied, and the truth is that this is something which really helps you to keep improving every time because you have support. (Teresa, EC educator)

The two examples demonstrate how economic capital, in the form of access to technology and cultural capital in the form of ongoing teacher training were provided to the EC educators at Case Study 1: Rural Private Cusco.

b) The complexity of the parent-EC educator/school relationship

Parent-teacher relationships were crucial in providing the conditions for children to access ECE during the period of school closures. The following theme explores this complex relationship and the power dynamics which existed or were perceived to exist between the different stakeholders. The theme is broken down into two sub themes: collaborating parents and EC educators and perceptions of parents' desired approach to distance learning and their perceived power.

Collaborating parents and EC educators

Parents and EC educators have collaborated by forming partnerships that help them both overcome the challenges related to adapting and delivering a distance ECE programme. An example of the collaboration between EC educators and parents is outlined in the following comment by Gabrielle, an EC educator, as she describes how she overcame the previously reported challenge for EC educators of creating bonds with children by connecting online with children and their families before online classes began:

Sometimes I connected earlier, and they were there. They were having breakfast sometimes. Or maybe they were with their mom playing so, it was really like a trio type of connection with the student, the mother most of the time. Sometimes it was a father, but most of the times it was a mother and me as a EC educator, so I think that connection worked because I think if it was just the student, my 3 year old's were alone just looking at me and I was speaking English all the time [children spoke Spanish as their first language], so of course it was going to be, I think impossible too, but I think families really had a great role in it. Since they were little. Yeah, it was kind of like an advantage if I think about it. (Gabrielle, EC educator)

From the quote we can see that Gabrielle believed the partnership with parents to be crucial in developing bonds with children. The fact she calls the interaction an 'advantage' provides further evidence that collaborations with parents were perceived to be key not only providing children access to ECE during the pandemic but potentially in the future. The EC educators' capacities to connect with children and families in this way is underpinned by the shared cultural and economic capital that exists in the community. Economic capital exists in the form of ECE stakeholders' access to technology (devices and internet), parents' time to support children during online classes and the stable home environment where parents were invested in their children's educational development. Cultural capital exists in the form of ECE stakeholders' digital literacy, the value placed on ECE and the learning habits that parents highlight.

From the parents' perspectives collaboration with EC educators was also seen as key as illustrated through Luna's comments:

There were very few children, there were 5 or 6 children in his class who did virtual classes with him. At first, he would stand up, he would go to the other side of the room, he would want to play. I mean, no, he didn't want to do the class, and I tended to be like very strict and very responsible, I've always been very responsible at school and yet…, so I was frustrated to see him like that as I wanted to force him to sit down. And well, the EC educator said to me, "no, you don't tell him anything, it's better that you don't tell him to sit down, I'm going to do that, do what I tell you". (Luna, Parent)

Significantly, here we see how guidance and communication from the EC educator removed the sense of responsibility Luna had for what she perceived to be inappropriate behaviour. Later Luna went on to describe how after a few months her son engaged more and more in the classes,

singing songs and participating to a much greater extent. This example highlights the cultural capital that parents had access to, being able to call on the experience and guidance of EC educators during online classes to help them support their child's educational development.

Perceptions of parents' desired approach to distance learning and their perceived power

Despite having previously highlighted the positive effects of collaboration between EC educators and parents, the following sub-theme explores how EC educators and the leader perceived that parents possessed more power in their relationship and as a result were influenced in their approach by the perceived desires of parents. However, the perceived desires were not always accurately reflected by the comments made by parent participants at Case Study 1: Rural Private Cusco.

Parents were perceived to hold the power in this relationship at the time of school closures because they could withdraw their children from school which would result in reduced income for the school and therefore job losses. The context for this is explained by Pilar, the leader, when she comments on a change in law which coincidentally came into effect during the period of school closures where parents could withdraw children from private schools and not lose the (often expensive) registration fee they had paid when the child enrolled at the school to another school. This was compounded further with a second government intervention which allowed parents to recoup any upfront fees paid for the 2020 academic year. The significance of these changes was directly referred to by the leader as she explained that the school had already effectively spent the money they had received, and that some parents who had stayed were either not paying full tuition and/or paying late, resulting in economic difficulties for the school.

The Peruvian government gave some rules, some laws, special laws for example: Uh, maybe we need to give the matriculation back. Parents pay that in January, and we already used it to have the school prepared and in May we had to [re]pay, to give money back. How? [laughing]. because of course they didn't pay March, April. And if they continue [being enrolled at school], they pay so much less, but also, they pay it very late. (Pilar, Leader)

As well as the serious financial implications for school, the educators and leaders perceived the parents had more power, essentially being able to shop around for the best approach to distance learning during the period of school closures and/or cheaper fees, moving their children more freely between schools. Whilst of benefit to many parents who may have been facing financial difficulties another consequence was that it meant extra pressure to retain and

also attract new students. The need to justify school fees during the pandemic in one sense speaks to a wider point of the commodification of education and the changing dynamics between parents and schools for this socioeconomic group.

For EC educators and the leader, it also meant compromises between what they believed to be age-appropriate distance learning programmes for young children and what they perceived the parents wanted. For example, Pilar, the leader perceived that parents wanted greater contact time via screens which was something which she also perceived the EC educators were reluctant to provide. The subsequent excerpts highlight her perception of the difference of opinions:

The EC educator needs to be connected [to online classes] from eight [in the morning] to one [in the afternoon] in order to have the student busy in nursery and let the parents feel that the school is working, so they are going to pay. Sorry to be so honest, but I mean this is, this is the question. (Pilar, Leader)

Of course, there were EC educators saying it is not…I mean we are not going to have a student for five hours on a cell phone or a computer just because we want parents to pay at the end of the month. (Pilar, Leader)

So, parents had no money, and they were at home and sometimes they considered that paying the full tuition was not… I mean, it was not fair. (Pilar, Leader)

Therefore, the perception from the school was that parents wanted more online classes and interaction via a screen to replicate the quantity of time children would normally have spent with their teachers in the classroom if schools were open. Significantly, however the parent participants at Case Study 1: Rural Private Cusco instead reported that they wanted less online and screen time, the opposite to the perceptions held by the leader and EC educators. Four of the five parent participants shared concerns about there being too much screen time for their young children, for example stating the following:

We tried, to explain to the teachers in the meetings we had, and they also tried to fix the schedule, so, that they don't have so much time, in front of the screen. (Ximena, parent)

In the past year they entered at 8:30 am and it was link after link after link until 1:30pm. How can she spend so much time with the computer? Because my daughter was sitting with the

laptop, doing homework, they liked the classes, yes, but I thought it was a lot and then the classes end and it is time to relax, to rest and she wanted to watch TV! I had to say rest your eyes for a little while, in a bit you can watch TV for a while. (Alba, parent)

It is clear from these comments that the parents who participated at Case Study 1: Rural Private Cusco were aware that too much screen time could be damaging for their children's health, and they were wary about this. By contradicting the leaders' perceived view of parents, that they wanted more online classes, it highlights the inconsistencies between the perceptions of leader and EC educators and the reality (at least for the views held by these parent participants).

c) Impact on children's educational development

A noteworthy finding was the shared concern about children's educational development across participant groups, specifically their social development and their physical development. These concerns were apparent despite the school community's perceived levels of social, cultural and economic capital which enabled children to access ECE via online classes throughout the period of school closures. The following examples came from direct questions related to what the participants perceived to be the consequences of the period of school closures on children:

I think they've missed what it was like to share with other kids. In the case of my daughter, for example, the one who at that time was five, four sorry. For example, we took her to a party [when restrictions eased], and she stayed glued to us. No, no, she didn't want to share with the kids, she didn't go out to participate with the clown. And we worried too, because why is she withdrawn? She didn't want to do anything; she stayed with us. (Alba, parent)

Of the skills they lack, I feel that social, social. Social ability it is more emotional, emotional-social. I believe that learning has been ok, some, some things that have been difficulty is developing social skills, for example, they have difficulty organising themselves in a team, or they have difficulty working together cooperatively, respecting each other. (Rosario, EC educator)

The examples illustrate that there are some aspects of children's educational development which are perhaps more difficult to develop via a distance learning programme. By their very nature online classes change the dynamic and interactions possible between children and adults and they may rely on children sitting and listening in a more traditional pedagogical approach rather than exploring through movement. It was also noteworthy that in terms of more academic development (reading, writing language acquisition) ECE stakeholders did not report concerns

over delays or differences between children taught during the period of school closures and previous cohorts. This demonstrates that parents and EC educators either perceive that the online classes had been successful in addressing these areas of development or that they were not considered a priority. Both interpretations indicate how ECE stakeholders possessed cultural capital in being able to evaluate the perceived progress of the children. The following example from Gabrielle, an EC educator indicates that there were perceived advantages of the distance learning model developed at Case Study 1: Rural Private Cusco.

We actually teach in English. It really allowed kids to be first, really comfortable with the language because since it was online I had the opportunity to use songs to show little bits of videos so they can move along and follow the indications or the movements. So yeah, as an English teacher. I would say it really worked. (Gabrielle, EC educator)

In this subsection I presented Case Study 1, outlining the context, participants, challenges for EC educators and parents, and finally three themes which were developed from interviews from all three participant groups (EC educators, the leader and parents). I now state the main findings and then go on to explain how Bronfenbrenner and Ceci's Ecological Systems Model (1994) and Bourdieu's Theory of Capital (1986) support my understanding of how the environment, and the existing societal structures influenced the experiences of ECE stakeholders and children.

5.1.10 Main findings from Case Study 1: Rural Private Cusco

- Access to technology allowed frequent interactions and communication between the child, parents and EC educators.
- Despite, the frequent interactions EC educators found that forming emotional connections with children through a screen was difficult.
- Both parents and EC educators believed that there had been a negative impact on children's educational development.
- EC educators were dependent on parent involvement, but perceived parents held power over them and this affected their relationships.
- Negative impacts on well-being were self-reported by parents and EC educators.
- Taking on additional parenting responsibilities such as household chores, caregiving and educational development of children was challenging for parents.

Figure 11 (below) is an adapted version of Bronfenbrenner and Ceci's Ecological Systems Model (1994) which provides a visual guide to highlight the variety of influences across the different layers of the environment that impacted ECE stakeholders' and children's experiences during the period of school closures.

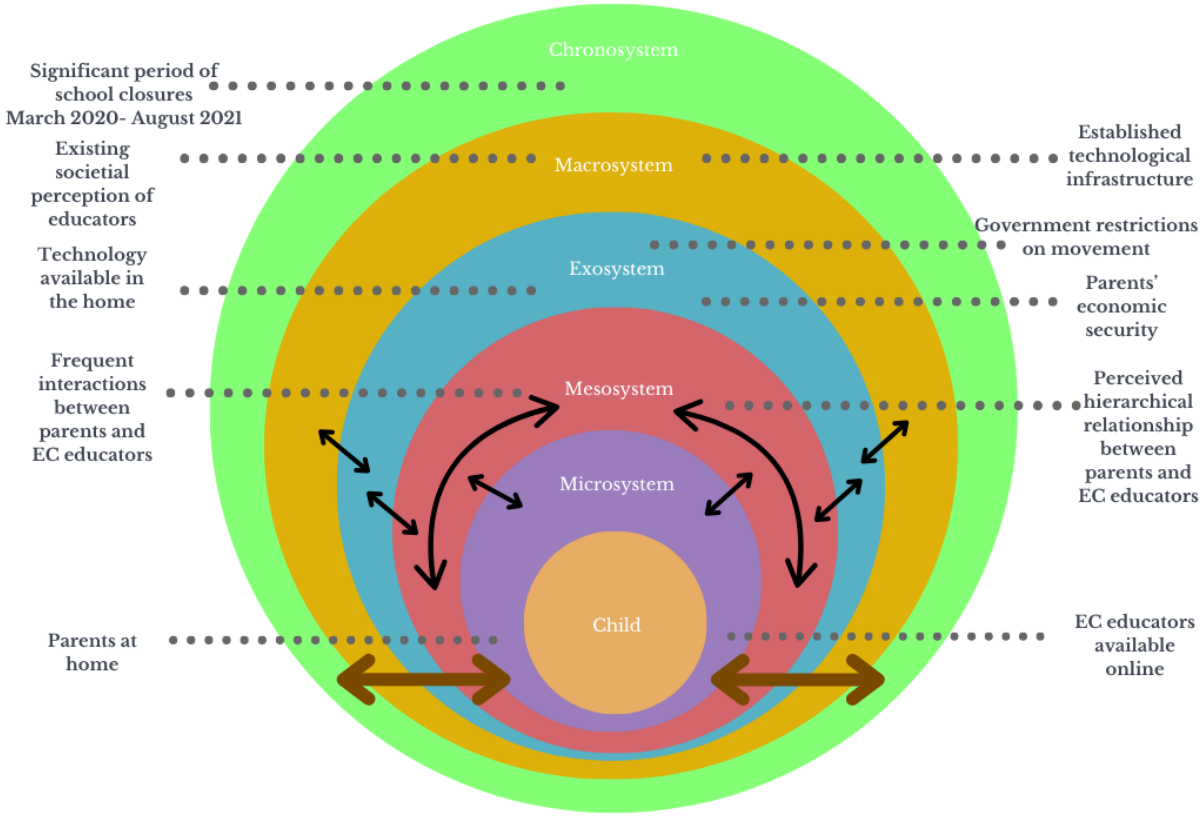


Figure 11. an adapted version of Bronfenbrenner and Ceci's Ecological Systems Model (1994) for Case Study 1: Rural Private Cusco

As illustrated in figure 11, the economic security of parents at Case Study 1, located within the exosystem of the model, meant that that not only did parents possess the economic capital in the form of laptops to ensure that their children attended online lessons with the EC educators, but that they were also present at home during those lessons. At least one parent in each family was able to be at home with their child during this period as they could work online from home or had sufficient resources from one income. Their presence at home was perceived by all stakeholders to be important as it allowed them to be directly involved and engaged in the educational development of their children. They were able to draw on their cultural capital in the form of digital literacy, time and their own educational background, as well as their social capital in the form of friends or fellow parents who were navigating similar experiences. These

socioeconomic conditions ensured that within their immediate environment (microsystem), children could interact frequently with both parents and EC educators.

Furthermore, access to technology in the home provided opportunities for direct communication between EC educators and parents too, enhancing the potential for high levels of interactions between these key stakeholders within the mesosystem. Krishnan (2010), when describing the mesosystem states that, 'parent's and a teacher's involvement in the child's education, if mutual, will result in mesosystem functioning' (p.8) suggesting that when there is frequent interaction between teachers and parents there are direct positive outcomes for children. However, in case study 1 these relationships were complicated, and a perceived hierarchical dynamic existed with EC educators perceiving that parents held power over them. This unbalanced relationship led to EC educators being negatively affected by parents which led to further challenges for them. Bourdieu's theories help to better understand these interactions as they emphasise how power (real or perceived) is a logical consequence of social reproduction whereby the transmission of capital leads to individuals with access to capital exercising influence over those with less (Bourdieu, 1986). Therefore, the EC educators, with their own professional capital were influenced by the parents who possessed significant accumulated capital. In Peru, the historical and cultural context in the macrosystem where educators were considered to be of low value (Saavedra & Gutierrez, 2020) provides further nuance to this relationship.

Despite the potential for frequent communication and interaction between EC educators and children it was noted that connecting emotionally and bonding with children was more difficult for EC educators than in physical classrooms. As previously established in the literature review children's development and learning has been linked to the positive interactions and relationships with educators highlighting the importance of such bonds (Murray & Greenberg, 2000; Crosnoe, et al., 2004; Sabol & Pianta, 2012). Indeed, both EC educators and parents stated that they believed that the educational development of children had been impacted and in particular the distance learning programme had not provided opportunities for the social and emotional development of children due to the nature of the interactions possible via a screen. This highlights children's inherent vulnerability at this time as they were prevented from in person interactions with other children during formative years of development, being dependent on the limited online opportunities parents and EC educators could provide.

The shared experiences within the exosystem of being confined to the home due to the government restrictions, uncertainty and concerns about getting sick meant that both parents and EC educators self-reported negative impacts on their well-being. These conditions were experienced over a significant period as seen within the chronosystem of the model in figure 11. Whilst some families did have the economic and cultural capital to move to larger homes with gardens and therefore reduce the impact of some of these stressors, they still reported negative effects on their well-being. One significant factor affecting parents' well-being across families at this case study was the additional roles they took on during the period of school closures. Due to the government restrictions preventing movement of people tasks that were previously completed by paid workers such as private childcare workers and housekeepers were taken on by parents, alongside the increased role they took on with regards to the educational development of children. Despite the families in this context possessing the cultural, social and economic capital to access support online from EC educators they found adapting to these roles challenging.

5.2 Case Study 2: Urban Public Lima

In the following section the context of Case Study 2: Urban Public Lima is described to enable greater understanding of the lived experiences of participants. The characteristics of the school and local area are set out, followed by the response to the pandemic and then pertinent details of the participants are shared.

5.2.1 Characteristics of the school and local area

The school is located in the capital city of Lima in an area vulnerable to weather erosion and earthquake tremors which the ECE leader reports leaves the school building in need of repairs, continual maintenance, and safety checks. Prior to the pandemic, efforts by parents and the wider community had been vital in allowing the school to remain open and functional, with limited government funding available for such issues.

The school is home to children from the ages of three to ten, catering to both early years and primary students. In March 2020, the ECE section contained five classes of around 20-25 children each (one classroom of three to four-year-old children, two classrooms of four to five-year-old children, two classrooms of five to six years old children). From approximately 100 children, 15 were Venezuelan, one Columbian and the rest were Peruvian. At the time of data collection, between June 2022 and August 2022 there were nine classes and significantly more children. The increase was largely attributed to an influx of children who had previously been registered at private schools and had since transferred into the public sector as a direct consequence of the pandemic. This trend was the opposite to that seen in Case Study 1: Rural Private Cusco where the number of students decreased during the period of school closures.

Case Study 2: Urban Public Lima is situated in an affluent region of Lima, however, families whose children attend the school typically come from socio-economic groups who are unable to afford to live locally. Its catchment area is, therefore, large as the school attracts children who live up to two hours by public transport from the school. The ECE leader reported that parents worked locally to the school as childminders, housekeepers and municipality workers, and their children attended the school as it was conveniently located for school drop off and pickup. Alongside these families who travelled from further afield were working parents who live in neighbouring similarly less affluent districts. In comparison, parents associated with Case Study 1: Rural Private Cusco worked as business owners and in tourism.

The school follows the Peruvian national curriculum (MINEDU, 2016) and is overseen by the local authority (UGEL) who provide guidance on curriculum implementation and health and safety procedures. During the pandemic the school was also required to provide UGEL with data and evidence of child and family engagement with distance learning programmes as well as details for how curriculum and teaching practices had been adapted as was the case at Case Study 1: Rural Private Cusco

5.2.2 Response to COVID-19

The academic school year runs from mid-March until mid-December at Case Study 2: Urban Public Lima. The school had opened to in person teaching gradually from October 2021 with normal daily schedules taking place at the start of the school year in March 2022. The school offered a purely distance learning ECE programme between mid-April 2020 to October 2021. From October 2021 until December 2021 there was a gradual easing of restrictions in the school which allowed children to return to school but with reduced schedules and the option to continue with online learning.

As with Case Study 1: Rural Private Cusco, the distance learning programme evolved over the course of the pandemic however, EC educators at Case Study 2: Urban Public Lima relied on the national distance learning programme 'I learn at home' to guide their planning. All children were advised to watch the 30-minute daily television show or tune in to the radio programme designed to be a stimulus for that day's learning at home. Depending on the availability of parents and access to devices EC educators were then able to interact with children and focus discussions and activities on the programme's theme adapting to the individual needs and interests of the children.

5.2.3 Data Collection Period

All interviews took place via videocalls at the participants' convenience, between June 2022 and August 2022 lasting between 35 minutes and 75 minutes. All six interviews were conducted in Spanish.

5.2.4 Leader participant characteristics

The ECE leader interviewed took up her position during the pandemic as an added responsibility whilst remaining as a classroom EC Educator and is referred to as Maria, Leader/EC Educator throughout this section. She brings perspectives from both roles.

5.2.5 EC educator participant characteristics

The three EC Educators hold teaching licenses obtained at Peruvian universities and have 54 years of combined classroom teaching experience. Two of the three EC Educators had their own children at home with them during the pandemic aged between two and 14 years old. EC Educators lived in neighbouring districts to the school and already had a laptop at home when the pandemic began that meant that they were able to work and conduct classes remotely.

Table 10. Case Study 2: Urban Public Lima – Leader and EC educator participant characteristics

Name (pseudonyms)	Participant type	Gender	Age Range	Years of Teaching Experience/working in education
Maria	Leader/EC educator	Female	45-54	16+
Almudena	EC educator	Female	35-44	16+
Catalina	EC educator	Female	25-34	10-12

5.2.6 Parent participant characteristics

Table 10 on the following page shows that parent participants had between one and four children at home and lived in dual parent homes, with one family also living with extended family. Some parents lost their jobs whilst others had their incomes reduced. Parent participants had access to savings which they used to support themselves. They all had a least one device that could connect to the internet in their homes when the pandemic began and were able to access the online interactions with EC Educators via WhatsApp. Families lived in apartments some of which had access to communal gardens.

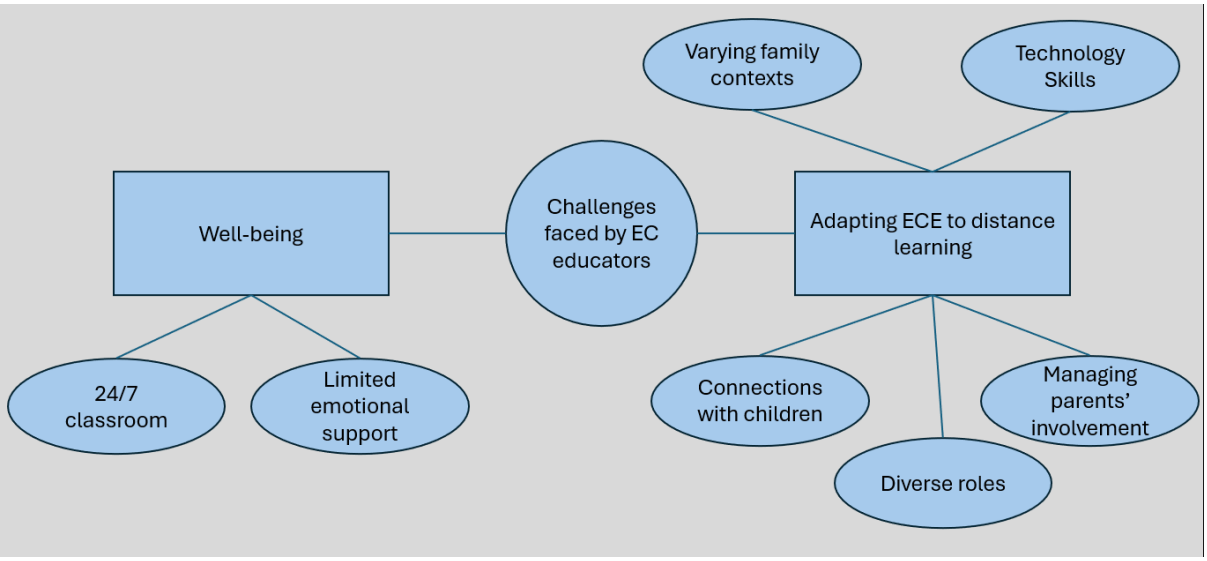
Table 11. Case Study 2: Urban Public Lima – Parent participant characteristics

Parent (Pseudonym)	Gender	Age Range	Occupation	Children aged 3-6	Dual Parent Home	Education
Alejandrina	Female	25-34	Teacher/Event caterer	2	Yes	University
Monica	Female	35-44	Stay at home parent	2	Yes	University
Luciana	Female	25-34	Stay at home parent	1	Yes	College

5.2.7 Challenges faced by EC educators

The following section explores the challenges that were specific to the EC Educators from Case Study 2: Urban Public Lima and directly address research question one. These challenges are broken down and examined through two categories: a) EC educator well-being and b) adapting ECE to a distance learning model as illustrated in figure 12**.**

Figure 12. Challenges faced by EC educators at Case Study 2: Urban Public Lima



a) EC educator well-being

EC educator well-being was highlighted by the EC educator participants in Case study 1: Rural Private Cusco as being negatively affected by the changes caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

At Case Study 2: Urban Public Lima all three EC educators similarly reported experiencing negative effects on their well-being. The nuances in how this was experienced are now explored through the following categories: The 24/7 classroom, and EC educators' emotional support.

The 24/7 classroom

All three EC educators from Case Study 2: Urban Public Lima noted increased contact with parents/guardians, and similar to the EC educators in Case Study 1: Rural Private Cusco it was the unscheduled and informal nature of these interactions which they found challenging.

We had practically no work schedule, we worked 24 hours and 7 days because even when it was two in the morning, we continued to receive calls, it was Saturday or Sunday, and we continued to attend to our children who could not connect during the week because the families gave preference to the older children's schooling. (*Maria, Leader/EC educator)*

Uh, at first it was crazy, I mean, it was almost 24-hour work, it was totally exhausting. On Saturdays or Sundays there was no limit, but I think that's another thing I learned, to set limits in terms of my family or personal space. (*Almudena, EC educator)*

If, for example, [the parents] did not have their child's next call scheduled, or they didn't know the questions to ask them, or they had a problem sending their evidence [of completed tasks] there would be messages at midnight or at one in the morning… even at four in the morning, the phone rang. It didn't matter if it was Friday, Saturday, or Sunday, the same, no. (Catalina, EC educator)

From these comments we see that parents were in communication with EC educators at times and on days that were most convenient (or actually possible) for the families, usually via the use of WhatsApp messaging and video calls. This level of contact was unprecedented and reported as being overwhelming. The focus on increased contact from parents here at Case Study 2: Urban Public Lima was not reported at Case Study 1: Rural Public Cusco where EC educators spoke about increased planning and preparation requirements for online classes.

EC Educators' Perceived Limited Emotional Support from School

As previously noted in the literature review educator well-being has been shown to be beneficial in teacher-child relationships and children's educational development. The following comments by Catalina, an EC educator, and Maria, Leader/EC educator, describe how stressful situations that were unrelated to their roles as educators impacted their lives.

I also had to support my youngest son in his school activities as he was just in first grade. He had to do literacy and comprehension tasks, and I needed to support him in his tasks and homework. I had to distribute my time so that I can see a little of each of my children, with the older ones, not so much their schoolwork but the things that went on in the house, everything that involves activities at home. So, I ended feeling totally tired, rough. (Catalina, EC educator)

So, that's what we're missing, support from an emotional partner that supports the school staff, who have been overloaded [with work] and also had losses during the pandemic. It has not only been the parents who have lost loved ones. (Maria, Leader/EC educator)

As Maria suggests as the start of her comment emotional support has been missing from the school, indeed all three of the EC educator participants reported that they perceived they had not received sufficient support with regards to their own emotional well-being having experienced stressful or tiring experiences. Almudena, an EC educator, explains how she lacked this support and highlights its importance as she, herself was providing emotional support to children and families.

If you are going to deal with emotions of children and other adults such as those in [the children's] families, first you have to go through that yourself and in schools we do not usually talk about this, about our own emotions. Who listens to me? I don't have space to talk about myself, huh? To reflect? Or time, for example, in which we sit down together and feel like an educational community. Do those spaces in our educational community exist within schools, I feel not. You have to prioritise those spaces.

…

It is an emergency, because I feel, that we have definitely passed through a kind of war, a situation where death has passed through in front of our eyes, illness, all that kind of thing, job loss. Above all I feel like that for public schools this has been an enormous challenge. (Almudena, EC educator)

Almudena's words emphasise the emotional strain she felt in both her personal and professional life, with the references to 'war' and 'death' particularly striking. She highlights the limited opportunities to reflect and share feelings and experiences within a professional context and when asked a probing question about what this support might look like she explained that her solution would be for external specialists such as psychologists to provide support to educators. At the end of her interview, Almudena again chooses to comment on this challenge as in

response to the final question: Is there something else that you would like to say or a topic that we have not talked about? she stated:

I think that there is an urgent matter for EC educators. I think that it is true we need to be trained, we need to acquire new knowledge, but I feel that there is an urgency to guide the EC educator by accompanying them. Specifically, this should focus on giving emotional support and motivational support. Because I feel that, for example, what has happened to me is that I am worried about getting infected in my work environment or suddenly seeing that my family are getting sick. These things will happen, and EC Educators are human beings, so they have their emotions. And since we are working on developing this within the schools [helping to emotional development in children], I think there must be more of a focus on our well-being. (Almudena, EC educator)

By returning to this challenge and giving further details, explaining how emotional support is crucial not just for the individual educator's well-being but because they play a role in supporting children's emotional development, we see how significant a challenge this was for Almudena. These words closely align with the experts, five of whom highlighted how personal circumstances in the home were impacting EC educators' capacity to work professionally. Diana, a Parenting Programme Specialist and expert participant, emphasised this when she spoke about the 'human' aspect and how EC educator welfare should be a priority. This is in contrast to some EC educators in Case Study 1: Rural Private Cusco where EC educators reported that they felt supported by their school and their colleagues. This was evident both formal support in the form of online training and regular meetings and informally through the partnerships and connections made between EC educators and leadership.

b) Adapting ECE to a distance learning model

As with EC educator participants from Case Study 1: Rural Private Cusco, participants at Case Study 2: Urban Public Lima reported that they faced challenges associated with adapting to ECE to a distance learning model. These challenges are now explored through the following categories: individual approaches to teaching and learning according to the varying family contexts, EC educators' technology skills, fostering meaningful connections with children, EC educators' diverse roles and managing parents' involvement in online classes.

Individual approaches to teaching and learning according to the varying family contexts

The nature, frequency and form of interaction and, therefore, distance learning programme,

varied depending on each family's individual context. This was a challenge that was highlighted by expert participants and reflects how the community at Case Study 2: Urban Public Lima lived in diverse socioeconomic contexts. For some EC educators this may have involved activities being sent via WhatsApp to parents with accompanying audio messages and later feedback, for others it may have been video calls and online classes with small groups of children.

There was not a single reality, so we had to adapt it to the reality, not only of the whole group, but of the different families. For example, families that did have connectivity, they might have mostly cell phones. Other families, for example, did not have Wi-Fi in the house, so they had mobile data from their phone and then they could connect. (Almudena, EC educator)

There were cases that were more difficult, some parents, because of the economic situation, they had told me that they can't connect [to the internet] and that they needed to go and connect using a network in the street [a shared Wi-Fi network]. (Catalina, EC educator)

Another problem we encountered is that our majority of parents had a prepaid cell phone. So, when they used the internet, they spent their data, and it lasted not even 5 minutes. (Maria, EC educator/Leader)

The EC Educators designed simple planned activities for parents to complete at home with the children, and they had to send us photographs or short videos about what they did in the house. (Almudena, EC educator)

Therefore, less affluent families (compared to those in Case Study 1: Rural Private Cusco) presented more diverse challenges for the educators in terms of how they could interact with parents and children. EC educator participants also reported that family contexts evolved over time as the parents became more familiar with technology, were able to buy or borrow laptop or smart phone devices and leave the home to work (taking their device with them). This meant that EC educators needed to be able to respond to the demands as they arose at different points of the pandemic as illustrated through the following quotes.

They [parents] began to go out and began to take the devices with which our children connected, then it was back to working at night and it was back to working on Saturdays or in many cases Sundays. (Almudena, EC educator)

I felt like in 2020 the Zoom lessons worked well but in 2021, it was not so good, because parents were already working and could no longer connect with the children. Two or three simply did

not connect anymore because there was no one in the house who was with them at that time. (Almudena, EC educator)

Feedback during the first year was mostly through audio [WhatsApp messages] because this was the only way to give feedback and communicate. (*Catalina, EC educator)*

This emphasises the prolonged and changing nature of the demands on EC Educators during the pandemic, highlighting the need for them not only adapt once at the onset, but to do so continually. The different forms of interaction between home and school reflects comments made by Brisa, a consultant and expert participant, as previously outlined in the ECE expert section of this chapter as she described a conversation with an EC Educator in her network. Therefore, the EC Educators in Case Study 2: Urban Public Lima add weight to Brisa's suggestion that public school EC Educators were faced with the challenge of adapting the distance learning programme, responding to the diverse needs of the communities they served.

EC educators' technology skills

When asked directly about the challenges faced all three EC Educators described how initially they perceived that they did not have the necessary skills or experience to utilise technology to teach children remotely. The lack of technological skills was largely attributed to limited familiarity with the tools as they previously had no need to use them as illustrated through the following comments:

We definitely had to train on our own in the use of these platforms, the Zoom, Teams or the other one we use is Meet. We also had to learn how to make our videos, how to make our cards, our teaching materials with these virtual tools, because you know that at school we cut, we draw, we are great at that, but through technology I could not. It has been quite difficult. (*Maria, EC educator/Leader)*

As for the other challenges one example is my knowledge of technology. I wasn't very familiar with how to manage and use it. But one of my strengths has also been, oddly enough, I recognise it now, it has been the support of my [own teenage] children. Because they knew better than me how to use these different tools. With issues of making videos, making slides, how to record a video, cut a video and send them to my students, to compress videos. All of these things my children helped me. I have also looked for tutorials. And despite all the difficulties for me that

has been one opportunity. Yes, because I have been able to learn and know different digital tools. I am not suddenly an expert in it, but, yes, I have realised that there are other types of

tools to be able to support me, in the learning of the children, so that has been for me a great challenge. (Catalina, EC educator)

Significantly EC Educators were not provided with opportunities to develop these skills by the school or school district, rather they needed to learn these skills themselves, making use of online tutorials, expertise of family members and/or their own exploration and experimentation. Responsibility falling on the EC Educators themselves to develop their own skills is in contrast to the experience of EC Educators at the private school context in Case Study 1: Rural Private Cusco where EC Educators had technological support and opportunities to receive training from the school.

Fostering meaningful connections with children

Comments by Catalina, an EC educator, highlight the importance of making connections with children and reveal how this was a prerequisite to any meaningful learning occurring, a finding that very much aligns with the experiences of EC Educators in Case Study 1: Rural Private Cusco emphasising its significance in distance learning programmes in ECE across contexts.

Firstly, I think from my experience that you do have to have a connection as a person. I don't know if you are the same but for me for learning to take place you need that connection, firstly as friendship with the children, so, that they can have that openness, of wanting to tell me, wanting to talk, wanting to participate, right? (*Catalina, EC educator)*

A follow up question was posed asking what strategies were employed to develop these relationships, which again mirror similar strategies of movement, dance, song and play that were highlighted in Case Study 1: Rural Private Cusco.

[Through] activities. The first thing I did was play games with them. We danced so that they did not feel so much pressure to speak or feel self-conscious. I danced too! We did some craft activities, making puppets that we could play with. Through those activities we have been able to connect and little by little give the opening for them to speak to me, little by little. It is a process because at first, they did not participate. (Catalina, EC educator)

Maria, the EC Educator/leader, highlights that the connection with children was not only related to how effective teaching and learning was, but that it also had an impact on the emotional wellbeing of the EC Educators.

We also suffered emotionally because of the fact, that the early childhood educators are very loved, we are mother figures, right? So, the fact of not being able to give them a cuddle, a hug, hurt us, it was difficult. (*Maria, Leader/EC educator)*

EC educators' diverse roles

EC educators reported a shift in the day-to-day tasks performed, taking on new tasks and responsibilities. For example, EC Educators reported having to take time to learn how to use technology for teaching and learning, having to record videos, send personal audio messages to children, lead online classes, coordinate with families for when they could connect online or via phone calls with children, and track family and child engagement with the ECE programme to contribute to government data monitoring requirements. These were all new tasks and responsibilities that EC Educators were not used to doing before the pandemic. Whilst the reporting of these new tasks largely aligns with findings from Case Study 1: Rural Private Cusco and the views of experts, in this case study there is more of an emphasis on EC Educators offering holistic support to families, not just being responsible for the education of children. Indeed, EC Educators perceived that they were fulfilling a variety of new roles in supporting the families of children in their class as demonstrated through the following comments:

And our role was more emotional accompaniment for the families, not only with children, with families too. (Almudena, EC educator)

We are counsellors, we are nurses, we are even legal helpers, even parish priests, we are multifaceted in that sense, because the parents create a certain bond with some of the EC Educators and suddenly begin to entrust them with these particular things, but all that is loading the EC educator, and she has no way of downloading these. (Maria, Leader/EC educator)

This was not a challenge reported by the expert participants or EC educators at Case Study 1: Rural Private Cusco which suggests that parents in this context relied on school and EC educators more at Case Study 2: Urban Public Lima perhaps due to their socioeconomic status or perhaps it reflects the closer relationship between school and community in this public school.

Managing parents' involvement in online classes

As previously stated, whilst not all parents had access to technology and EC educators were delivering ECE in different ways, however in the home contexts where online classes were possible EC educators at Case Study 2: Urban Public Lima report that managing parents during online classes was a challenge as it was with the EC educators at Case Study 1: Rural Private Cusco. Similarly, EC educators perceived that parents would give children the answers and complete tasks for them, preventing them from making mistakes.

I would also ask a question and then the child answered me through an audio, the mother sometimes took a video, but I felt that in some cases there was a lot of intervention from the parents to answer in the right way, to do it as they wanted it to be. (Almudena, EC educator)

It seems that many parents have overprotected their children, or it may be due to the fact that they have been at home for so long together. The children are not autonomous. They are not able, for example, to solve problems. (*Catalina, EC educator)*

The consequences of this are that EC Educators were not able to accurately assess children's progress and development and plan accordingly. The EC Educators also suggest that as the children returned to school, they were able to observe the direct consequences of this with children unable to perform tasks that previous cohorts of children were able to.

The children from before [three years ago], yes, they were dropping things and then automatically tried to it clean up. But now they stay thinking, walk away or wait for someone to do it for them, that is what must have happened at home, and they have become accustomed it. Many similar things, if the tap in the sink is left on, they don't turn it off, they just wait. They don't give you quick ideas for how to fix problems. (Catalina, EC educator)

Maria, the leader/EC educator, identifies that the parents although trying to help were not able to support the development of their children as needed due to their parental instincts being overly protective.

It is true that the parents have been able to give all the support they could, but it has not been the support we needed because they were very maternalistic or very paternalistic. (Maria, Leader/EC educator)

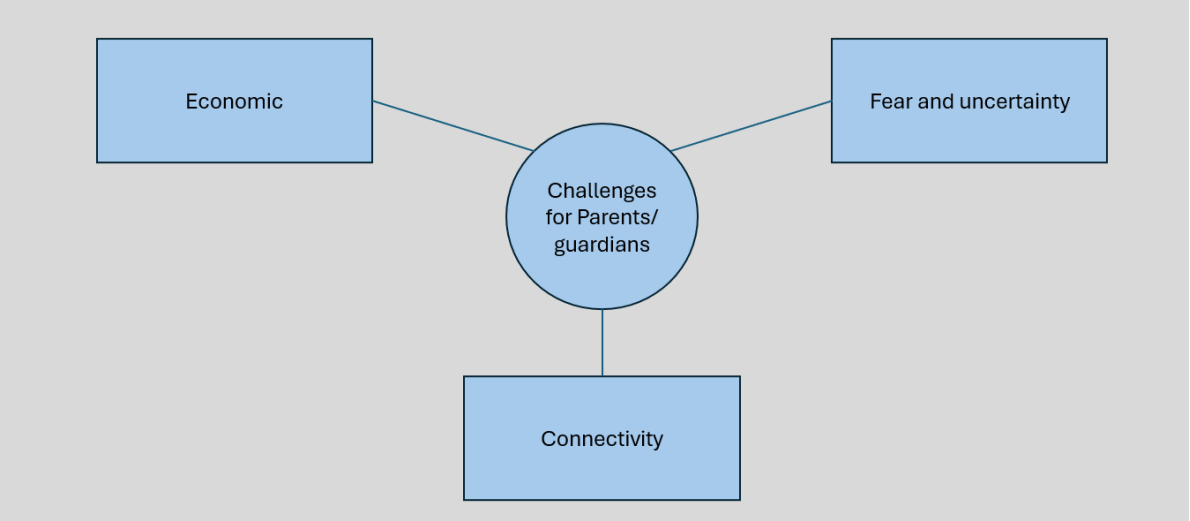
The suggestion made by Maria is that perhaps the parents were unable to separate their preexisting parental role with the new role as an EC educator. This builds on similar findings

from Case Study 1: Rural Private Cusco that EC educators perceived that parents' support was sometimes inappropriate for the learning process in young children.

5.2.8 Challenges faced by parents/guardians

The following section explores the challenges that were specific to the parents from Case Study 2: Urban Public Lima and directly address research question two. These challenges are broken down and examined through three categories: a) economic challenges for parents, b) challenges of connectivity and c) a climate of fear and uncertainty as illustrated in figure 13.

Figure 13. Challenges faced by parents/guardians at Case Study 2: Urban Public Lima



a) Economic challenges for parents

Measures put into place to prevent the spread of COVID-19 had a direct impact on parents' ability to work and as a result economic difficulties were reported as challenges for parents by all six participants. Through the following selected quotes, we see how parents described the reality of not being able to earn an income and having to use savings and pension funds for day-to-day expenses in a significant redistribution of funds.

We had other savings. We had money earmarked for something else and we had to start using it. There was no other way. We couldn't go out; we didn't have a good job where would get paid monthly. I was being paid for each event [birthday parties and weddings as a caterer] and when there were no events, I didn't get paid. It was a different budget. So, this was a bit difficult. (Alejandrina, Parent)

What made it less bad was that we could take out some of our pension funds so we could live. As all of our income stopped as everything was closed and there was nowhere to work. (Monica, Parent)

The EC educators and the leader, likewise, perceived the economic realities to be a challenge for the parents in the community they served adding weight to the finding that economic hardship was a significant challenge for parents at Case Study 2: Urban Public Lima.

Many parents were left without work, many parents lost their business or went bankrupt. (Maria, Leader/EC educator)

They no longer had [mobile] data because their economic situations had changed completely because they had lost their jobs. We had other examples, families that had been entrepreneurs or private business owners and suddenly they no longer had their incomes. (Almudena, EC Educator)

Changes to income and the redistribution of funds in households connected to this urban, public school was not an unexpected finding considering the socioeconomic group that the school served. It was significant that the parent participants had the resources to meet basic needs, and this may reflect biases in participant recruitment where access to technology was a requirement for participation and so households with fewer resources may have been excluded from the study.

Children's experiences and access to ECE were directly impacted by disruption to parents' income, for example, Alejandrina, a parent took on a new role as a private tutor during the day to replace her income working at evening events as a caterer. This caused changes to circumstances at home where Alejandrina was no longer present to support her daughter connect to her online classes.

When I started working face-to-face, I had to go to teach some girls and then I stayed taking care of them. It was last year, more or less in March. So, our children stayed with their dad, and I was leaving every day. ... It took me a bit time for me to adapt, and I had a bit of a hard time at first, but they [Alejandrina's own children] had a harder time adjusting to the fact that they didn't see me all day, every day 24/7, getting them up, giving them breakfast, sitting with them during classes. For their dad too it was difficult as he had to adapt to the fact that he had to do those things. Sometimes I called, and I'd say where is my daughter, where is she? But it turns out that she did not want to enter the class, the poor thing. (Alejandrina, Parent)

The data, however, go beyond just stating that economic difficulty was a challenge as links are made between the ways in which these difficulties shaped parents' lives and potentially impacted on children and ECE. The following quote from Monica, a parent, also reveals how immediate financial difficulties negatively influenced emotional well-being.

Look, the most difficult thing was the economic aspect. Of course, it exhausts us emotionally because many families have mortgages, and the banks did not excuse that. They did not waive payments. This did generate stress, and we even had to see how to sell things. In many cases people had to sell things to be able to meet their payments. (Monica, Parent)

In summary, economic difficulties were identified by all six participants at Case Study 2: Urban Public Lima as being a challenge for parents, suggesting that this was a significant issue for families in this context. Whilst economic difficulty was identified in Case Study 1: Rural Private Cusco it was not talked about to the same extent which implies that in this, and perhaps similar contexts, socioeconomic status was crucial in how ECE was experienced during the pandemic.

b) Challenges of connectivity

Connectivity in the home shaped the interactions possible between EC educators and parents/children and therefore directly impacted ECE during the pandemic. All six participants spoke about the difficulties of communicating digitally highlighting a broad range of aspects which were perceived to be challenges for parents including a lack of devices in homes, prioritising devices for older children, limited mobile data, lack of home Wi-Fi connections, limited internet bandwidth and slow, unreliable internet connections.

The three parents interviewed all stated that that internet quality was a challenge and that it often shaped their interactions with EC Educators and their ability to access ECE.

In some cases, there were advances but there are many deficiencies in Peru, there is not internet everywhere, and the bandwidth is very low, because sometimes it didn't work or just cut out. (Alejandrina, Parent)

Yes, there were problems for both the EC Educators and for us. Sometimes the call hung up and sometimes we couldn't connect. Sometimes we were late because she [the child] had woken up late, other time she did not enter because of course, my husband was online and so the network was busy. So, this was an issue. (Luciana, Parent)

Sometimes we stayed until 1:00 in the morning trying to send the information [evidence of completed activities] because the network was so heavy [slow] and so loaded that no videos and tasks [photos of completed activities] were sent. Or the EC Educators' emails were saturated, and the emails bounced back, and they didn't go in because the mailboxes were full. It was very tiring. (Monica, Parent)

This finding points to a wider infrastructure issue that exists within the country and highlights that even when families are able to afford internet in their homes there is a lack of quality which hindered the ability for distance learning programmes to work effectively. The lack of home Wi-Fi, limited availability of devices, and mobile data were all highlighted by parents and EC Educators alike. Often links were made to the affordability of being able to connect drawing highlighting that socioeconomic status was a factor in accessing ECE during the pandemic.

And well, I know of other children who had only the mother's cell phone, we say that we are privileged because we had Wi-Fi, but there are other children who only had the cell phone. It was a complicated issue, I mean, I think nobody was prepared for that, not even the companies. (Luciana, Parent)

So, we fought, I entered for using my laptop and she used my cell phone, and she did not like it because the screen is smaller, and she could not see as well. (Alejandrina, Parent)

Also, something worth knowing is the reality of the parents in terms of their economic situation. In some situations, yes, the parents had, for example, a cell phone, but did not know how to connect to classes. I had some parents who grouped two or three little children so that they can connect through the zoom, for example, because they did not have the economic situation. Another situations where parents search, for example, for some internet connection of some other house. 'Miss, I'm looking for a connection where I can connect as I am trying to send evidence or sending the audio'. That was made more difficult when the network became overloaded, and we stayed in beep, beep, beep or earlier [in the interview], like when we became disconnected and there wasn't that connection, or we just didn't reconnect. (Catalina, EC educator)

The limited availability of devices and home Wi-Fi, poor quality internet, and running out of mobile data are all factors which have the potential to negatively impact the ability of parents to support their children in accessing ECE. Their reporting in this context and not previously at Case Study 1: Rural Private Cusco suggests that for less affluent families, connectivity was

a significant challenge. This aligns with existing research and adds weight to the suggestion that the digital divide experienced during the pandemic had the potential to further widen existing inequalities.

c) A Climate of fear and uncertainty

The third challenge for parents was that of living within a climate of fear and uncertainty. Many experiences described by the parents elicited negative emotions such as stress, anxiety, fear, grief, and uncertainty. The combination of all of these negative emotions at the same time may well have affected mental health and well-being. The following quotes illustrate the negative emotions experienced by the parent participants themselves.

In the time of pandemic, I think we were gripped by fear because we were isolated and did not know what was happening, at least here in Lima we saw that people fell to the floor, fell to the floor because they lacked oxygen until they were taken to the hospital. No, nobody knew how to handle this issue, we had never experienced it ever in life. The world saw this. This has been a global thing. (Monica, Parent)

For me that was very stressful [not being able to visit an elderly parent in a care home], it hurt, not to see what was happening, I had to believe what they told me and more than everything that was hard. Until at one point I decided not to listen to the news from other countries or from here anymore and simply trust that everything was fine. (Luciana, Parent)

The quotes reflect the feelings of fear, uncertainty and of not knowing how to react. They are significant for ECE as they reveal the very real-life challenges that the parents were dealing with at the same time as they were trying to adapt and help their children access ECE. Each parent from Case Study 2: Urban Public Lima described specific situations that they lived through during this period that had directly emotionally affected them. They referenced experiences which included relatives passing away, family members who were sick with COVID, and not being able to have contact with elderly parents either at their homes or in care homes. Whilst these difficulties may have been shared across contexts for this case study it adds to the growing number of sources of stress.

Parents' emotional well-being may also have impacted children in their care and there is a suggestion that these children would have shared similar fears and anxieties. The following two quotes, from a parent and the EC Educator/leader, illustrate how children were not immune to the psychological impact of the pandemic, and this too is an important consideration when

understanding the implications for child development and ECE.

At the beginning she could not go outside, and the games were closed. This hurt her. On top of that she is an only child, so she couldn't see her cousins, she couldn't see her friends. Just imagine. Yes, there was fear especially, when the deaths started and you could see there were people on the street who had died or things like that, even if you don't want her to, she listens to it, she sees it, no? Her fear was for her grandparents, 'is something going to happen to my grandmother, my grandfather?' things like that, she talked about death and what it meant and the whole subject, because we didn't know what was going to happen next. So, we talked about topics that we had not talked about before. At four, three or four years old. (Luciana, Parent)

But with the parents, with the relatives of our children there were many losses and definitely explaining this to the child was something difficult for us, that is, we could not fulfil the pedagogical activities to try to calm that child by trying to calm that family. (Maria, Leader/EC educator)

The quotes also demonstrate how adults were required to provide emotional support for children at time when they themselves were struggling to manage their own emotions. This finding highlights how parents faced multiple emotional stressors which had the potential to negatively affect the children.

5.2.9 Overarching themes

The following two themes: a) parent involvement and b) parents and stakeholder support network**s**, are illustrated in figure 14. They were developed from interviews with parents, the leader and EC educators from Case Study 2 and are now explored below.

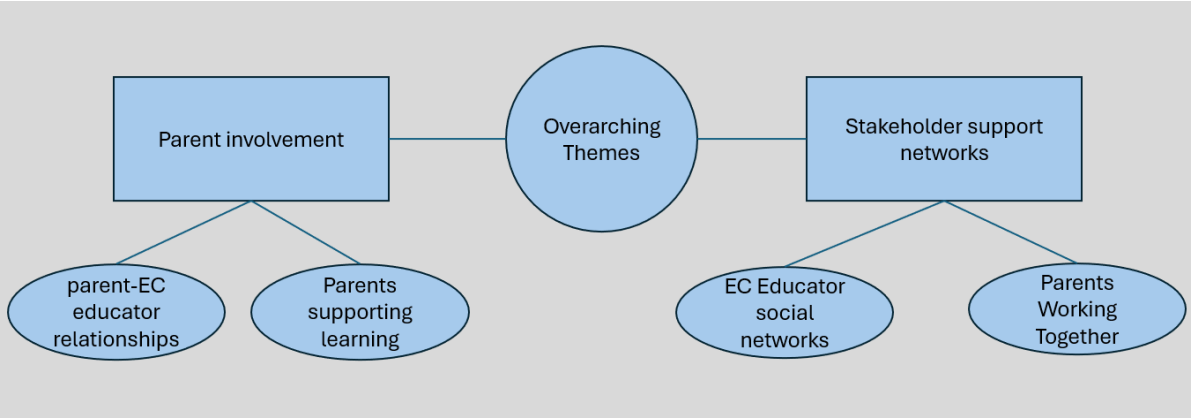


Figure 14. Overarching themes at Case Study 2: Urban Public Lima

a) Parent involvement

Many of the challenges faced by parents and EC Educators participants highlighted the significant role that parents play in providing access to and delivery of the ECE distance learning programme at Case Study 2: Urban Public Lima. In this respect this finding mirrors that from Case Study 1: Rural Private Cusco, in that without parental involvement ECE would not have been able to function. This is implicit in many of the comments made by the participants and explicitly stated by Catalina, an EC Educator when she says:

If the parents did not support this virtual education, I think it would not have been achieved either because virtual education was not only possible due to the EC Educator, but it also has a lot to do with the parents. (Catalina, EC educator)

The nuances of parental involvement at Case Study 2: Urban Public Lima are explored through the following two sub themes: the development of stronger parent-EC educator relationships and parents adapting to supporting children's learning.

The development of stronger parent-EC educator relationships

An important aspect of parents' involvement in their children's education were the relationships that were built between themselves and the EC educators. The reported positive interactions between these two key stakeholders occurred within the mesosystem of Bronfenbrenner's model which allowed for direct impact on children's experiences of ECE. The nature of the situation meant that there was an enforced reliance on each other's input which created an opportunity for EC educators and parents to grow closer. EC educators guided in how to manage behaviour, assist during online classes and help develop specific skills in children.

But yes, we worked hand in hand with the EC educator. When we did not know the EC educator guided us in what we had to do. (Monica, Parent)

That is something we have more than indicated to parents during interviews [parent-EC Educator meetings] with them: Please sit them at a table with a chair at the height of the child. If the chairs are very high, please put cushions so that he can reach. (Maria, Leader/EC educator)

The desire by EC educators to forge strong relationships with parents was not a new phenomenon as explained below by Almudena, this was an aspect of the EC educators' roles that she had been aware of before and had always tried to foster positive partnerships and guide

parents in how to support their children's development. Her cultural capital equipped her with this knowledge and the skills to communicate these strategies to parents and now the circumstances caused by the pandemic meant that parents could see and engage in this process.

I have always been concerned with [building relationships with parents]. It was not that suddenly that I had to have the family as an ally, because I feel that there needs to be support, a bond with the family to be able to work as an early childhood educator. We had already begun to do some workshops at school with parents. (Almudena, EC educator)

For many years we have tried to engage parents in school because we felt that this was our weakness. For example, when I took the training in Reggio Emilio, it was there that I understood a little, because it tells you about involving the context and the context is the family, the home, the community. So, we in public schools have had the custom, in quotation marks, of stopping parents there at the front door. Leaving them out, they only enter [the school] in certain situations. But this is open doors. So, it changed our dynamics at school a lot, didn't it? (Almudena, EC educator)

Access to technology, a form of cultural and economic capital, provided Almudena and some parents at Case Study 2: Urban Public Lima with the opportunity to develop their relationships within the mesosystem and have a direct impact on child educational development as parents were welcomed into the school with 'open doors'. Seeking to involve parents in this way was also seen in Case Study 1: Rural Private Cusco where access to technology was a requirement of all parents.

Parents supporting children's learning

EC educators reflected on the importance of parents during the distance learning programme, highlighting how their involvement was key as seen through the following comment.

Whatever [type off] class [online or in person], it is I believe that the support of the parents, of the family is fundamental. We as EC Educators, do believe that we are nothing without the support from parents. And it's not going to change. (Catalina, EC educator)

Parent participants themselves reported that they adapted in several ways to support their children's educational development. These ranged from moving furniture in the house to moving house, to establishing routines and structure to day-to-day life at home as illustrated through the following examples:

Because the house was not very big, it is not a suitable space, right? And so, we moved the furniture, we moved the tables and everything we made every effort possible. (Alejandra, parent)

At just this time my husband found a good place to rent that was a condominium that had a garden. When moved there she changed completely, it was her again, as we took her out, there was the garden, no, you did not have to go outside, it was inside and there were a quite a few other little children in the condominium. Ten used to come outside. So, she was with them playing, obviously everyone played with a mask, but she relaxed and was back. She already controlled herself, she changed. We noticed it. (Luciana, Parent)

My husband, who is more disciplined, began to correct us with the schedule because he did not lose the routine of work and it was hard because at that time the children were always using the cell phone a lot, so their actions were changing. They were very irritable until we decided to put schedules in place. So, on Tuesday and Thursday these are the only days that we use electronic devices. (Monica, Parent)

The three examples illustrate how each parent used the resources that were available to them to create a more favourable or suitable educational environment for their child. Underlying each of these modifications is the cultural capital in the form of awareness that firstly educational development for their children was important and secondly that space, outdoors and structure would support children's educational development. In the case of Luciana who was able to move homes we can also identify a significant level of economic capital which allowed this transformation of the child's immediate physical environment.

b) Parents and EC educators' support networks

This theme explores the support networks that EC Educators and parents were able to call on to help them ensure ECE continued during the period of school closures. For EC Educators it was collaborative experiences with each other and for parents it was support from extended families, friends and neighbours. These sub-themes are now explored under the following headings: *EC educators drawing on their social networks* and *parents working together with support from extended family, friends and neighbours.*

EC educators drawing on their social networks

EC educators drew on their social capital to help them overcome or at least lessen the impact of two of the challenges previously described. Firstly, the EC educator participants turned to

each other for emotional support, with Catalina in particular commenting that she had benefitted from talking to a colleague about their shared experiences.

One of the supports I have had apart from my family was just talking to Almudena [an EC educator at Case Study 2: Urban Public Lima]. We talked a lot. We needed to cheer each other up, I don't know, sometimes one of us felt like saying, you know, I want to quit and it's over, because there comes a time when you get overwhelmed. (Catalina, EC educator)

I receive lots of support from my colleague. We learn and share with each other. Her suggestions are powerful as she works in the same place as me. Within my darkness, let's say in quotation marks, I suddenly had more lights and am able to drive better. (Catalina, EC educator)

Secondly, EC educators utilised their social capital to learn approaches and strategies both logistical and practical that other educators were using to support the delivery of ECE. This was highlighted by Catalina, as she spoke at length about how she collaborated with colleagues both within Case Study 2: Urban Public Lima but also through her own professional and personal networks, learning from the experiences across a variety of settings.

We asked questions like 'how do you make …' and we were giving ourselves encouragement. What's more, there were EC educators from different types of schools. I also have friends who work in parochial schools and private schools, so they kind of felt that way too, right? So, I told them that you have the tools and maybe you can support us in the State, they told us, well we don't have the tools either and so we shared how they were [implementing a distance learning programme]. (Catalina, EC educator)

Significantly, Catalina confirmed that these exchanges were informal and unstructured interactions which occurred due to her seeking out others in her network. This was different to the conditions within the exosystem at Case Study 1: Rural Private Cusco where formal opportunities to share and interact with colleagues were planned for. Catalina confirms this as she explains:

Exactly, it was not structured. It was in those moments of despair that we looked to someone. 'Look, how are you doing this?' And ask someone 'look, I'm working in such a way, I need help, do you know a page or application?'. So, it was not these structured conversations or formal meetings, but it was at any moment, suddenly, or through a [WhatsApp] chat, and everything came out. We shared information, no, it wasn't anything structured. (Catalina, EC educator)

Catalina's comments highlight the value that she gained by having this professional network and the potential benefits for EC educators to share strategies, resources, and experiences with each other. Whilst this highlights the social capital available to Catalina it also reveals that she had the economic capital in the form of a device and internet to communicate freely with colleagues and friends. EC educators using their social networks in this way took advantage of having access to peers they were able to indirectly influence the strategies to adapt ECE to a distance learning model.

Parents working together with support from extended family, friends and neighbours

EC educators and parents both report that for some parents the extended period of confinement and being around each other meant that there may have been unstable parental relationships in homes. Conversely, in other households this period also provided opportunities to build relationships as a family and grow closely. Both experiences are highlighted through the following comments:

The parents at this time were having a very difficult time as they needed to take care of their children and take care of the partner 24/7. That is, in reality there has been a real coexistence within a marriage. I say it like that as before they saw each other for a few hours every day because they went out to work, they arrived at night, and they saw each other at night. And during the day if they saw each other for 5 hours it would be a lot. On the other hand, in these two years of the pandemic they have seen each other for 24 hours. (Maria, Leader/EC educator)

For us too, it has been beneficial. I know there are many people who have separated because of the fact of interacting so much, but it was calm [for us]. (Luciana, Parent)

And we have realised that we have to live together to survive. To tolerate each other, we have gotten to know each other more and we, as a family, have united. (Monica, Parent)

These quotes reveal that whilst for some parents this period led to conflict, for the parents interviewed the pandemic period provided the opportunity unite and for both parents to be more involved in the lives of their children as they spent time and collaborated together.

When asked if they received additional support or collaboration from organisations or other sources they report collaborating with friends, family and neighbours in their roles as parents

and caregivers, reflecting a supportive network in their communities. The following comments by Alejandrina, a parent, reveal that friends and family were able to provide emotional support but also practical support in navigating the expectations of online learning.

The truth is that we as a family, we did get together especially with my aunt, and we talked to her, and we got together and prayed as my dad was sick. We got together and always prayed using the Rosary. We met virtually with friends. We supported each other. (Alejandrina, Parent)

My best friend, just that year, as the pandemic began, her daughter entered my little daughter's school. The girl didn't meet anyone at school, not the EC educator or even a friend. So, we kind of supported each other. 'Do you know what needs to be done?', 'so, we are going to do it together', 'so they have to do it in a group, ok, the two together'. (Alejandrina, Parent)

These comments demonstrate how parents relied on their social capital to work together to support their children's educational learning during the period of school closures. It was the ability to share information and strategies with existing contacts and interact with friends and family members from the same community which was a significant factor for parents at Case Study 2: Urban Public Lima.

In this section I presented Case Study 2 set at an urban public school in Lima. I now state the main findings from the case and the theoretical implications related to Bronfenbrenner and Ceci's Ecological Systems Model (1994) and Bourdieu's Theory of Capital (1986).

5.2.10 Main findings from Case Study 2: Urban Public Lima

- Unreliable and limited access to technology in the home determined the type of interactions possible between the child, parents and EC educators.
- Unstable economic conditions in the home affected some parents' capacity to stay at home with children and access ECE.
- EC educators took on additional roles as they not only learnt how to teach through a distance learning programme but also supported and guided families in their diverse contexts.
- Parents engagement in the educational development of their children was necessary for the distance learning programme.
- Negative impacts on well-being were self-reported by parents and EC educators.

This case study draws on the direct experiences of EC educators and parents who all had access to technology during the period of school closures. However, both parents and EC educators do refer to the experiences of parents in the community who did not share this access. Taking both these direct and indirect accounts into consideration, this case study reveals that the economic uncertainty in the home resulted in only some parents having sufficient economic capital in the form of laptops or mobile phones to access ECE. In homes where technology was present, communication and interaction between EC educators and parents was frequent but not without problems as internet reliability was also cited as an issue, highlighting the limited infrastructure within the exosystem. Furthermore, the economic circumstances in the home impacted on parents' capacity to be present to support their children's educational development as some parents were required to leave the house to work whilst others were able to remain at home. Their presence within the children's immediate environment as shown within the microsystem of figure 15 was therefore variable and further complicated by the fluctuations of government restrictions overtime (exosystem and chronosystem).

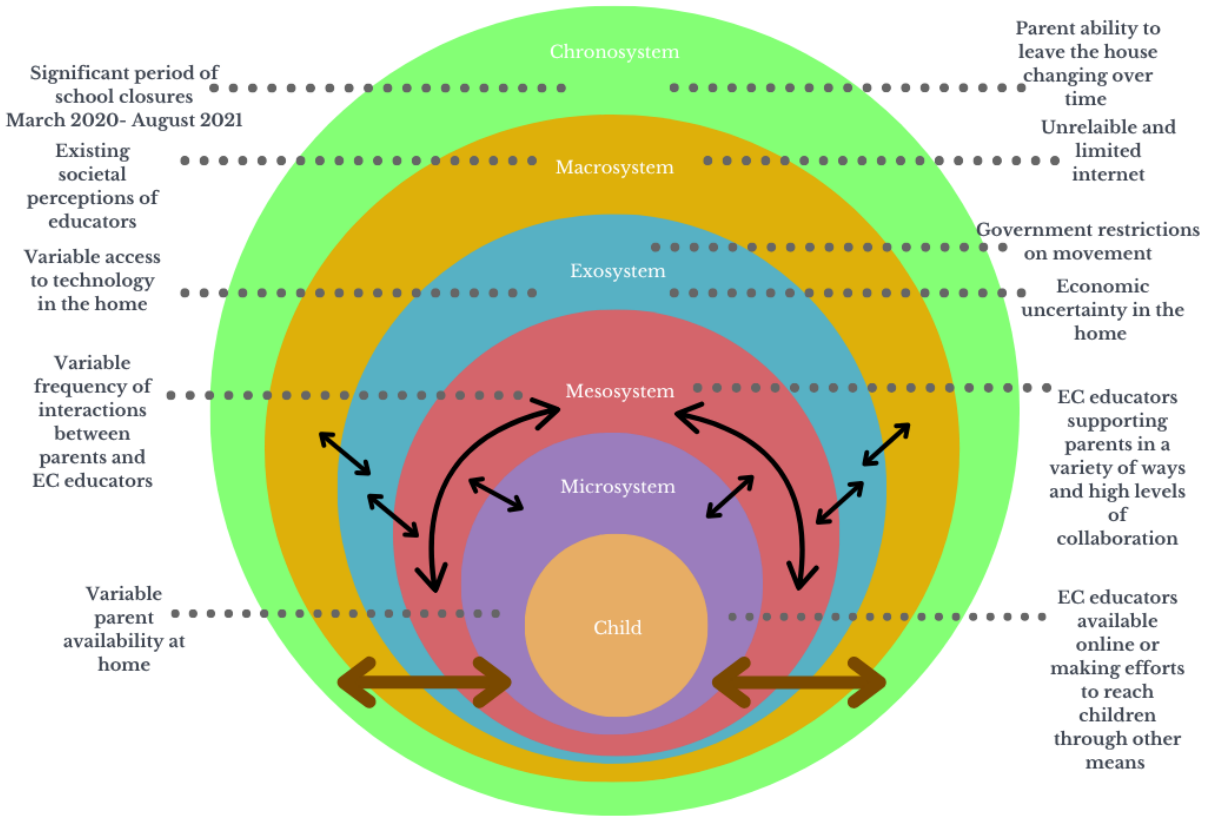


Figure 15. An adapted version of Bronfenbrenner and Ceci's Ecological Systems Model (1994) for Case Study 2: Urban Public Lima

The direct interactions possible between the child, their parents and EC educators within the microsystem were dependent on the families' economic situation. In homes where limited economic capital meant that technology was not as accessible or parents were not at home with children, EC educators revealed that they adapted their distance learning programme by sending voice messages, sending physical resources or attempting to travel to children when restrictions allowed movement. Even with this additional work carried out by EC educators, often outside of school hours, the nature of the challenge resulted in far less direct communication between EC educators and children than seen at Case Study 1: Rural Private Cusco.

Similarly, the frequency of interactions between parents and EC educators within the mesosystem were also variable as communication was determined by parent availability and their access to technology. These conditions were underpinned by the levels of economic capital parents possessed in the home. When conditions allowed for relationships to be possible, they were highly collaborative as parents and EC educators relied on each other to implement the distance learning programme highlighting mutual dependence. Furthermore, parents' dependence on EC educators extended beyond guidance related to the educational development of their children as they also relied on them for emotional support and guidance in other aspects of their lives such as nurses, priests and counsellors. EC educators, therefore, took on different roles away from that of traditional teachers as they supported the diverse needs of parents.

As with ECE stakeholder well-being in Case Study 1, here in Case Study 2 there were influences across the distinct levels of Bronfenbrenner and Ceci's Ecological Systems Model. The significant challenges involved dealing with prolonged periods of uncertainty which had the potential to cause stress and negatively impact emotional well-being. Increased workload, uncertainty, learning how to use technology, changing pedagogical approach and adapting to the needs of each family were identified as potential sources of stress for EC educators, whilst a lack of connectivity, economic difficulties and fear of getting sick were the main stressors for parents.

5.3 Case Study 3: Urban Private Lima

In the following section the context of Case Study 3: Urban Private Lima is described enabling greater understanding of the lived experiences of participants. The characteristics of the school and local area are set out followed by the school's response to the pandemic and then pertinent details of the participants are shared.

5.3.1 Characteristics of the school and local area

Case Study 3: Urban Private Lima is a private school located in the south of Lima in a district considered to be part of the urban sprawl of the city. The district is not named to maintain anonymity but is characterised by being a residential area and tourist destination with a mix of middle- and upper-class occupants who live in large houses in gated communities. The school leader explained how alongside these more affluent communities are those who live in high rise buildings and 'pueblos jovenes' (translated as young towns), historically characterised as informal poor migrant settlements which had gone on to be recognised and upgraded by government to establish working class communities (Lloyd, 1980). According to the school website in 2024, tuition fees range from 1600 to 3000 soles (£335-629 GBP) a month (according to age of child) with an initial admission fee of approximately 25,000 soles (£5250 GBP), when these figures are compared to the average monthly income of Lima residents of 1921 soles (£405 GBP) (INEI, 2018b, p. 146) we can assume that parents who send their children to case study 3: Urban Private Lima are from middle to upper class communities, rather than those from the 'pueblos jovenes', indeed this assumption was confirmed by the school leader during a pre-interview.

Approximately 700 - 800 students were on the school roll at the start of 2020, with more than 150 children enrolled in the ECE programme which consists of three age groups nursery (3–4-year-olds), pre-kinder (4–5-year-olds), and kinder (5–6-year-olds) with 20 members of ECE staff being employed. In 2021, the number of ECE children number fell to less than 70 with 0 enrolled in the nursery age group due to children withdrawing from the school or postponing enrolment. In 2022, the number of children in ECE had risen to over 100 children but not yet at pre-pandemic levels. Student and staff numbers were sourced from government websites, documents available on the school's website and confirmed by the school leader, approximations have been provided to maintain anonymity whilst also providing a sense of the size of the school and the enrolment trends.

The school follows a Reggio Emilia inspired philosophical and pedagogical approach, giving the school a significant identity which is referred to by all participants in some way. This distinctive approach to learning founded by Loris Malaguzzi (1920-1994) in the town of Reggio Emilia is fundamentally based on the principle that children have a hundred languages through which they express themselves and explore the world around them (Edwards, et al., 1998). This pedagogical approach centres on children exploring materials and situations and is particularly relevant given the shift to a distance learning model.

5.3.2 Response to COVID-19

As with case study 1 and 2 the school at case study 3 was closed to in person learning in early March 2020 and began to gradually reopen in August 2021 through hybrid and reduced schedules leading up to a return to 100% in-person classes for the start of the 2022 academic year (March). An ECE distance learning programme was developed by the school within a week of the announcement of school closures with modifications made throughout with regards to the online platforms and contact time between EC educators and students. The approach was characterised by live daily online classes with small groups of children and their EC educators.

5.3.3 Data Collection

A total of seven semi structured interviews were conducted between 02 - 30 November 2022 via video calls that lasted between 30 and 54 minutes. Five of the interviews were conducted in Spanish with two in English according to the participants' preferences.

5.3.4 Leader participant characteristics

The school leader, Paul (pseudonym), had over 20 years of international educational experience and joined the school mid-2020, initially online and then in person later in 2021. He had previously lived in several countries, having studied at universities in the UK and Australia.

5.3.5 EC educator participant characteristics

Emilia, Elena and Olivia were pseudonyms given to the three EC educators who participated in interviews at Case Study 3: Urban Private Lima. As seen in Table 11 (on the following page) these participants ranged in experience from two to eight years, all having studied at Peruvian universities and were living in Lima. They all had fixed internet in their homes and either lived alone or with their own parents, without dependents.

Table 12. Case Study 3: Urban Private Lima – Leader and EC educator participant characteristics

Name (pseudonyms)	Participant type	Gender	Age Range	Years of Teaching Experience/working in education
Emilia	EC educator	Female	25-34	1-3
Elena	EC educator	Female	25-34	7-9
Olivia	EC educator	Female	25-34	7-9
Paul	EC Leader	Male	45-54	16+

5.3.6 Parent participant characteristics

Three parents, Tiago, Flavia and Sofia (pseudonyms) had young children aged three to six years old during the period of school closures. One was a single parent and moved in with their mother, two lived in dual parent families. As seen in table 12 they came from a range of professional backgrounds including education, engineering, and one was an independent business owner. They lived in homes with fixed internet access and multiple devices available to be used both for distance learning and their own jobs.

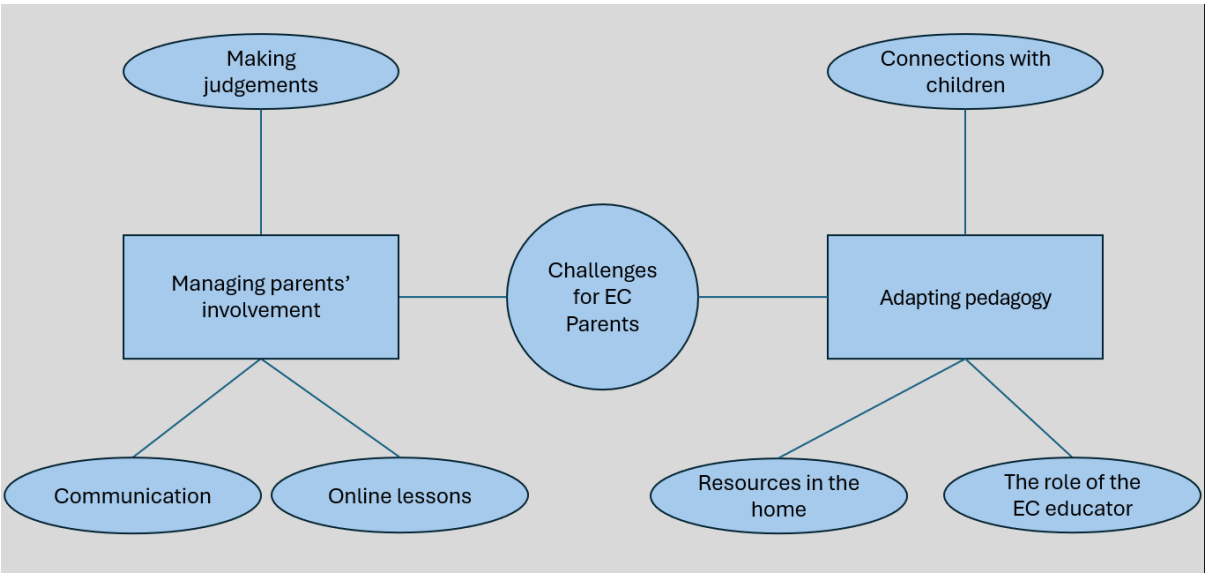
Table 13. Case Study 3: Urban Private Lima – Parent participant characteristics

Parent (Pseudonym)	Gender	Age Range	Occupation	Children aged 3-6	Dual Parent Home	Education
Tiago	Male	25-34	Engineer	1	Yes	University
Flavia	Female	35-44	Business owner	1	Yes	University
Sofia	Female	25-34	EC educator/Manager	1	No	University

5.3.7 Challenges faced by EC educators

The following section explores the challenges that were specific to the EC educators from Case Study 3: Urban Private Lima and directly address Research Question One. These challenges are broken down and examined through two categories: a) managing parents' involvement and b) adapting teaching pedagogy as illustrated in figure 16.

Figure 16. Challenges faced by EC educators at Case Study 3: Urban Private Lima



a) Managing parent involvement

As we have seen in case studies 1 and 2, and from comments made by experts, it was perceived that parent involvement during the period of school closures was crucial in providing children with opportunities to access ECE. This view was also evident in comments made by all three of the EC educators and the leader from Case Study 3: Urban Private Lima. Parents not only had to be present but had to be actively involved in assisting children to maintain open channels of communication, connecting with online classes, and often prompting and encouraging children during those classes. The inclusion and reliance on parents in Case Study 3: Urban Private Lima brought about its own challenges which are now explored under the following headings: managing informal communication with parents, managing parents' involvement during online lessons, and the perception that parents were judging EC educators.

Managing informal communication with parents

Firstly, as we saw in previous case studies informal communication was difficult to manage, however different to previous contexts, in Case Study 3: Urban Private Lima, the school had a policy that prohibited the use of WhatsApp as a means of communication between EC

educators and parents. This was reported by two EC educators who had differing experiences of the effectiveness and perception of this policy when answering the question, 'How did you communicate with parents?'

I was their EC educator in kinder, first grade, and now second grade. So, when the pandemic arrived it was crazy because they all, I don't know how, they got my phone number because we don't usually share numbers, but they called me [via WhatsApp] all day. (Elena, EC educator)

We did not use WhatsApp as the school policy does not permit the use of WhatsApp. So, it was all through Zoom and emails. ... There were some complaints that there was not much communication because, of course, there was no WhatsApp. I think it is much easier for families to send a WhatsApp. (Olivia, EC educator)

Elena's comments mirror the experiences of the EC educators in Case Study 1: Rural Private Cusco and Case Study 2: Urban Public Lima with informal communication from parents happening 'all day', adding weight to the argument that managing parent communication was a significant challenge for EC educators across contexts in Peru. This along with Olivia's comments revealing the parents were unhappy with the lack of communication caused by the school's 'no-WhatsApp' policy highlight how communication and the relationship between parents and EC educators was perhaps a wider issue. Parents requiring guidance from EC educators could in someways be expected and was consistent with studies in other contexts (Dong et al., 2020) where parents report that they felt they did not have the knowledge and/or skills to support their children's learning and development.

Within the Peruvian context this parental need to have contact with EC educators can be interpreted in several ways, for example Elena stated previously that she felt that parents trusted her may represent a new respect for EC educators and the skills they have reflecting a change in societal perception of EC educators. Alternatively seeking out the support of EC educators 'all day' and via informal means of communication which is prohibited may indicate a lack of respect towards EC educators as professionals, although, there was no indication that parents had expected an immediate response.

Managing parents' involvement during online lessons

Two of the EC educators and the leader at case study 3 reported that parents being involved in their child's online classes could, in some cases be unhelpful, similar to reports from EC educators from case studies 1 and 2. Elena described how parents gave their children the

answers to questions, whilst Paul, points out from his position as the leader that he was concerned about parents hurrying children to complete tasks.

The parents were there and if the kids didn't know how to answer for us, it's like normal, it doesn't matter because we are going to like, to build the learning in the coming days. But for them [parents], that wasn't easy, so you could hear the parents saying and whispering the answers [to their child], right? (Elena, EC educator)

The parents wanted... I think they, they felt the time, or the burden that this was putting on them, that they always feel, they always came across, that they had something else to do, so they wanted to kind of just step in and get things done. (Paul, Leader)

Parents helping too much in this way by completing tasks themselves or giving children answers, may of course, just signify parents being busy and wanting to get things done quickly, but it could also highlight a fundamental difference in the perspectives and objectives of the EC educators and parents during online classes and perhaps education in general. The school's Reggio Emilia approach would suggest the EC educators adopt a facilitatory role but if the priority for parents is task completion, an instructor's role may be favoured leading to dissatisfaction of online classes from parents. Whether it was parents' lack of time or their belief that learning should be focussed on outcomes it demonstrates a lack of understanding of the Reggio Emilia philosophy that the school subscribes to.

The implications of the parents overhelping or not supporting their children's learning and development effectively can be seen in the adverse effects on children's independence and autonomy, two aspects which are significant for children's educational development. Indeed, the EC educators and leader described how levels of autonomy in children were noticeably different as children returned to school. This was highlighted by Olivia, an EC educator, when she was asked the question 'Did you notice any changes in children's behaviours during the pandemic?'

Ah, well, at the beginning, when this school year started [in 2022, during in person lessons] we saw zero autonomous children, that is, they could not do anything for themselves. We asked them to go wash their hands and literally they would go to the tap and say, 'wash me', 'here I am'. Or to go to eat and they sat at the table and waited, just sitting as if waiting for someone to put the plate, put the glass on the table. I mean, no, they hadn't developed many of these skills. There was little autonomy in the group. (Olivia, EC educator)

Rather than as a consequence of parents not having sufficient knowledge of children's educational development and/or just wanting to complete tasks the reported lack of autonomy could also be a natural result of children spending more time with their parents/guardians in the home due to the restrictions put on place. In this respect, children were not provided with those day-to-day opportunities that arise to develop independence skills at early childhood settings away from parents. The differences in child autotomy may be interpreted in many ways, but what is clear is that EC educators perceived that on occasion, both during online classes and more generally during the pandemic period, parent involvement had the potential to negatively impact children's educational development.

The perception that parents were judging EC educators' abilities

A third challenge reported by EC educators related to the involvement of parents in online lessons was the perception that they were being judged by the parents. A natural consequence of online lessons was that parents could see and hear the EC educators teaching and interacting with children to a far greater extent than when children attended school in person. EC educators revealed that they perceived their abilities were being assessed by parents particularly with regards to how they managed the class and interactions between students as we can see from the following quotes:

I couldn't know if the mother was behind the laptop and was, I don't know, taking notes of what I was saying, or if she didn't like the class or if she thought something happened in another way, or if one student raised his hand and I didn't see it because that happened a lot in Zooms. All the cameras were mixed, and one [child] raised his hand, or I didn't listen to them, so that was something that really stressed me at one point. … So yeah, that was one thing I was a little bit afraid of. (Emilia, EC educator)

So, they [parents] were there, I feel like they were present and listened to everything that happened in the classes. They could be a little more critical of what happened in the class especially with some exchanges of ideas or some interaction between students. ... So, yes, we were much more exposed as EC educators to these kinds of things from families. (Olivia, EC educator)

The comments and language used suggest that EC educators perceived the presence of parents as a challenge as they associated it with negative factors such as stress, fear and being 'exposed'. The leader describes how as a direct consequence of parents having greater access

to classrooms, they also had greater awareness of the EC educators and the children's levels of English. He was appointed around six months into the pandemic tasked with improving learning outcomes in this area as he explained:

English got totally massacred from parents with online learning. Uh, simply because ... the parents were theoretically in the classroom for the first time. Yeah, and with English it's very much... Can you speak the language or not? Do you understand what this person is saying or not? And the parents very quickly just realised, 'oh my God, my kid can't speak English', 'my kid doesn't understand', 'my kid pronounces poorly'. All kinds of criticism just got thrown straight on us [the school/EC educators]. (Paul, Leader)

Paul's description and particularly his use of the word 'massacred' and later in the interview the use of the word 'butchered' when continuing his explanation of his role emphasise how critical the parents' perceptions of the EC educators' levels of English were. This along with the fact that the school recruited Paul (a native English speaker) during this time suggests that this was more than EC educators perceiving that they were being judged, it was a reality. Paul went on to describe how the dynamic between parents and EC educators led to parents feeling empowered to interrupt online lessons an issue which he then relates to school fees as seen below:

There were definitely issues with the hierarchy. Uh, you know, who, who has the power in that situation? [online classes] Is it the EC educator or is it the parent who's actually kind of you know, indirectly paying the EC educator. (Paul, Leader)

The reference to 'indirectly paying the EC educator' is significant as it highlights the complicated nature of the parent-EC educator relationship. It also emphasises the commodification of education in this context with parents expecting a certain type or style of education in return for fees paid.

b) Adapting EC educator pedagogy

The three EC educators in Case Study 3: Urban Private Lima all found that adapting the school's Reggio Emilia approach to a distance model was a challenge. The school's distinctive approach relies on children exploring and expressing understanding in a variety of ways as outlined by Olivia when she stated:

Because of the philosophy at the school, we give much more attention to the artistic languages, the languages of how we express ourselves through other forms, not just the oral word, but through drawing, representation, modelling. (Olivia, EC educator)

Delivering this approach through a distance learning model was hampered by the limitations of working remotely in several ways which are now explored under the headings: the role of the EC educator, resources available in the children's homes and making meaningful connections with children.

The role of the EC educator

Firstly, the EC educators took on roles which they compared to those of more traditional EC educators who give information to children rather than guiding their exploration and allowing them to discover as we might have expected with the Reggio Emilia approach. This is illustrated through Emilia and Elena's comments:

It's different [the Reggio Emilio approach compared to online learning] because the philosophy is more like exploring and learning. You get to the class and on the table the EC educator has wrote a question or is inviting you to do something with the materials or the papers. ... On screen it was, I mean you couldn't have the tables, you couldn't have the invitation you couldn't have you as an EC educator. ... It was more like a traditional school. I think, I felt it like that it was more a traditional [approach]. (Emilia, EC educator)

I felt at the beginning like I was, uh, like a traditional EC educator because, uhm, we shared a lot of information, we shared a lot of videos and usually when we are at the school we ask a lot of questions. (Elena, EC educator)

Taking on more of a traditional role may have been a consequence of several factors for EC educators. One of these factors was insufficient knowledge of how to harness technology to fuse distance learning with the Reggio Emilia philosophy as is evident when Elena described her uncertainty when faced with the shift to a distance learning model as 'like being in the wildness' and similarly Emilia commented that 'I wasn't feeling that prepared'.

There was an awareness shown by the EC educators that they had shifted their pedagogical approach when they first adapted to a distance learning model and later attempted to realign their practices. Olivia, an EC educator, stressed the importance of ensuring that 'Circle Times' were carried out virtually enabling children to participate in 'question and answer sessions,

with dialogue' and 'brainstorming'. This meant that children were more active and involved in their learning and not simply listening to the EC educator- key features of the Reggio Emilia approach.

Resources available in the children's homes

A second reason the EC educators found it a challenge to adapt the Reggio Emilia philosophy to a distance learning approach was the perceived lack of resources available in the homes of children. EC educators describe how a range of concrete materials are needed to support learning and at school these are freely available and, if not, could be acquired quickly, whereas following a distance learning model relied on parents having these resources in the home which was not always possible as pointed out by Elena:

If we are investigating something and we want to use, I don't know, seeds, tomorrow we are going to have seeds, but if you ask parents tomorrow, we are going to work with seeds, some of your kids are going to have them, some of them are not. (Elena EC educator)

Again, it was Olivia who spoke about reducing the effects of this challenge as she described how 'families were asked to have a lot of materials ready' a strategy which took organisation, planning and a great deal of communication between EC educators and parents to ensure that children had relevant resources available. For EC educators at Case Study 3: Urban Private Lima this was possible solution as they knew that parents had the means to acquire the resources, and it was more a case of giving them warning that was the issue. EC educators in other contexts where parents weren't so financially secure may not have been able to rely on parents to such an extent.

Making meaningful connections with children

Thirdly EC educators reported that they struggled to make meaningful connections with children reflecting reports from EC educators from the two previous case studies. Despite being in regular contact with all the children in their class through the use of technology (unlike in Case Study 2: Urban Public Lima) EC educators reported that they felt online classes didn't provide the same opportunities to interact with children, as described here by Emilia.

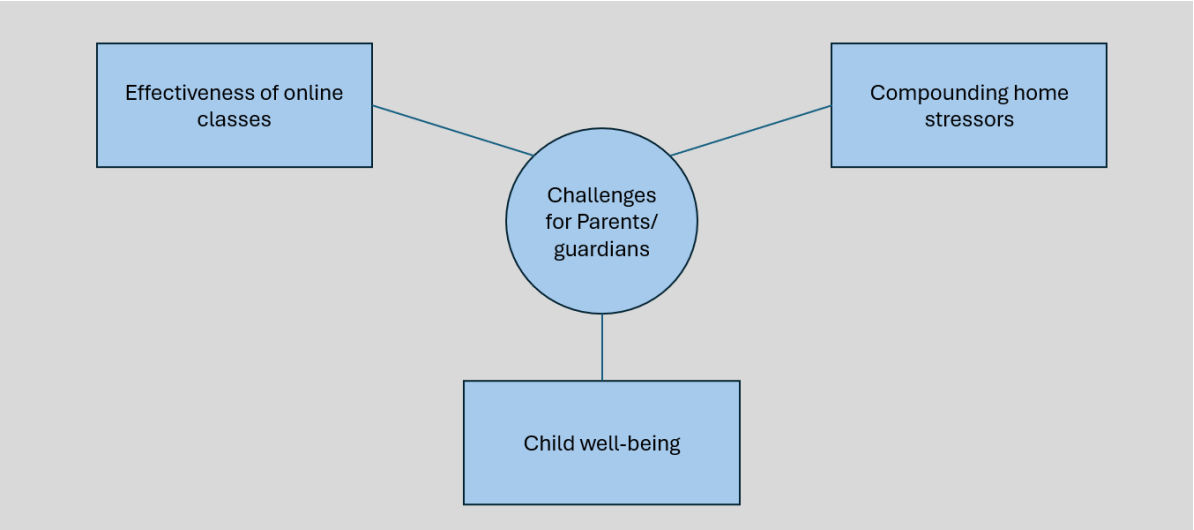
But what I was more worried about, was what I was telling you about [before] - that connection with the students. It wasn't, like, it's not the same, I don't know, energy. It doesn't feel the same to give a class online. So, it was a little bit hard. (Emilia, EC educator)

EC educators were able to develop strategies to overcome this challenge by finding other ways to create bonds with children. Olivia explains this was normally achieved through 'hugs' and 'eye contact' but during the pandemic it was necessary for her to do 'a little more talking and connecting with what was happening with them at home'. She also explains how she created opportunities for the children to interact with each other during break times online to encourage 'freer conversation and connection with the students'.

5.3.8 Challenges faced by parents and guardians

The following section explores the challenges that were specific to the parents from Case Study 3: Urban Private Lima and directly addresses research question two. These challenges are broken down and examined through three categories: a) concerns about the effectiveness of online classes, b) compounding home stresses and c) concerns about child well-being as illustrated in figure 17 and explored below.

Figure 17. Challenges faced by parents/guardians at Case Study 3: Urban Private Lima



a) Concerns about the effectiveness of online classes

There were mixed perspectives on the suitability of online classes from parents; two parents, Sofia and Flavia, viewed them negatively, while Tiago spoke about them positively. Sofia found that the classes were too long and caused her daughter frustration which in turn led to her own frustrations with her daughter. Similarly, Flavia reported that the classes were boring and unsuitable for her son's developmental level and that he found them difficult to connect to emotionally.

I guess it was one of these moments where Isabel was extremely frustrated and I thought I put the mute button on and I was like talking to Isabel, [saying] 'why aren't you paying attention?', 'Why are you doing this?' And I guess everybody heard and right away I got an e-mail saying like Sofia, we would like to have a meeting with you I think you're finding this very challenging. And then I talked to my friends. And they were like, 'Oh my God that happens to all of us, I mean don't feel bad, we're all yelling at our kids'. (Sofia, Parent)

I knew he was getting annoyed, he was already complaining about everything and everything bored him, so it was tense in the house, having Martin sitting for so many hours bored in class where he did not learn anything because of course, as I say, in 2020 Martin learned to read and write by himself, he read encyclopaedias, he read books about the history of the universe. And so, to sit down to see just an EC educator teaching the letters to his friends on the computer, no, I mean, it was like no. And he's a kid who also likes to take turns, respond and talk. He can wait, but of course, he saw that the children spoke more slowly and that he had to wait a long time for them, to give them the time to speak on the computer. So, he started to get bored. (Flavia, Parent)

From Sofia's and Flavia's comments we can see that having their children engage in online learning at Case Study 3: Urban Private Lima was a challenge that evoked negative emotional responses for both them and their children. In particular the conflicts that Sofia mentions suggests that the online classes were an additional source of stress in homes of many children which previous research has linked to the emotional well-being of both parents and children (Magill-Evans & Harrison, 2001; Ward & Lee, 2020). The comments by Flavia suggest a lack of a personalised approach to learning which is a key principle of the Reggio Emilia philosophy. This reinforces the challenges reported by EC educators where they describe taking on what they see as a traditional EC educator's role. These factors informed the value parents attributed to distance learning online classes and led to the decisions for both parents to withdraw their children from the school as they sought to support their children's learning and development in other ways. The perceived financial cost and value of the online lessons are highlighted through Flavia's explanation:

So no, it didn't work and, in the end, in October [2020] we withdrew him from school. Because the investment for the family... it was an effort to be able to pay for school. It had already become a conversation without thinking about the expense because my son was not learning

anything, he was bored and emotionally there was nothing, nothing was there, no, so it was no longer an investment, it was just an expense. (Flavia, Parent)

These decisions reinforce the EC educators' and leader's perceptions from Case Study 1: Rural Private Cusco that parents withdrawing their children from school was a valid concern and could have implications for job security should enough children be withdrawn from their institution. This reflects a wider issue for private schools in Peru where parents were more active in moving their children between schools at that time. Here at Case Study 3: Urban Private Lima the emphasis from parents who did withdraw their children from school was that it was a decision related to the perceived quality of teaching and learning rather than a difficulty in paying school fees.

Tiago, a father of a young boy was, however, more enthusiastic about the opportunities the online classes gave his son to access ECE and interact with his EC educators. He described how he perceived EC educators had been able to effectively adapt to the Reggio Emilia philosophy through online classes reflecting the strategies highlighted by Olivia, an EC educator, in the previous section.

To share the screen, to have the kids interact with their little fingers on the iPad, they made it very, very tangible, like, bring items, we're going to cook, we're going to do this, we're going to do math, and you need beans, bring beans, bring recycled materials, we're going to glue. It's Reggio Emilia online, and I liked that a lot. (Tiago, Parent) (context for comment available in transcript example in Appendix 3b).

These contrasting views provide balance between how parents perceived the quality of online classes and reflections on the differences between EC educators and their styles or capacity to adapt pedagogy to an online model. Another possible reason for the differences in perceptions of online classes maybe that both Flavia and Sofia's children had begun the distance learning programme in 2020 when EC educators were adapting and getting used to the demands, whereas Tiago's son was slightly younger and began in 2021, still during the period of school closures, but 12 months after they were initially closed. (The interviews with all three parent participants were conducted in November 2022). Therefore, the time when children started online classes could be a significant factor in how parents perceived the effectiveness of online classes in ECE.

b) Compounding Home Stresses

Flavia and Sofia spoke about a variety of stressors in the home that could be directly related to the pandemic such as feelings of confinement and having financial concerns as illustrated below:

Since Isabel was born, I've always taken her out to the park every single day. Even if it was cold, if it was too hot, we always went out, so just not being able to go out it was, it was hard, you know. (Sofia, Parent)

So, although we may have had an income, it was not enough to be able to sustain ourselves, let's say, our lifestyle as it was. So, all those changes happened during the same year too, and we did not know what was going to happen despite the reactivation [of the economy]. (Flavia, Parent)

These are factors that have been highlighted by parents in the two previous case studies suggesting that these were consistent across settings. Confinement and restrictions on movement have the potential to negatively affect emotional wellbeing and relationships. And although parents in this case study could be considered more financially secure, they were still affected by the economic uncertainty that existed at this time in Peru. When responding to a starter question: 'Tell me a little about yourself – what do you do?', Tiago elaborated on his homelife and highlighted how significant it was that many challenges and stressors had all happened at the same time.

It was complicated and interesting, intense, dramatic, because it was the confinement plus this and that. There were many variables together. But hey, it's what we do- live and here we are. (Tiago, Parent)

The cumulative effect of these stressors had the potential to negatively affect parents' wellbeing and their interactions with their children.

c) Concerns about child well-being

Closely related to the two previous challenges outlined is the challenge of parents dealing with the behavioural changes they reported seeing in their children and wider concerns about their development and well-being. The unprecedented nature of the pandemic and its sudden disruption to routines, way of life and sense of security created a context of uncertainty and anxiety for children. In this case study all three parents describe how their children's behaviour

changed in several ways during the pandemic when responding to the question - *Have you noticed any changes in your child's behaviour during the pandemic? If so, how?*

A little bit at the beginning, Martin was a little fearful about the pandemic, he had a few stressful moments. He started to wet the bed; he sweated a lot during the night. (Flavia, Parent)

Yes, he was afraid, and he felt insecure to see people with masks, with face shields and all these things, no, he was fine, but very anxious about this, what can I tell you? Yes, it was like a zombie movie, something like that with the empty streets, so much uncertainty, he didn't understand what's going on and just preferred not to go out. He preferred not to go out, he said 'dad, I want to stay here'. (Tiago, Parent)

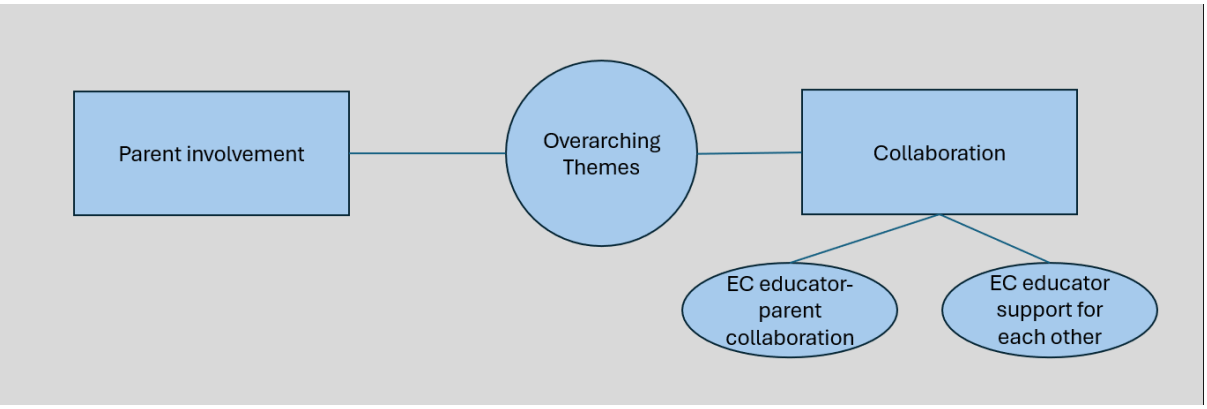
Yeah, I guess emotional. I think there's definitely been a toll, yeah. And I can see, you know, by now I shouldn't have a problem leaving my daughter at school, you know, and she is still not wanting to stay. So definitely the emotional part has been hard. (Sofia, Parent)

The comments reveal how parents were aware of the negative emotional effects that the pandemic had had on their children. Parents observed changes, interpreted them. and then made efforts to lessen their impact by taking the time to explain the situation to them, distracting them by playing together or keeping them occupied with classes or projects at home. This in itself is significant as it demonstrates aspects of responsive parenting, behaviours which have been highlighted as beneficial for child development and form the basis for some parenting programmes and interventions. In following these behaviours parents showed that they had the time, education and resources to support their children's emotional well-being.

5.3.9 Overarching themes

The following two themes, a) collaboration key for educators to adapt and b) parental involvement in curating real-world learning experiences are illustrated in figure 18 on the following page. They were developed from interviews with parents, the leader and EC educators from Case Study 3 and are explored subsequently.

Figure 18. Overarching themes at Case Study 3: Urban Private Lima



a) Collaboration key for educators to adapt and deliver ECE

This overarching theme is developed from data from across all three participant groups it reveals how for the distance learning model to be effective, collaboration, in two main forms needed to be present: EC educators requiring the collaboration of parents and EC educators supporting each other.

EC educators requiring the collaboration of parents

In the first of these subthemes, we see how like in the two previous case studies EC educators simply could not implement a distance learning model without the input from parents in the home. Whilst there was friction between these two groups of stakeholders, EC educators are clear in their assessments that they needed parents to be involved:

If they were alone, they didn't do the work, so their knowledge and their learning process was interrupted. (Emilia, EC educator)

But in those two years parents were effectively accompanying the children. Children at this age could not do classes by themselves, almost none of them could do the classes by themselves. Everyone had a mum or dad or nanny beside them saying 'listen to your EC educator' 'listen' 'come to the class because your EC educator is talking to you'. So, that was their role especially in those years. (Olivia, EC educator)

In comparison to Case Study 2: Urban Public Lima, rather than economic and cultural capital in the form of access to technology being a factor in making ECE accessible for children at Case Study 3: Urban Private Lima adults being available to sit beside children and help them to engage in online classes was considered most important. This involved a different form of capital in the form of time and a willingness from the adult to engage in this collaborative

process. There were examples of division and a hierarchical relationship between the EC educators and the parents which potentially had an impact on the level of collaboration. As discussed previously EC educators perceived they were exposed to parents' criticism, Paul the leader spoke about the hierarchy he perceived existing between parents and EC educators and the 'no-WhatsApp' policy meant that communication was not as fluid as in the other case studies. The policy had existed before the period of school closures and had been brought in to maintain a formal record of communication via email between parents and EC educators. Within Case Study 3: Urban Private Lima collaboration was complex, a view that is illustrated through the quote by Paul, the leader.

So definitely when they're online they [parents] were far more involved in education, some of them willingly, some of them, I guess reluctantly, because when the kids are home, they either can't go to work or whatever. So, some really embraced it, some didn't like it, but definitely they were there. They were involved. They were clearly listening because even through emails they were sending, they were a lot more kind of... well informed, for example rather than asking what is my child doing in English? It's, I know my child was studying this this week and they didn't understand it. (Paul, leader)

So, whilst managing parents' involvement was identified as a key challenge for EC educators, engaging and incorporating them into the children's learning was key to successfully adapt teaching pedagogy to a distance learning model. Examples of the collaboration also included EC educators asking the parents to take photographs of the children's work and send them so that they could give feedback.

I mean, we asked the families to upload homework, let's say, like a picture of the child doing this, and we sent a feedback message. (Olivia, EC educator)

This information was also useful for EC educators in informing planning and whilst EC educators perceived parents to have a greater knowledge of their child's progress, this could be harnessed during parent-EC educator meetings which were more convenient and allowed for more of a focus on the next steps in the learning process rather than reporting what had been covered in the curriculum as pointed out by the leader, Paul.

I would say one of the smoother things was parent-EC educator meetings. They were a lot easier to organise and there was no, you know you, you couldn't hide anything in terms of you

know, the parents already knew what was happening. It was more of a kind of frank conversation. So right we know this. What are you going to do about it? (Paul, Leader)

The comment demonstrates that parent – EC educator meetings were now more meaningful interactions as the parents were already engaged and involved in their children's learning. This reflects the consequences of effective partnership and provides an example of how collaborative relationships between the school and home could be harnessed to support children's learning.

EC educators supporting each other

Collaboration between EC educators was also identified as being key in supporting EC educators in overcoming the challenges identified. This subtheme was developed to explore two areas: EC educators' emotional well-being and practical teaching strategies.

EC educators' emotional well-being

As highlighted previously in the literature review and from interviews with expert participants, EC educator well-being is thought to have suffered during the pandemic period across a variety of contexts (Quiñones-Laveriano et al., 2022; Jalongo, 2021; Rogers et al., 2023; Swigonski et al., 2021; Bigras et al., 2021; Hanno et al., 2022; Kwon et al., 2022). EC educators at Case Study 3: Urban Private Lima similarly spoke about feelings of fear and stress suggesting that their emotional wellbeing had been affected too. Additionally, when asked about the support they had received from the school they referenced opportunities to meet with their coworkers in both formal and informal online settings as illustrated through the following comments:

... [there was] training about emotional things so we could share things between each other and so we could get to know other people. Like, a lot of my friends are now EC educators at school. I met them online. Emilia, EC educator

One thing that that helped me a lot is that we were like a group of EC educators that worked together the previous year - in 2021, and we talked a lot, a lot. And that helped me. Elena, EC educator

Both these comments suggest that the EC educators felt as though they were supported by their colleagues and that this had been a helpful source of support for the emotional challenges that were encountered. This is a form of social capital that the educators at Case Study 1: Rural

Private Cusco also had access to through structured planned meetings and more informal opportunities.

Practical teaching strategies

Similarly, the EC educators at Case Study 3: Urban Private Lima commented that they valued opportunities to work together to find and share resources and strategies to adapt teaching and learning to an online model. It was this working together that was a feature of how they attempted to overcome the practical challenge of adapting their pedagogical approach as illustrated through Elena's comments:

I was planning the investigations [an enquiry section of the curriculum] and I had meetings with the EC educators of each class grade A, B, C and D. And we talked about the classes and then we started looking together for strategies to continue with the investigation. That's the way we helped each other. (Elena, EC educator)

But one thing that I love is that, for example, between EC educators, we start saying, uh, did you know this [resource/tool]? Have you heard about these [websites]? Yeah, I loved it [the collaboration]. (Elena, EC educator)

Both the opportunities for emotional support and sharing of practical strategies mirror the findings from previous case studies where EC educators also spoke favourably about how they valued the support of their colleagues from professional and personal perspectives. This reflects the social and cultural capital that the EC educators were able to draw on at this time both informally from friends but also through structures in place within the school. These structured opportunities were also present at Case Study 1: Rural Private Cusco but not at Case Study 2: Urban, Public Lima suggesting a possible difference between the level of available support for EC educators between private and public sector schools.

b) Parental involvement in curating real-world learning experiences

This overarching theme reveals how parents in Case Study 3: Urban Private Lima actively sought to get involved in their children's development during the pandemic. As previously explored some parents felt the online learning offered was not appropriate for their children, some were too involved in their online classes (as perceived by EC educators), and some were attempting to reduce the negative impact on the emotional well-being of their children by

spending more time with them. Regardless of the motives, parents went beyond ensuring their children connected to an online class or watched the Ministry of Education's daily television broadcast. Both Flavia and Sofia had the resources in various forms of capital to provide what they considered more personalised learning experiences for their children by withdrawing them from Case Study 3: Urban Private Lima in 2020 and hiring private tutors as illustrated through the following comments:

Isabel only did one year of online school because I pulled her out. And I got her in with two kids that she already knew, and she had classes at the park with these two other kids. (Sofia, Parent)

In 2021, he had an English class via zoom every week and later that year she came in person. He took a class once a week, and in person he took it twice a week. (Flavia, Parent)

As well as these outside providers, Sofia and Flavia, along with Tiago were able to provide opportunities throughout the day for their children to be learning and engaged. They had the combination of time, economic resources, knowledge, digital literacy and relationships within their social networks to enrich the home environment for their children and support their educational development. All three parents referenced how they played with their child, how they followed their child's interests and how they sought to extend their knowledge and understanding of the world as illustrated through the following comments:

My mum has dogs, so at least she was playing with the dog. She had the lady that works at my mum's house and she's wonderful with kids, so they played together and then we played, and my mum played, my mum read with Isabel too. My mum, she doesn't play that much but would read with her, they would make cookies, or they would do something, we painted, we washed the cars, we just tried to do, I mean we did everything we could. (Sofia, parent)

So, we travelled in 2020 [towards the end of the year], in fact we took a trip with him to the jungle because he told us that he would like to go to the jungle. We had air miles and everything and we went to a lodge in the jungle. It was very cool, the three of us went because with everything he had read in the books, he was interested about animals. So, during on our day trips we made in the jungle, he would see animals, he would say this is so-and-so, this is so-and-so, so he would talk a lot with the guide, and the guide would ask him, oh, how do you know this? (Flavia, parent)

He's a very curious kid and a good communicator, so we said, well, let's do projects. So, what do you want to know? How do people take care of themselves? OK, then we started to do it, we did a little survey, he did some drawings, it was his questionnaire, they were his drawings, and we sent photos of those drawings to friends by WhatsApp he recorded videos that we helped him with. It was like this 'hello, I'm Juan'[pseudonym], 'hello', he introduced himself; this is me; I am this many years old. Then another video, and in this one asking the question: 'How are you taking care of yourself during the pandemic?'. He made a questionnaire through videos. Because we have a lot of friends from all over the world. (Tiago, parent)

There were some good things. We connected a lot as a family by spending so much time [together]. His creativity exploded as well; his curiosity also exploded. All of a sudden, he started saying he wanted to be a YouTuber, for example, because of those videos. And now everyone has discovered that he has a hobby of recording videos and that's why we bought him a camera and he is always with his camera everywhere. I mean, let's say it opened up the opportunity for him to discover other things that he didn't know, and neither did we. (Tiago, parent)

Being able to spend time together as described by Sofia, take trips as outlined by Flavia, and connect with people from around the world as explained by Tiago, were not typical experiences for the majority of the population during the period of extended school closures, nor was the option to withdraw children from formal education as was the case for Sofia and Flavia, yet they did so. The parents had the resources to provide their children with experiences that they perceived could complement online classes or replace them entirely. Tiago's comments were particularly revealing as he describes how spending time with his son enabled him to see his development flourish in some unexpected ways.

Significantly in this case study there is less evidence of collaboration being a factor in the interviews from parents. They were far less reliant on formal schooling and the advice and guidance of EC educators in being able to access learning experiences, instead we see these parents taking on a much more active role in their children's education in other ways.

5.3.10 Other notable findings: work life balance for EC educators working online

Further analysis revealed that EC educators experienced positive changes during the pandemic period, this notable finding is significant as it contradicts previous comments with relation to perceived workload both in this case study and in previous cases. There was a consensus of

views where EC educators felt that they were faced with an increased workload from interactions with parents, to learning how to use technology and adapt it for teaching proposes. However, in Case Study 3: Urban Private Lima there were two EC educators, along with the leader, who described significant positive experiences for their work-life balance as a direct result of the shift to the distance learning. The positive changes encompassed eliminated commuting times, the ability to work from more convenient destinations and spend more time with family. These are illustrated through the following comments made by EC educators and leader:

Working remotely was on the one hand quite.... maybe advantageous. We're all at home. We finished at about the same time we had lunch together and it was actually quite nice. (Paul, Leader)

I mean, it was actually like a blessing because, I don't know, if I got out of school at 4:30 and my mum wanted to go with me to the mall at 5:00 PM I could do that. Like I could be available for whatever I wanted at 4:30. (Emilia, EC educator)

I miss sometimes teaching online because it was great because I could be literally wherever I want. Like one week I was in my house teaching. The next week I could go to a friend's house, and I can connect there and have my materials and teach. The next week. I remember I went... my best friend was living in Mancora [beach town in northern Peru] and I went to Mancora to visit her, and I had classes from Mancora with my laptop. (Emilia, EC educator)

Being at home, so that was what I also valued most, being at home, not having to go anywhere myself because here the transport is horrible, so I did not have to get on the bus, I did not have to do any of that, but I was quiet in my house, I did not have to wake up early, I woke up 15 minutes before [the online class], I had breakfast. (Olivia, EC educator)

These quotes reveal how EC educators who were working in a context where access to technology was not a challenge were able to enjoy some notable positive changes to their lives. This finding provides a contrast to the comments made by EC educators in previous case studies that they felt that overwhelmed by workload during the pandemic. These EC educators used their economic and cultural capital to adapt their home circumstances to provide opportunities for leisure activities.

Through this section I have presented Case Study 3: Urban Private Lima was set in an urban private school associated with a distinctive Reggio Emilia pedagogical approach to teaching and learning. I now go on to state the main findings and explore their theoretical implications.

5.3.11 Summary of findings from Case Study 3: Urban Private Lima

- Access to technology, strong digital literacy skills and wide social networks provided parents with options for how to best support their children's educational development.
- Some parents perceived the online distance learning programme from school was inappropriate for their children's educational development and well-being and created their own informal approach.
- EC educators were reliant on parent involvement but perceived that parents held power over them.
- EC educators supported each other emotionally and with practical teaching strategies.
- Online teaching provided some teachers with a better work-life balance.

Figure 19 is an adapted version of Bronfenbrenner and Ceci's Ecological Systems Model (1994) which provides a visual guide to highlight the variety of influences across the environment that impacted on the child's experiences during the period of school closures.

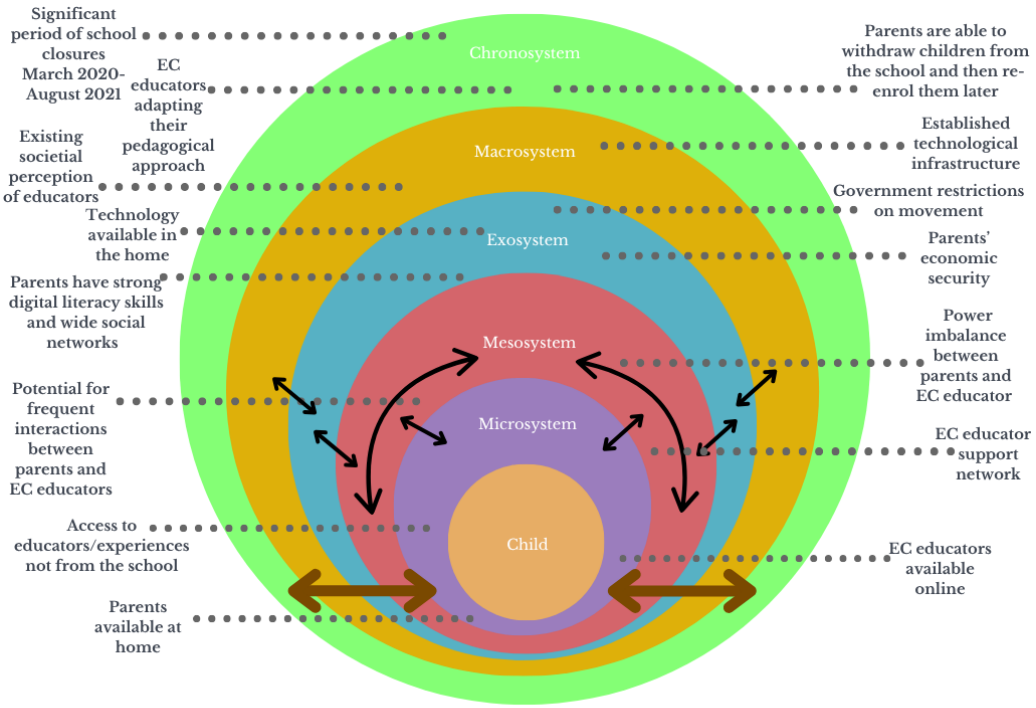


Figure 19. An adapted version of Bronfenbrenner and Ceci's Ecological Systems Model (1994) for Case Study 3: Urban Private Lima

A number of conditions in the exosystem of the model illustrated in figure 19 provided the parents with options as to how best to meet the educational developmental needs of their children. Firstly, economic stability allowed parents the capacity to access technology in the home and to be physically present with children. As in previous case studies the presence of parents at home was viewed as vital in supporting children not just in connecting with EC educators but helping to keep them engaged in online lessons. Secondly, parents had the digital literacy skills and social networks to create educational experiences for children. Underpinning these conditions was the access to capital in its various forms that parents were able to call on. When some parents perceived that the distance learning programme was not appropriate for their child's educational development and/or it was negatively impacting well-being, they utilised their capital to develop their own educational projects. The parents' assessment of the potential negative impact on their child was in itself as a result of the cultural capital they possessed having the knowledge and power to question the quality of experiences that were being offered by the school. They then further relied on their cultural and social capital to develop what they perceived to be more effective and personalised solutions. Therefore, the capital parents possessed at this case study provided them with choice of either engaging with the distance learning programme offered by the school or replacing/supplementing it with custom made experiences.

This finding has several implications as it highlights how parental engagement didn't only involve parents supporting children during online lessons but could also take place away from formal schooling. As highlighted previously many children both in Peru, but also globally, were withdrawn from ECE during the pandemic period, with many researchers implying that this would lead to negative outcomes for children and society as a whole with knock-on effects in terms of individual's lifetime earnings (Nugroho et al., 2021 and McCoy et al., 2021). Whilst this may be true in many circumstances the findings in this affluent urban context suggest that the situation is more nuanced as for some children, when conditions allow, opportunities for informal learning and development not only existed but were preferred

The capital possessed in its various forms by parents influenced their relationships with EC educators in the mesosystem by creating a power imbalance. The two groups of stakeholders were not mutually dependent on each other as had been the case in case study 2. Whilst EC educators relied on parents to support them in implementing the distance learning programme, parents could withdraw their children and choose an alternative approach that did not involve

EC educators. This dynamic resulted in EC educators perceiving that whilst necessary parent involvement was difficult to manage. Specific challenges for EC educators were that parents would contact them after working hours, that they were judging their teaching and that they were supporting children in what they perceived to be inappropriate ways during online lessons.

The school at Case Study 3 had a deeply embedded approach to teaching and learning based on the Reggio Emilia philosophy. EC educators themselves recognised how it took time to adapt this approach to a distance learning model highlighting how educators and schools didn't have plans for online learning in place but that they could be developed. Significantly, they also note how they were able to support each other emotionally and with practical teaching strategies. These strong relationships forged through both frequent planned and informal interactions between fellow EC educators within the mesosystem, were as a consequence of educators' own capital in the form of access to technology and pre-existing digital literacy. Furthermore, they could call on their cultural capital in knowing where and how to find new strategies online and then share these with colleagues. Once online routines were established some teachers noted a better work-life balance as they experienced the benefits of not having to commute to school and the ability to work from anywhere.

5.4 Case Study 4: Rural Public Huancayo

In the following section the context of Case Study 4: Rural Public Huancayo is described to enable greater understanding of the lived experiences of participants. The characteristics of the schools and local area are set out, followed by the response to the pandemic and then pertinent details of the participants are shared.

Case Study 4: Rural Public Huancayo: Rural Public is a cluster of four separate, but closely related state funded educational institutions situated in a district of the province of Huancayo, one of nine provinces that make up the department of Junín. Discretionary judgements are a key feature of case study research (Stake, 1995 and Yin, 2018) and as such the decision to group these four very small institutions together as one case study was made as they shared the same contextual, socioeconomic and geographical backgrounds. The schools were interconnected sharing resources as part of the same educational ecosystem. With each being so small, just one EC educator classrooms, grouping them allowed for greater triangulation of data, and for the quantity of data collected to be similar to that collected in previous case studies, thus enabling a more valid comparison across cases.

5.4.1 Characteristics of the schools and local area

Huancayo is a vast province forming part of central Peru which had a population of 545,615 in 2017 according to census data (INEI, 2018a). The majority of inhabitants of Huancayo reside in urban areas but there is also a considerable number in rural dwellings. It is within this rural environment that Case Study 4: Rural Public Huancayo is set. The four sites are located just several kilometres from each other but separated by rugged mountainous terrain. A nursery school serving families with children aged three-four years old and a primary school serving children from ages four to 11 are both located deep on one side of a valley just a few minutes' walk from each other. High in the mountains are another nursery and primary school, which again are near one another. Each of the institutions is a one-EC educator-one-class institution with eight to 16 students enrolled at each. The two primary schools included three and four children aged four to six and thus were receiving ECE within their setting.

The local district where all four institutions are located is not named to maintain anonymity but is characterised by being a vast rural area inhabited by farmers and those who work on the land providing for their families. One EC educator in a pre-interview explained how the majority of inhabitants in the local community didn't have access to fixed internet in the home and many

did not have mobile phones. National census data from 2017 shows that in the department of Junín there were 18.1% homes which had no form of technological communication (INEI, 2018a, p.409). The census also revealed that 25% of homes had refrigerators or freezers (INEI, 2018a, p. 384) and 66.2% had colour televisions (INEI, 2018a, p. 383).

The population of Junín had an average monthly income of (1135.7 soles/£240), a figure below the national average of (1376.8 soles/£297) and significantly lower than those in previous case studies in Lima (1921.1 soles/£405), but more than from Case Study 1: Rural Private Cusco in Cusco (1064.7 soles/£220) (INEI, 2018b, p.146).

Focusing more closely on Huancayo the data show that in 2017 an estimated 27.9 - 30.4% of inhabitants were considered to be living in monetary poverty (INEI, 2020). During pre-interviews all four EC educators noted that parents who send their children to the institutions that form Case Study 4: Rural Public Huancayo were from vulnerable socioeconomic groups.

Another important characteristic of the population in Junín is that in 2017 according to the national census data there were 58,802 people aged 15 years and over who declared not knowing how to read or write, that is, 6.6% of the population were illiterate (INEI, 2018, p.138). Significantly a greater number of women were illiterate (9.8%) compared to illiterate men (3.0%) (INEI, 2018, p.140).

5.4.2 Response to COVID-19

As with previous case studies, all four institutions were closed to in person learning in early March 2020 and reopened in March 2022 with a return to 100% in person classes. An ECE distance learning programme was developed by each of the schools which varied in form according to the circumstances of each family. At the two nurseries EC educators attempted to initiate a programme of parent accompaniment where they would send daily or weekly messages via WhatsApp or text message with ideas for activities and reminders to watch or listen to the 'I Learn at Home' programmes transmitted daily on the television and radio as part of the Ministry of Education's distance learning programme. At the two primary schools, where possible, EC educators attempted to connect via video call or phone call with one or two children at a time. The amount of direct communication with children fluctuated throughout the pandemic as parents returned to work at different points. According to the EC educators the communication with parents was sporadic and varied according to access to technology.

Parents reported asking for EC educators to come to the school to conduct in person lessons at the school prior to the end of school closures and that EC educators had complied.

5.4.3 Data Collection

In person, semi-structured interviews were conducted with each of the four EC educators at the four sites. Two group interviews with parents were also conducted, one including parents from a nursery and one with parents from a primary school. The option for parents to participate in group interviews was explored in the methodology chapter and was part of an ethical consideration as participants were considered vulnerable and less likely to participate in one-on-one interviews (Barbour, 2014 and Creswell, 2014).

All interviews and group interviews took place in person on November 18, 2022, and lasted between 22 minutes and 30 minutes each. The in-person nature and their briefer duration are worth noting as being different in comparison to the three previous case studies. All data collection from Case Study 4: Rural Public Huancayo were conducted in the participants' first language of Spanish. Quechua was also spoken by several of the participants, but all stated that their first and preferred language for interview was Spanish.

5.4.4 Leader participant characteristics

The nature of the one-EC educator-one-class institutions meant that there was no recognised leader at Case Study 4: Rural Public Huancayo.

5.4.5 EC educator participant characteristics

Melanie, Antonella, Illanie and Paloma were pseudonyms given to the four educators who participated in the interviews. They ranged in experience from five to 12 years as seen in table 13, all having studied at Peruvian universities and were living locally at the time of interviews in November 2022. Antonella and Illanie had joined their schools at the beginning of 2022 having previously been working in the main city of Huancayo at a private school and in at a public school in the Amazon. They offered insights into how they perceived the context at the Case Study and how parents and community members had spoken about the period of school closures. One of the EC educators who was present at the Case Study site throughout the period of school closures lived a few hours' drive away in the city of Huancayo and the other lived close to their school. There was no fixed internet connection at any of the four schools and one of the four EC educators had access to a laptop. The others relied on their personal mobile phone devices.

Table 14. Case Study 4: Rural Public Huancayo - EC educator participant characteristics

EC educator	Gender	Age range	Years of teaching experience/working in education	Type of School (Age of children)	Number of children enrolled at the school
Melanie	Female	25-34	4-6	Primary (5-11)	16
Paloma	Female	25-34	7-9	Nursery (3-4)	10
Antonella	Female	25-34	4-6	Nursery (3-6)	8
Illanie	Female	35-44	10-12	Primary (5-11)	11

5.4.6 Parent participant characteristics

Characteristics of the parent participants at Case Study 4 are outlined in Table 14. Group interview one (GI1) was conducted at the primary school in the valley with parents from both the primary school and the nearby nursery. There were four mothers in total: Charo, Caterina, Evelyn, and Janett (pseudonyms). Group interview two (GI2) was conducted with two parents, Fran and Domenica (pseudonyms), at the nursery at the top of the mountain. Parents across both group interviews were farmers. One of the six parents had no access to internet, one stated that they lived in a home with fixed internet access, whilst four stated that they owned a mobile phone with internet access.

Table 15. Case Study 4: Rural Public Huancayo - Parent participant characteristics.

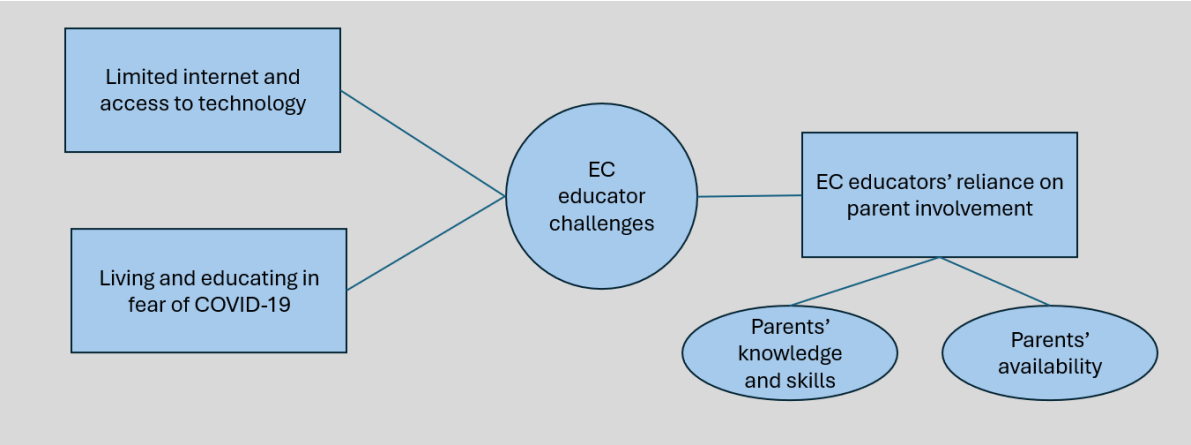
Parent (pseudonyms)	Group interview (GI)	Children aged 3-6	Dual Parent Home	Completed Education
Charo	1	2	Yes	Secondary
Caterina	1	1	No	Primary
Evelyn	1	1	Yes	Secondary
Janett	1	1	Yes	Secondary
Fran	2	1	Yes	Secondary
Domenica	2	1	Yes	Secondary

5.4.7 Challenges faced by EC educators

The following section explores the challenges that were specific to the EC educators from Case Study 4: Rural Public Huancayo and directly addresses research question one. These challenges are broken down and examined through three categories: a) limited internet and access to

technology, b) living and educating in fear of COVID-19, and c) EC educators' reliance on parent involvement as illustrated in figure 20 and explored below.

Figure 20. Challenges faced by EC educators at Case Study 4: Rural Public Huancayo



a) Limited internet and access to technology

Parker and Julia, expert participants and researchers, previously noted that limited infrastructure in rural areas was a barrier to accessing ECE both prior to and during the pandemic. This aligned with previous research which predicts that those from rural backgrounds are more likely to be left behind in terms of their educational development than children from urban environments (Alcázar et al., 2020 and Saavedra & Gutierrez, 2020). This limited infrastructure at Case Study 4: Rural Public Huancayo was highlighted by both Melanie and Paloma, two EC educators, as they noted:

Well, I know that in urban areas, I know they have internet lines or mobiles, laptops, I know that there are more facilities for them to do their classes, but here, in this town we don't have those things. (Melanie, primary school/EC educator)

I had to try to communicate with my children and with the parents too, I said that we are going to do virtual classes. We tried them through Zoom, but the reality here was different. Some mothers bought data with what they had, with their ten soles [£2], with their five soles [£1] so that they had enough for a day. But soon, they no longer had enough megabytes, they no longer had it. Out of ten children, only five children were entering the room and suddenly there were already less than three, two, one and so I communicated with parents to find out what happened. And they told me 'Well, now I don't have megabytes, I don't have it anymore, it doesn't allow me [to connect] anymore.' So, what am I going to do if the parents have their

economic situations, I can't force them, I can't force them to be buying more data. (Paloma, Nursery EC educator)

In this rural area virtual live classes were attempted but not practical due to the limitations of the pre-existing limited infrastructure. With no fixed internet in homes EC educators relied on the parents to invest in buying internet data to load on to mobile devices, and as outlined by Paloma this was not sustainable. Instead, Paloma went on to describe how she focused on ensuring that children had access to the government distance learning programme on television.

The Ministry of Education gave virtual classes on television [I Learn at Home]. So, I communicated here with the authorities to find out the details and made sure [children and parents] connected to the ECE lessons. And I told the parents the children must be attentive to the class from this time to this time. (Paloma, nursery EC educator)

I spoke with parents and children. I called the children [on the phone] to say did you watch today? What have you seen in the class? Some told me yes, some told me no, why? Because there was also the problem that here there is a single channel [to watch educational shows], only one channel and that the person in charge [at home] sometimes changed it to another channel and did not allow them to watch. So, I tried to communicate with the parents to say please it does harm the children, how will they learn if you are changing to another channel and so on. So that was my job, and I talked, and I let the parents know that from such an hour to such an hour the children should watch. (Paloma, nursery EC educator)

These efforts by Paloma illustrate the role she took on as an EC educator and how she used the available technology to communicate with both parents and children via voice calls. This also provides an example for how the 'I learn at Home' programme was advocated for and supplemented by public school EC educators such as Paloma when families did not have the resources to participate in virtual classes. Instead, she advocated for children to watch the television programme and when possible, used the content as something to focus discussions on with children. It is through both Paloma and, previously, Melanie's comments, that we see how the limited technology was a key factor in determining the type of ECE that EC educators could offer children. This reveals a striking difference to previous case studies particularly case studies one and three, both private schools, where all stakeholders had access to fixed internet and multiple devices in the home thus enabling access to daily online virtual classes and frequent communication between families and EC educators.

b) Living and educating in fear of COVID-19

As we have seen in previous case studies difficulties in the EC educators' personal circumstances represented a challenge for EC educators to some degree, however in Case Study 4: Rural Public Huancayo, all four EC educators commented that the COVID-19 virus had affected them personally. For example, they reported that their loved ones had been sick, that they themselves had been sick, or that they were living in a fearful state knowing that contracting the virus could have significant health implications. The following comments by Paloma, an EC educator who was present throughout the period of school closures and Illanie, who joined her school in March 2022 reveal how this environment was present over a prolonged period and remained as children returned to school in 2022.

Ah, well there was fear, of course. I could not travel. There was this fear because of the news, the news every time we saw it was well, you were shocked by the people who needed oxygen, that many people are already dying and all that came out meant we were very afraid. There was fear. (Paloma, nursery EC educator)

Sometimes there were many [COVID-19] cases here in the town. ... But when we knew that there was an illness, we knew we had to take these precautions as much as we had to. (Illanie, primary school/EC educator)

Illanie's comments demonstrate that COVID-19 was still present in the community in March 2022 as schools reopened highlighting the prolonged nature of the pandemic and the period when people were living in a fearful environment.

c) EC educators' Reliance on Parent Involvement

As in previous case studies EC educators perceived that parents played a crucial role in ECE during the period of school closures and this was a finding also found at Case Study 4: Rural Public Huancayo: as illustrated through Melanie's comment as she responded to the question: *How were parents involved in their children's education? Had their role changed?*

Well, sure, quite a lot. Parents played a very important role at this time. Well, in times of the pandemic not only that they have been their EC educators at home because they had to guide their children, support them since there was no way for the EC educators to be close to them, and it was they, the parents, who are often there in the home. (Melanie, Primary EC educator)

Through this comment, we see how Melanie relied on parents to guide and instruct children as in person teaching was prohibited. Similarly to other cases this reliance brought with it its own set of challenges for EC educators. These challenges at Case Study 4: Rural Public Huancayo have been further broken down and are now explored under the headings: parents' knowledge and skills and parents' availability.

Parents' knowledge and skills

Paloma and Melanie, commented that they perceived that some parents were unable to support their children's learning because of their own level of education as illustrated through the following quotes:

There were also parents who could not read. That happened to me in the middle of the pandemic. There was the case of a lady who was illiterate, she could not read what I would send her through WhatsApp. She would say 'you write the homework, I cannot read it, so I cannot help my child.' (Paloma, nursery EC educator)

Some parents have not had or let's say completed education, primary school, so many parents have had difficulties in being able to support their children. (Melanie, primary school/EC educator)

These reports of parents' levels of education being a barrier to children's learning reflect previous findings from studies in rural Peru which have found that generational illiteracy exists with children growing up in households with illiterate parents being more likely to be illiterate themselves (Cueto et al., 2011; Behrman et al., 2017). As previously stated, when describing the context of this Case Study there were a significant number of inhabitants in Huancayo who were illiterate.

Parents' Availability

Whilst EC educators stated that they needed parents to support children and praised their efforts, they also commented that a challenge was the availability of the parents as they had other responsibilities and priorities as outlined in the following comments by Paloma and Antonella.

*I had to call at nighttime because the parents were allowed to go out [during the day], but the young children were not. So, at that time when they were together is when I had to make the calls and then leave them a task. (*Paloma, Nursery EC educator)

Every day they had to send [photos of children completing activities], but some told me, Paloma, I don't have time, tomorrow I'm going to send them to you, but just because they told the EC educators that didn't mean it happened. We had to be tolerant, understand that it is their reality, it is not like that in Huancayo [the city]. (Paloma, nursery EC educator)

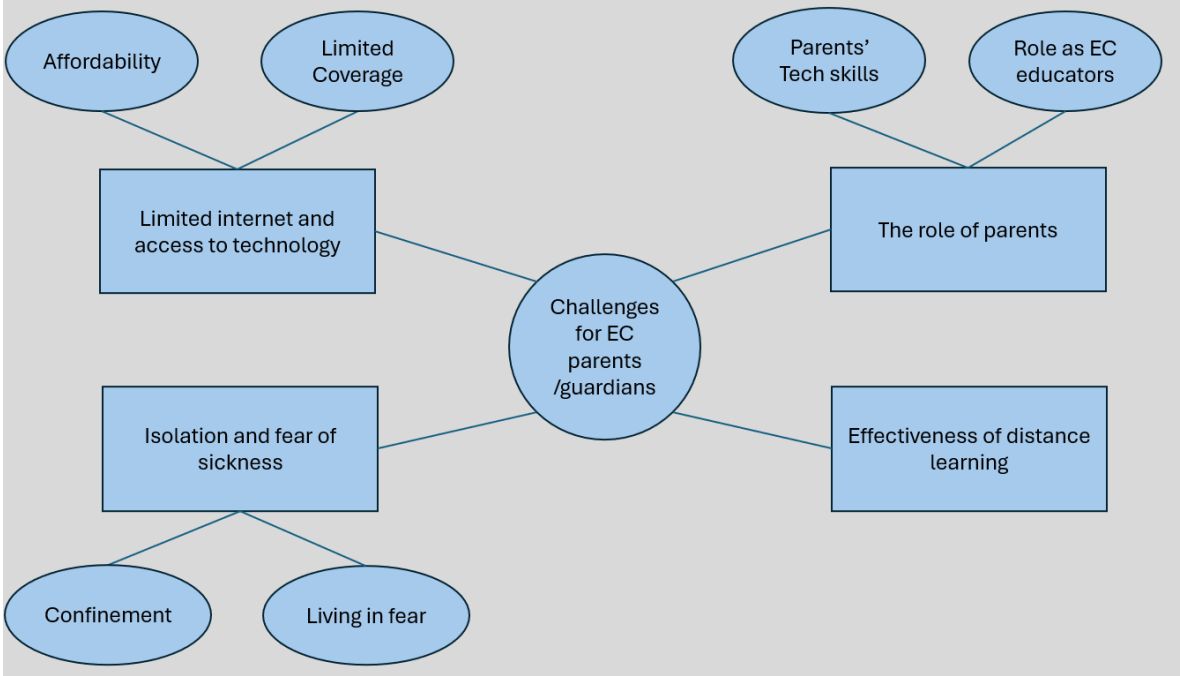
I feel that they have been involved but only because they had to. And it has not been an involvement because... I see that they work, they work in the fields, in their crop fields, with their animals and they leave the children in their houses, and so do the work with the children because they have to get it done. And they say, 'what do I have to do?' and then they do it, rather than the child doing it. (Antonella, nursery EC educator)

From Antonella's comment we can see that she perceived that some parents were eager for their children to access ECE, but their lack of time meant that they completed the tasks for them. The parents' availability is a particularly significant challenge for EC educators as it determined when EC educators were required to work. If the only time parents were at home with their children or were free to talk to the EC educator was at night that was the only possible time EC educators could communicate with them and/or their child. EC educators' personal lives were in effect determined by the work patterns and availability of parents; whilst this may have left them with fewer work commitments during the day it also meant that they had less control or established working hours. This uncertainty had the potential to negatively impact emotional well-being.

5.4.8 Challenges for parents

The following section explores the challenges that were specific to the parents from Case Study 4: Rural Public Huancayo and directly address research question two. These challenges are broken down and examined through four categories: a) limited internet and access to technology, b) the role of parents, c) isolation and fear of sickness, and d) effectiveness of distance learning as illustrated in figure 21 on the next page and then subsequently explored.

Figure 21. Challenges faced by parents/guardians at Case Study 4: Rural Public Huancayo



a) Limited Internet and access to technology

As reported previously by the EC educators in Case Study 4 access to technology that allowed communication between the child/parent and EC educator was a significant challenge, this too was identified by parents as they highlighted two main barriers to using technology: affordability and limited Internet/TV/Radio Coverage.

Affordability

Parents interviewed at Case Study 4 reported that they did not have the economic resources to make investments in devices for their children to use to access ECE such as laptops, televisions and tablets, and that many of them and their peers did not have mobile phones or access to televisions. Even parents who did have mobile phones and could connect to the internet found that they could not afford to sustain the level of investment required in internet data to maintain communication with EC educators.

Yes, of course, there were parents who could not afford a mobile phone, and the children are behind [developmentally]. I know it was terrible. What are you going to do? (Evelyn, parent. GI1)

Sometimes there was no TV, so I did not watch it [I Learn at Home]. (Fran, parent. GI2)

The cost of charging data for your mobile phone was five soles [£1], ten soles [£2] for five days or ten days, but soon it ran out, it was already over. And for the mothers there was no possibility that you could recharge your mobile phone. You had to buy data for your mobile phone, just like everyone else because it was needed. For those who didn't have it [data or mobile phone] they were left without their studies, without the EC educator's class. And, more than anything, this has been very difficult for us, and I think that virtual education is no longer feasible. (Domenica, parent. GI2)

These comments from parents in both group interviews emphasise how they did not have the financial resources to afford access to the technology necessary to maintain contact with EC educators. The parents, as previously outlined in the case study context were from lower socio-economic groups, and due to the restrictions on movement put in place we can infer that they were also experiencing negative impacts on their incomes as they were not able to go out to work. An additional expense at this time was too much and the words of Domenica and Evelyn emphasise how parents were aware that without access to EC educators, children were left with no ECE to the detriment of their educational development.

Limited Internet/TV/Radio Coverage

Very much linked to the previous challenge of affordability of technology was the quality and coverage of internet, radio, and television available for those families who did have the access to technological devices. In this rural area internet coverage was weak, and television and radio signal limited as we see from the following comments:

There are times when there is no [internet] signal, there are times it cuts out. What do you say to the children? There are already very few times when we can connect and then there is not much coverage which makes it very difficult. (Domenica, parent. GI2)

The following exchange during group interview 2 was in response to the question*: Were you able to access I Learn at Home? [The government distance learning programme available daily via television and radio]*

Fran: It is very blurred.

Domenica: There is not much [television] signal, the signal is not good, that's why it looks half blurred and half grainy.

Fran: It is worse if you turn it on when it rains, there is no signal or anything. You can't even see anything then.

Tom: How about with the radio?

Fran: Even worse, it's the worst, isn't it?

Domenica: The radio also had some shows.

Fran: But you have to be very high for the signal to reach the radio. In the deepest valleys you don't have any signal even with a long aerial.

Domenica: It transmitted well.

Fran: Well, I guess a little while, I held a wire up and if it catches, and you don't move it. And it takes a while.

Domenica: Sometimes the signal is turned off.

(Domenica and Fran, parents GI2)

This exchange reveals the limited access to ECE that the parents interviewed had during the pandemic. Even if they had access to devices, along with the awareness and motivation to connect to the available ECE opportunities the existing limited infrastructure was a significant barrier and challenge. As Fran described, she did attempt to overcome the challenge of the weak radio signal by altering the form and position of the aerial, but this was far from an ideal solution.

b) The role of parents

As previously reported limited technology prevented some parents from being able to access ECE, however, there were some parents who were able to access the available ECE opportunities such as trying to buy internet data if they could and adapting radio aerials to receive a better signal. The following paragraphs explore how those parents were then faced with another set of challenges as they attempted to support their children during the distance learning programme. These have been separated into two categories: parents' tech skills and parent awareness of child development.

Parents' tech skills

Four of the six parents who participated in the group interviews did have access to mobile devices and they all reported that they were not familiar with how to use them to support their children's learning. They described how using a mobile phone for more than making and receiving calls was new for them and that during the pandemic they were required to facilitate the communication between their child and EC educator as well as using their device to send and receive tasks. The following comments illustrate this challenge faced by these parents:

And the mothers of the little ones we do not know, what to do or how to use the phone to capture and send homework or help the children learn. They send the tasks via mobile phone, but I don't know anything, zero. This is my mobile phone; my mobile phone is just like that. [shows her mobile phone]. (Domenica, parent. GI2)

It was so difficult because we didn't know how to use mobile phones. (Evelyn, parent. GI1)

It's because they're little kids. They don't know how to use the mobile phone too, and we don't know how to use it either. The EC educator would say I will send you a WhatsApp, but the children are so small they needed their mother or father to help, to read what it said. And it affected the father, the mother too, because we are not used to using a mobile phone. Many did not have this possibility to buy a mobile phone. (Charo, parent GI1)

Knowledge of these tech skills were fundamental in providing parents and children with access to ECE and these comments demonstrate that even if parents had access to technology there were some who did not have the skills to harness it to support their children's learning.

Parent awareness of child educational development and their role as EC educators

Parents in both group interviews identified how taking on their new roles as EC educators in the home was a challenge, they reported that they felt they did not have the required skill set that trained EC educators possess and that this had an impact on their children's learning. This is evident through the following comments made by Domenica from group interview two and Evelyn from group interview one when responding to the question: *Were there any challenges with the distance learning programme available to you?*

[Some] Mothers do not know what to do with their children, sometimes they can confuse their children [not explaining well]. That is why the EC educator is … is a prepared person, who is dedicated to that preparation, to know how to reach [engage] the child. On the other hand, the

mother can help, sometimes we can. The children say, "not like this, my EC educator hasn't taught me like that, she says like that," so there are times we confuse the children too. (Domenica, parent GI2)

It's difficult because we had to be teaching our children, it was so difficult because we didn't know how to use mobile phones. No, we couldn't teach them either because we're not EC educators. It was too much. Until now we can't teach and then we were suddenly told you are the EC educator at home … you have to make time … they were believing that we could do it. Well for us, for my daughter, yes, sometimes we did it ourselves and we made it work but it was difficult. It's not fair. They [the children] are behind, way behind. It was not the same as having someone who knows how to teach and then us. We could not do it ourselves. (*Evelyn, parent GI1)*

From these two quotes we see how the two parents perceived that they did not have the required skills to teach their children and that at times their efforts may 'confuse' children as they gave contradictory instructions. Two parents in group interview one believed that teaching their children meant having them sitting and following adult-led instruction and when children did not comply, they were frustrated. This is illustrated through an exchange between Caterina and Evelyn.

Caterina: I have seen a lot of parents frustrated. So, kids start getting together and they just play, and they do not do what they need to do. They say they are doing it, but they are not.

Evelyn: They just play. You had to be sitting next to them otherwise they do not work.

(Evelyn and Caterina, parents GI1)

These comments also reveal the low value Caterina and Evelyn place on play, which is widely acknowledged as playing a crucial role in children's educational development.

c) Isolation and fear of sickness

As with the EC educators, parents too reported that living through the realities of the COVID-19 pandemic was a challenge. From the group interview discussions, these experiences could be broken down into two categories of challenges: confinement to the home and living with a fear of COVID-19.

Confinement to the home

All six parents who participated in group interviews relied on being able to leave the house to work in the fields to provide for their families. They reported that they found it challenging to remain at home due to the stress of being inside but also due to the feeling that they were neglecting their crops and animals as demonstrated through the following exchanges during group interview 1 when they were asked the initial question: *Can you tell me about a typical day during the pandemic?*

Evelyn: We were locked up every day, we got dressed, we didn't do anything... and we didn't go anywhere. You know, I started watching movies.

Tom: Aha yes, yes, me too.

Caterina: To help with stress.

Tom: Why did you feel that stress?

Evelyn: Because we are here, and we needed to go out and take care of the farm, of the fields, of the animals.

Caterina: Out of fear.

Evelyn: In the middle of the pandemic, it was not possible, we were not allowed to go out. We were locked in.

Caterina: There were soldiers [enforcing that the population adhered to the restrictions on movement].

Later during the same group interview Evelyn and Charo report the implications of this for their children.

Charo: The children didn't go to the farm or to dig the garden outside, we didn't even go out to the park.

Evelyn: Not even the park.

Charo: No, they wouldn't even know anything about the park.

(Evelyn, Caterina and Charo, parents GI1)

The effects of being confined at home were challenges that have been identified by parents across all case studies highlighting the extent of the restrictions implemented across Peru and reveals a shared lived experience for many in Peru.

Living with a fear of COVID

As with the EC educators who were present at Case Study 4 during the height of the pandemic in 2020 and 2021, parents too spoke about the precautions they took as a response to the fear of getting sick and the lived experiences of knowing people who passed away after contracting the virus. The following extracts from group interview 1 demonstrate the changes in parents' behaviour:

Charo: Each time she picked up a pen, she had to wash her hands. Each time she grabbed the mobile phone, it was the same, that is, we had all just washed ourselves, wash, wash, wash, wash every time.

Evelyn: Using disinfectant.

Charo: It was important to wash vegetables thoroughly before eating them. I try to avoid eating food that's been sitting out for a long time, especially if it's come from a crowded area or market.

Evelyn: Yes, I had vegetables and left them soaking in water for three days! [laughter].

Caterina: The disinfectant, everything was a very ugly experience and very scary. Thinking that at any moment it is going to be our turn. There was one person going out to work and every day I would say take care, take care, take care. And he has not been able to take care of himself. He has died. We told him to take care of yourself. You don't take care of yourself. People have left children, wives, mothers.

(Evelyn, Caterina and Charo, parents GI1)

This discussion highlights the changes in behaviour which link directly to the challenge of trying to keep safe and live within an environment where fear ruled many of the decisions people were making. These alterations in day-to-day life may have negatively affected emotional well-being and the home environment significant for child development and learning opportunities.

d) Effectiveness of distance learning

The perceived limited effectiveness of distance learning as opposed to in person learning was reported by parents across both group interviews. This was identified as a challenge for parents as it suggests that parents were concerned about the learning and educational development of their children. Fran and Domenica in group interview 2 were particularly dismissive of the use of technology and the way in which it was used in ECE as highlighted in the following comments:

It changes young students. For those who are already professionals, of course, yes mobile phones can be used by these young people, since they are already university students or are already leaving university and have their job then maybe they need [a phone] so that they can communicate for work or something, but for the children… for those children in early childhood education about to start school? At school? No. (*Domenica, Parent GI2)*

My little daughter got tired, she did not want to see [the television screen], she did not understand as they explained it all quickly, no, it was different [to being in a classroom]. (Fran, Parent GI2)

They perceived virtual classes and the national distance learning programme as being inappropriate for young children and later related the use of technology in education with society and young children becoming reliant on screens and not learning fundamental social skills. These negative perceptions were also reflected in the views of parents in group interview 1, with parents reporting that the tasks being sent were overwhelming children and not engaging their attention as seen through the following comments by Charo, a parent from group interview 1.

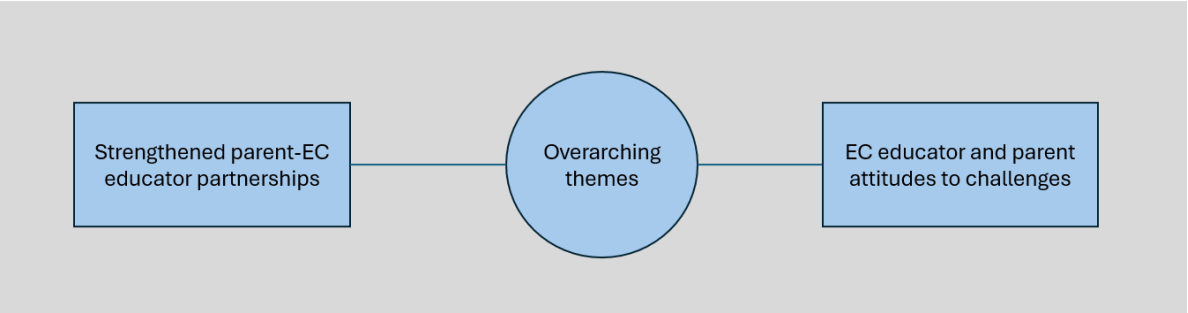
They [EC educators] send so much information it makes the children's heads hurt. [laughter from all]. My son is now in second grade, he is very little, and he is not used to being taught in that way and we cannot help him as we do not understand. Parents are desperate because they don't understand, they are traumatised [laughter]. (Charo, Parent GI1)

5.4.9 Overarching themes

The following two overarching themes: strengthened parent-EC educator partnerships and EC educator and parent attitudes to challenges, were developed across the interviews with parents

and EC educators from Case Study 4 as illustrated in figure 22 below and then subsequently explored.

Figure 22. Overarching themes at Case Study 4: Rural Public Huancayo



a) Strengthened parent-EC educator partnerships

This overarching theme was developed across EC educators' experiences alongside those shared by parents in group interviews and highlights the collaboration between the two groups as they looked to each other to help overcome the challenges that both faced in relation to the delivery of ECE during the pandemic.

Charo, Caterina and Janett, parents in group interview 2, described feelings of being overwhelmed and that led them to make requests to the EC educator to come to visit the school and teach in person. Whilst breaking the rules on restrictions of movement and possibly putting their own health and that of their children in jeopardy, the parents perceived it was necessary. This is illustrated through the discussion which ensued when responding to the question: *How did the school or EC educator support you and your child during the school closures?*

Charo: The EC educator came once a month because there were only five students, and they go one by one so that there is always a distance between them. That's how you're going to try to support the children. Once every two or three months for two afternoons and then she would go back. Because we are not prepared to teach them, she came to teach them everything [during the two afternoons]. So, the EC educator said I will come one day and because there were just a few of them it was one on each table.

Caterina: We as parents had to ask for it because we were going crazy.

Janett: We didn't know how to teach them, our heads hurt, that's why we asked the EC educators to come because we were going crazy. (Janett, Charo and Caterina, parents GI1)

The confidence to reach out to the EC educator and then for the EC educator to respond positively to the request suggests a willingness to work together demonstrating actions and attitudes associated with strong parent-EC educator partnerships. The value of this relationship was also highlighted by two of the four EC educators as they reported how they had grown closer to the parents as illustrated through the following comment by Antonella.

And I'm closer [emotionally] to the parents, if I want to ask them something, I go to their houses because they're close by to here, so I approach them, we talk, I request something, we talk. If I need this or we need that or we have our meeting like this or that, so the parents already have greater confidence and also when they need to come here, we're just super close. (Antonella, nursery EC educator)

Strengthening the parent-EC educator relationship may have been a natural consequence of EC educators and parents relying on one another to ensure that children were able to access ECE, but significantly at Case Study 4 this relationship required significant commitment and motivation to overcome the limited technological infrastructure.

b) Educator and parent attitudes to challenges

Despite the challenges identified by EC educators and parents there was evidence that both groups actively tried to stay positive in their outlooks and their interactions. This was demonstrated explicitly through their words but also more subtly in their actions. Two EC educators, Illanie and Antonella were very forthcoming in this respect as seen through the following comments:

Responding to the final question of the interviews: *Is there anything else that you would like to share about your experience?*

Well, Tom, I would like you to know that in our experience, as EC educators we have to be prepared for every field, for every place, you don't know the place where you are going to land. You don't know with what families, people you are going to meet along the way, so we try to always maintain an active attitude and more than anything to be friendly and affectionate with people, with the people that you meet on the way, right? And try to avoid the fights, the arguments, disharmony, to feel superior to others. On the contrary, you must feel part of the community because you have to show your positive side. To share with the people because those are the people who you are going to work with. And sure, they might show arrogance or be spoiled but you don't want to close the door to them. So well, for my part I have always tried

to be a warm person. I liked to share with the mothers, to always share with mums and try to keep us united in our work. (Illanie, primary school/EC educator)

Responding to the question: *What challenges did you face as an EC educator during the pandemic?*

Yes, look. For me, a challenge is something to advance through. When I take on a challenge or it is presented to me it is an opportunity for me, it is a strength. So, I assume it as something that is going to change my vision, something that is going to change and help me personally and also professionally, to grow, as a person, to grow as a woman, no? (Antonella, nursery EC educator)

Through these comments we see that both EC educators attempted to be positive in their approach to the challenges they faced and saw them as a way to develop positive relationships and grow. These were factors that were also evident in the attitudes of parents as they sought to find solutions to the problems they faced, from erecting aerials to try to pick up radio signal, trying to use the technology they did have access to and asking for more in person support from their EC educators as explained previously.

To conclude this section on case study 4, I will now highlight the main findings discussed in relation to Bronfenbrenner and Ceci's systems model (1994) and Bourdieu's Theory of Capital (Bourdieu, 1986).

5.4.10 Summary of findings from Case Study 4: Rural Public Huancayo

- Limited access to technology and unreliable internet, TV and radio signal led to limited access to ECE.
- Infrequent interactions were possible between the child, parents and EC educators.
- Parents perceived they did not have the knowledge to support their children's educational development.
- EC educators believed parent engagement was necessary, and parents valued EC educators' guidance.
- Negative impacts on well-being were self-reported by parents and EC educators.

Figure 23 on the following page is an adapted version of Bronfenbrenner and Ceci's Ecological Systems Model (1994) that highlights the influences across the environment that impacted on

the ECE stakeholders' and children's experiences at Case Study 4 during the period of school closures.

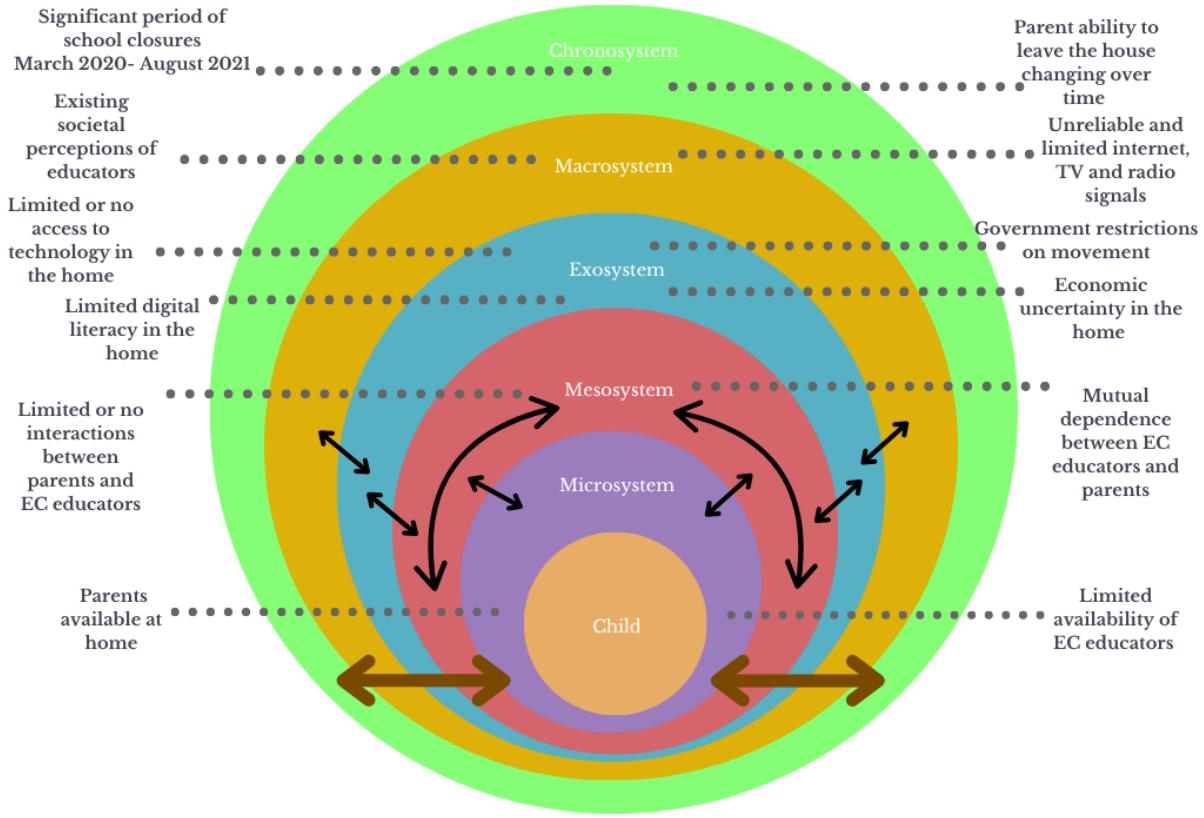


Figure 23. An adapted version of Bronfenbrenner and Ceci's Ecological Systems Model (1994) for Case Study 4: Rural Public Huancayo

The limited economic capital possessed by many parents due to their economic insecurity, highlighted within the exosystem, meant that access to laptops, mobile devices and affordable internet needed to communicate freely between stakeholders and deliver ECE was not always possible. Additionally, the pre-existing unreliable technological infrastructure within the macrosystem of model at this rural community ensured that even if families did have access to technology there were problems with internet connectivity and TV and radio signals which prevented interactions between ECE stakeholders. Furthermore, technology did not form part of the culture and day to day lives of families in Case Study 4 and so the parents' limited digital literacy, unfamiliarity with using it for educational purposes and perceptions of its usefulness again limited its use. These conditions resulted in infrequent interactions between children and EC educators in the microsystem.

Although interactions and communication were not as frequent or as fluid as in other case studies, parents and EC educators identified how much they relied on each other. EC educators explicitly stated that if parents were not involved in their children's education ECE could not function, whilst parents reported that they were in such need of an EC educator's input that they asked for her to break the restrictions of movement and come to the school to visit and teach their children in person. This mutual dependence between parents and EC educators in the mesosystem of the model of figure 23 shows how collaboration was magnified as the parents sought to maximise their cultural capital in the form of access to EC educators.

Furthermore this challenges the historically held societal view within the macrosystem that EC educators, particularly those in public schools, were of low value (Saavedra & Gutierrez, 2020). Within this context and during this period, parents perceived that they did not have the expertise necessary to educate their children and looked to the EC educators to guide their children's learning and development. This elevated the perceived status of EC educators as being the experts in the field of child development a position that may not have been clear to parents before the pandemic, therefore registering a change over time in the chronosystem.

In previous case studies, some parents reported that they were able to compensate for the limited access and/or perceived ineffectiveness of the distance learning programmes available by creating opportunities for informal ECE either through developing learning projects for children, spending time together or accessing private EC educators. Despite at least one parent often being at home with their children, the parents who participated in Case Study 4 did not report this. Instead, some parents stated that they did not have the skills or knowledge to support their children's learning. This highlights a key difference not only in access to more formal opportunities for ECE during the pandemic but also the informal opportunities and experiences that parents could provide

Parents discussed the changes to their day-to-day behaviours such as washing food, staying inside and not visiting parks which would have both directly and indirectly affected children. Whilst participants in other contexts also reported fear as a challenge, living in this context appears to have amplified the effects as families had less economic, social and cultural capital in order to find solutions. There were therefore fewer interactions in the mesosystem, and the rural setting by its very nature meant that societal structures with the exosystem such as medical attention and welfare support were less accessible compared to urban environments, leading to further isolation.

Chapter 6: Cross-Case Analysis, Findings and Discussion

6.1 Introduction to cross-case analysis, findings and discussion

In this chapter I report the main findings from a cross-case analysis which identified patterns, similarities and differences arising from the interviews across the four individual case studies. These findings are discussed and explored in relation to the existing research from the literature review in chapter 2 and the views expressed by expert participants in chapter 4. This cross-case analysis provides a broader understanding of the challenges faced by ECE stakeholders and increases the analytical depth of my study as I make comparisons across the four contexts. I followed Yin's (2018) recommendations to help guide my analysis by focussing on a 'case-based' rather than 'variable-based' approach:

> In a case-based approach, the goal is to retain the integrity of the entire case and then to compare or synthesize any within-case patterns across the cases. (Yin, 2018, p.246)

Considering this approach I analysed each of the four individual case studies in turn (as shown throughout chapter 5) and then looked to identify the within-case patterns evident across the cases. As in the individual case study analysis, Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Model (Bronfenbrenner and Ceci, 1994) was also used in the cross-case analysis to support and structure the analysis, examining the influence of each layer of the child's environment on the challenges faced by EC educators and parents. Similarly, Bourdieu's Social and Cultural Reproduction theoretical framework (Bourdieu, 1986) is also used here as a lens to explore the dynamics and structures that exist in society which impacted the resources available to parents/guardians of young children and EC educators. The visual representations based on Bronfenbrenner's model (figures 24, 25, 26 and 27) developed and previously presented in the summary sections of the four individual case studies are presented again for ease of comparison, highlighting the differences and similarities from each case study and providing a point of reference throughout the cross-case analysis. Within each model the black straight black arrows show the interactions occurring between neighbouring levels of the environment, the curved black arrows illustrate the interactions within the mesosystem, and the brown arrows show how the conditions within each layer of the model interacted and affected each other.

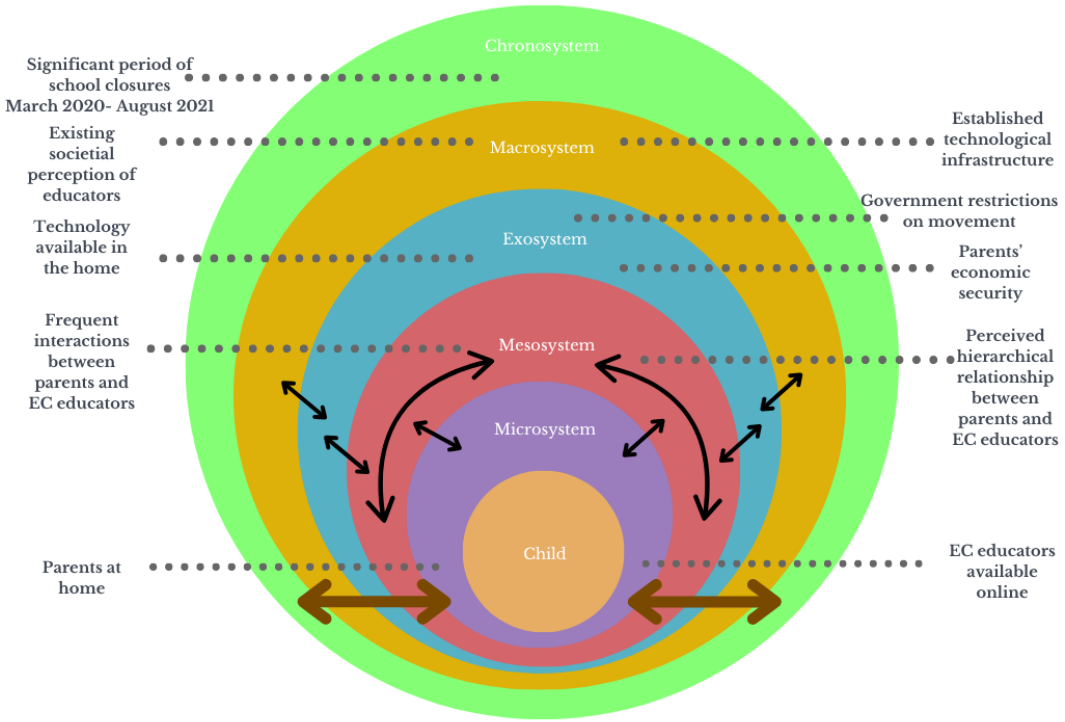


Figure 24. An adapted version of Bronfenbrenner and Ceci's Ecological Systems Model (1994) for Case Study 1: Rural Private Cusco

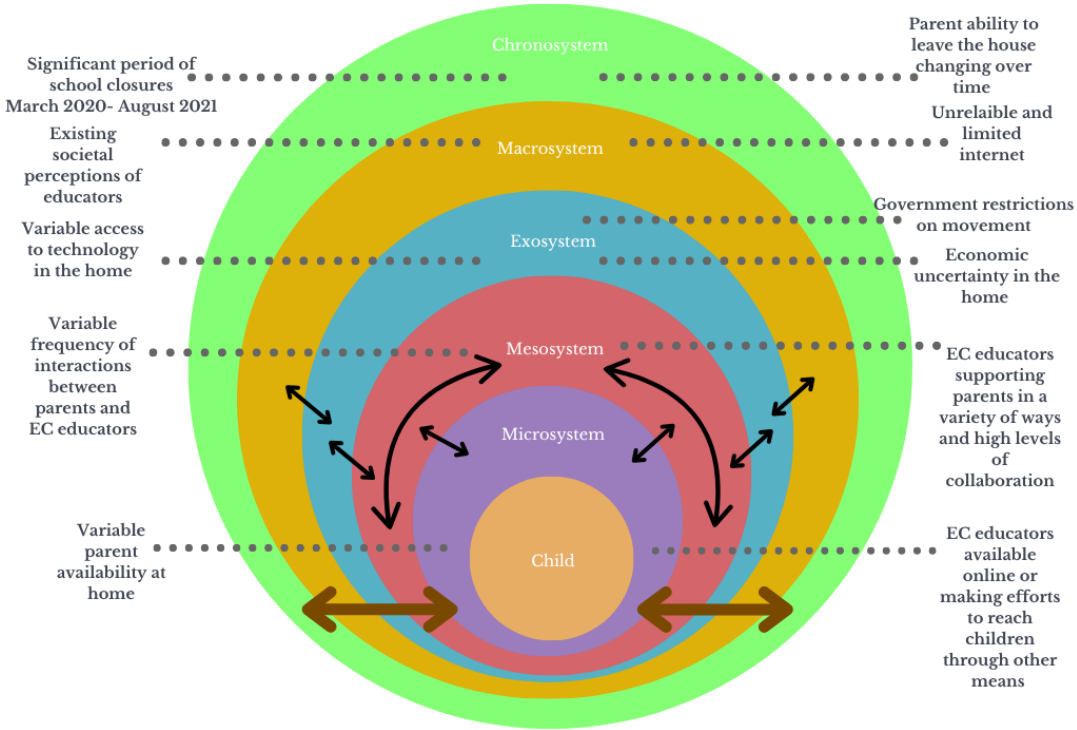


Figure 25. An adapted version of Bronfenbrenner and Ceci's Ecological Systems Model (1994) for Case Study 2: Urban Public Lima

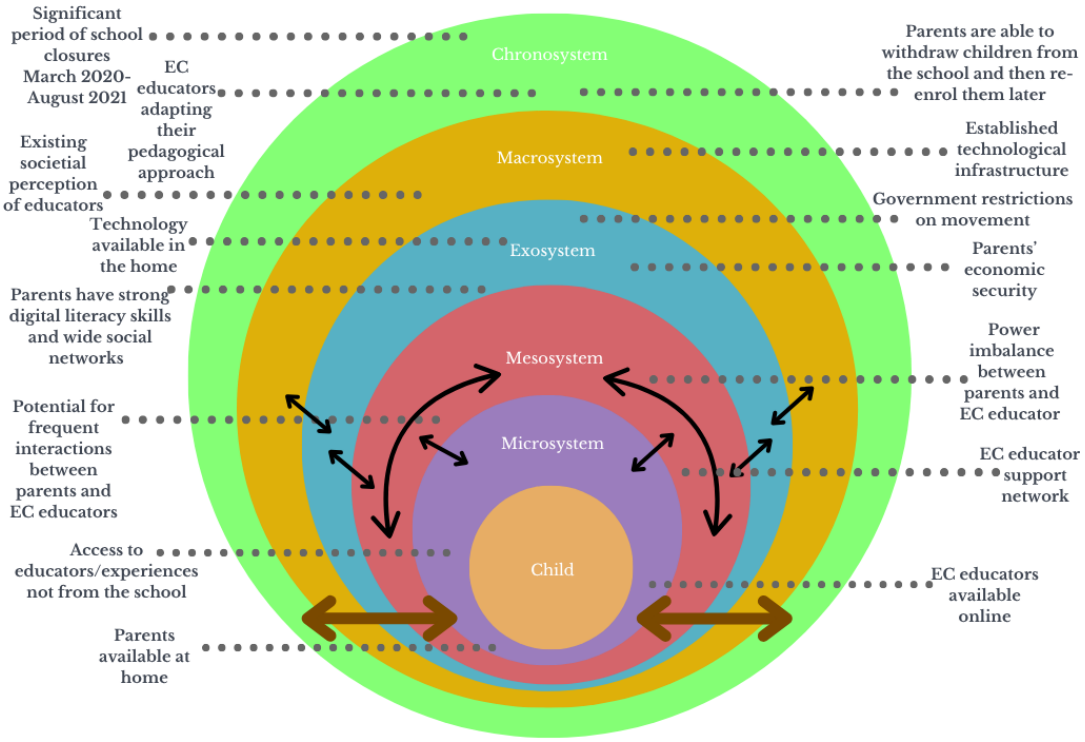


Figure 26. An adapted version of Bronfenbrenner and Ceci's Ecological Systems Model (1994) for Case Study 3: Urban Private Lima

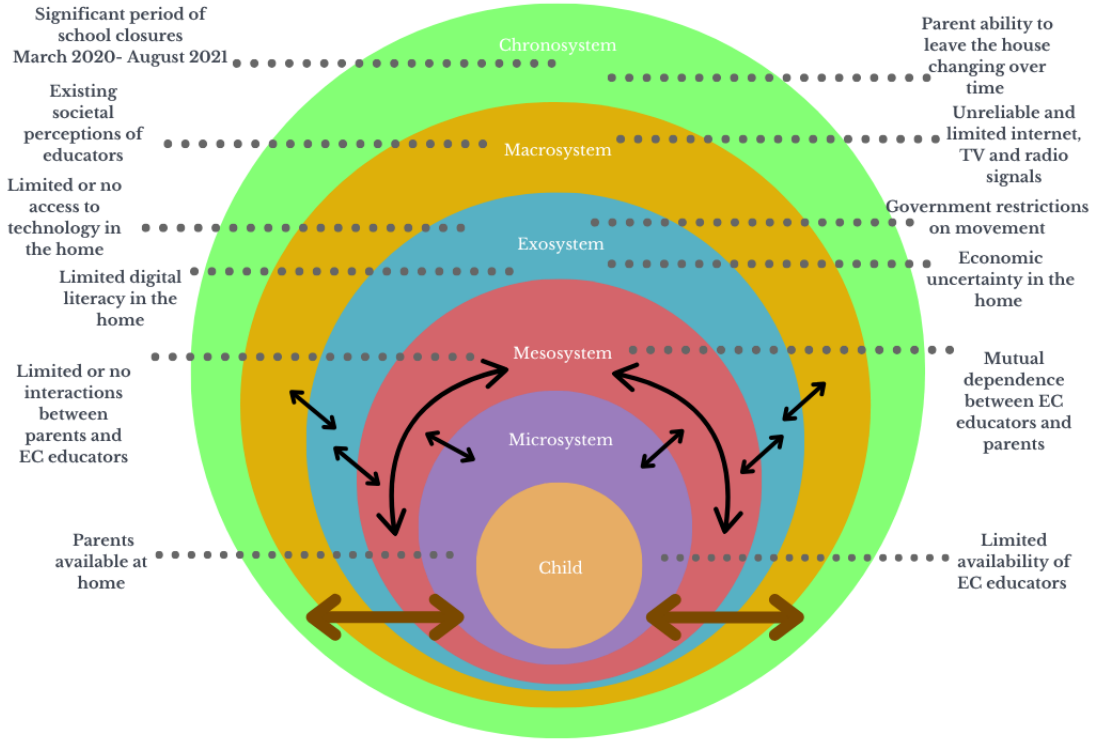


Figure 27. An adapted version of Bronfenbrenner and Ceci's Ecological Systems Model (1994) for Case Study 4: Rural Public Huancayo

Throughout the following section I explore and discuss each of the six main findings, taking care to maintain the integrity of each of the four case studies as they are discussed with relevant literature and theoretical frameworks. I conclude the chapter by synthesising the main findings to directly address the RQs.

6.2 Six key findings

Finding 1: Systemic inequality of access to technology shaped the nature of ECE stakeholder challenges

Due to the prolonged nature of school closures and the restrictions of movement put in place across the country, each of the institutions in this study implemented a long-term distance learning programme which to some degree relied on children having access to technology to function. Technology in the home was considered fundamental in providing children with ECE opportunities as it enabled frequent interactions between children/parents and EC educators. As established in the literature review interactions between EC educators and children are key indicators of process quality of ECE (Araujo et al., 2018) and were therefore perceived to be important. This finding unpacks the underlying causes of the unequal access to technology which determined the types of challenges faced by parents and EC educators across contexts. The data highlighted three aspects considered important in determining the degree to which children could access technology, these are explored under the following sub-headings: a) affordability of technological resources, b) digital infrastructure, and c) digital literacy.

a) Affordability of technological resources

EC educator and parent participants at the two private schools (Case Study 1 and 3) had capital in its various forms to ensure children accessed online daily virtual classes. Whilst there were some reports of limited internet coverage, the availability of devices and internet was not reported as a significant challenge. Despite the short-term economic situation being uncertain for many parents and EC educators during this time, all individuals at case study 1 and 3 had ´objectified cultural capital' (Bourdieu, 1986, p.243) in the form of multiple devices (or the capacity to make purchases) and fixed home internet. This is illustrated in the child's immediate environment (microsystem) in figures 24 and 26 as children were able to have direct daily interactions with EC educators.

In contrast the conditions within the microsystem for EC educators and parents at the two public school settings at case study 2 and 4 varied from those in the private schools. At Case

Study 4: Rural Public Huancayo, access to technology was limited with just one of the six parent participants having fixed home internet and one of the four EC educators owning a laptop. Parents reported that buying internet data to allow children to interact with their EC educators was unaffordable and unsustainable, emphasised by one parent, Domenica, who stated that the cost was not 'feasible'. Using Bourdieu's work as lens through which to view these experiences the limited objectified cultural capital in this context inhibited opportunities for children and parents to access input from EC educators via technology. Similarly, but not as extreme were the parent participants at Case Study 2: Urban Public Lima, where some parents reported having access to shared devices in the home and EC educators reported that they struggled to reach some parents in their communities due to the parents' limited access to technology.

Parent participants in affluent communities were more likely to have objectified cultural capital and access to technology in the home compared to those living in less affluent communities. They were therefore capable of providing opportunities for children to interact with EC educators more frequently. The pandemic caused an already high percentage of the Peruvian population living in poverty and extreme poverty to grow from 20.2% in 2019 to 30.1% in 2020 (World Bank, 2023, p18). With this as the national context we may expect a significant proportion of the population shared the economic and digital poverty (Ruiu & Ragnedda, 2024) characteristics found in Case Study 2: Urban Public Lima and Case Study 4: Rural Public Huanacyo, with many parents unable to afford access to technology and therefore provide children the opportunity to interact with EC educators during the pandemic.

b) Digital infrastructure

Within the macrosystem of the adapted Bronfenbrenner models in figures 24, 25, 26 and 27 we see how existing digital infrastructure varied across contexts. Indeed, parent and EC educator participants in the rural community at Case Study 4: Rural Public Huancayo did not all have access to fixed internet in the home, and parent and EC educator participants in Case Study 2: Urban Public Lima reported unreliable internet connections in their urban context. The socioeconomic groups that made up the communities at both of these case studies suggest that it was the poorest who were most affected by limited internet coverage. The expert participants interviewed provided further evidence of this finding by highlighting how preexisting limited infrastructure in poorer rural regions exacerbated the unequal access to ECE.

Kids don't have access to radio, like I was shocked because I thought like radio was kind of everywhere, but I was so wrong. I was so wrong. (Brisa, ECE Expert – Consultant)

I think also in terms of digital infrastructure, so actually 80% of the mums in our study area have cell phones. And I think smartphones more specifically. So, we know that there's access to that. However, a lot of places don't have signal, or the internet goes in and out, so it's spotty. (Julia, ECE Expert – Researcher)

These comments reflected the reality for Fran and Domenica, parents from Case Study 4: Rural Public Huancayo as they described the difficulty in attempting to pick up a radio and television signal in order for their children to access the government's distance learning programme 'I Learn at Home', as previously outlined in the analysis from case study 4.

The triangulation from multiple participants of this finding highlights the significance of the macrosystem of Bronfenbrenner's model where we see how limited infrastructure in regions where there were already vulnerable communities indirectly impacted on the parents' and EC educators' ability to provide opportunities for children to access ECE. This finding supports previous research highlighting the limited infrastructure and the lack of government investment in the Peruvian public school system particularly in rural regions (Guerrero et al. 2012; Castro & Rolleston, 2015). Furthermore, this suggests that the limited digital infrastructure is likely to have exacerbated the unequal access to education during the pandemic.

c) Digital literacy

Alongside the affordability of technology and limitations of preexisting infrastructure was the capacity for parents and EC educators to utilise the digital resources available to them to best support access to ECE and their children's educational learning and development. Again, we see stark differences across case studies with two parents in Case Study 4: Rural Public Huanacyo, stating that they did not know how to use a mobile device for anything other than making calls compared to three parents at Case Study 3: Urban Private Lima, who devised individualised online projects for their children to work on.

Using Bourdieu's framework as an analytical lens, parent participants at Case Study 3: Urban Private Lima had 'embodied cultural capital' (Pierre Bourdieu, 1986, p.247) in the form of prior technological experiences and digital literacy, as well as the social capital to communicate via technology with a wide network of friends, family or colleagues which allowed them to support their children. Similarly, negative attitudes towards the use of technology in ECE from

three parents at Case Study 4: Rural Public Huancayo can be attributed to their unfamiliarity in using it, suggesting they had limited embodied cultural capital as they did not have the experience to see the benefits technology could bring or use their prior knowledge and digital literacy to navigate the, albeit limited, technology that was available.

Finding 2: Parent engagement was critical for children's educational development

Research suggests that parental engagement and involvement is a pivotal factor in quality ECE programmes across the world (OECD, 2020f) providing children with a plethora of positive effects on educational and developmental outcomes as well as benefitting their social and emotional well-being. The importance of parent engagement in ECE during the pandemic was amplified as children were spending more time at home in the company of their parents. Dereli and Türk Kurtça (2020), Murray (2021) and Willinski et al. (2023) all highlight that parent involvement during the period of school closures was crucial. Parent involvement across all four case studies in my research was also identified as a key determinant in how children experienced ECE during the period of school closures. Both within and between cases the form of involvement differed but all four participant groups (experts, EC educators, leaders and parents) consistently stated that for any form of distance learning programme to be possible parents were required to engage and support their children. This is implicit in many of the comments made by the participants and also explicitly stated.

Despite being crucial to ECE during the period of school closures, parent engagement led to significant challenges for both EC educators and parents. These challenges are explored through the following sub-headings: a) parents being physically present in the home, b) parents' knowledge of child development, c) parents' level of education, d) parents' attitudes towards ECE and the value placed on education

a) Parents being physically present in the home

EC educators at case study one and three reported that parents being available at home, sitting beside the child as they connected to live online lessons was a key factor in determining firstly if children were able to connect to classes but also the quality of the learning experiences. According to the EC educator participants the online classes required parent input and engagement to ensure that children were listening and focussed. Parents at these two case studies had access to the economic resources within the exosystem which enabled them to be

present with their children. The child's immediate environment therefore allowed them to interact with EC educators and parents, a crucial advantage for their educational development.

In contrast EC educators at Case Study 2: Urban Public Lima, reported that there were some children in their classes who were not able to connect to classes or engage with them as parents were not at home. These parents did not have the capital required to be present in the home with their children as they were required to leave the house to work (when restrictions allowed). This fundamentally affected some of the challenges faced by the two EC educators at Case Study 2: Urban Public Lima, who both described how they had to search out children who they were not able to frequently interact with as they were being taken to the market where their parents were working. As shown in figure 27, at least one parent in each family at case study 4 was present in the home, however, as previously stated in finding 1 they did not have the required access to technology to provide interactions with EC educators. This finding further highlights the importance of interactions possible in the microsystem and that quality ECE experiences relied on two key factors: access to technology in the home and parents being physically present. If either of these two were not in place interactions between ECE stakeholders were weakened and quality was adversely affected.

Within the exosystem of each of the adapted Bronfenbrenner models the government-issued nationwide school closures and restrictions on movement imposed to slow the spread of COVID-19 indirectly impacted the ability of parents to be at home. This also had an indirect on children's learning as working parents, particularly those that form part of Peru's large informal economy, found that they were perhaps unable to stay at home to take care of their children as they needed to leave the house to work. Looking at the contexts at each of the case studies it appears that those families who were more financially secure (case study one and three) were able to ensure that there was at least one parent who could remain at home and support children in accessing ECE and help them engage with the teaching input. Using Bourdieu's framework, it is the economic and cultural capital that allowed these parents to work from home or have multiple devices that children could use if a parent had to leave the house to work which provided children with these opportunities. Some families which had limited economic capital were unable to be present at home to the same extent suggesting that those children from low-income families were disproportionately affected in their access to ECE.

b) Parents' level of education

Parents' education has long been associated with their child's development and future life outcomes both in international contexts (Grantham-McGregor et al, 2007; Agupusi, 2019) as well as specifically in Peru (Behrman et al. 2017). Intergenerational poverty particularly in minority groups existed in Peru before the pandemic (Arteaga and Glewwe, 2014) and findings from this research suggest that this has continued during the period of school closures.

Parent participants from case studies one and three (private schools) all attended university and were able to ensure that their children accessed ECE during the pandemic. This either took the form of daily online lessons from qualified EC educators or informally through online projects and private EC educators. This is in comparison to parent participants from Case Study 4: Rural Public Huancayo, for whom the highest level of education was the completion of secondary school, who reported that their children had occasional meetings with EC educators. Parent participants at Case Study 2: Urban Public Lima, were somewhere in between these two extremes as two had university degrees and one had completed secondary school, with all reporting that their children interacted regularly with their EC educator. Whilst this study contains a small sample size it highlights how children's opportunities for accessing education were related to their parents' level of education. It is a factor, along with socioeconomic status which is a cause of intergenerational poverty, whereby qualifications and education lead to better paid jobs which in turn results in increased wealth and cultural capital. This finding adds to the growing evidence that parents with greater cultural capital were able to better adapt and provide ECE opportunities for their children, whereas those parents in vulnerable communities who had shorter experiences of formal education were less able to support their children's learning or provide access to ECE. This suggests that existing inequalities are likely to have been further entrenched.

c) Parents' attitudes towards ECE and the value placed on education

Further analysis highlighted that the situation is more nuanced than simply stating those parents who had economic, social and cultural capital were able to access ECE and those who found they had limited capital could not. Parent attitudes and the value they place on accessing ECE were also significant factors as patterns can be seen within the data which suggest that parents from low-income families in case study two and four made significant efforts to ensure their children were able to access ECE and were ready to engage with EC educators and take advantage of formal ECE opportunities, suggesting they valued it highly. For example, the

following comments by Monica, a parent from Case Study 2: Urban Public Lima, describe how both a neighbour and cousin influenced her parenting behaviours specifically in terms of establishing routines to ensure children were ready for online interactions with their EC educators and to participate in learning opportunities in the home during the period of confinement.

We have an older neighbour who is 59 years old, or 57 years old and she was like, we're going to do such, and such a thing, and you have to make a schedule [for your children]. And also, I have a cousin who is very disciplined with her twins, she is also older, and she asked me a question:

'Tell me what you want for your children? That they are a successes as human beings? or failures? That they find it difficult to go to work in the future when they have to follow a schedule, or that they are lazy that they can't follow a schedule?'

So, I said 'I will do it today, not tomorrow'.

So, that's when I realised that I was wrong. I started straight away. I acted, and in 24 hours we changed this [not having a routine and having them ready for their class], and I said I am going to put that discipline into practice and my children followed in a disciplined way, we aren't perfect, but we have set limits, yes. (Monica, Parent, Case Study 2: Urban Public Lima).

This is an example which demonstrates that the initial period of confinement led to a relaxation of limits and routines. There was later a realisation from Monica that she needed to take control and ensure that her children were ready for their learning. She established routines, as advised by the neighbour and later described how her family completed projects together (gardening and painting). This highlights the importance of social capital in providing families with the capacity to have strong and varied social networks who can give parents advice and guidance. The phenomenon of parent attitudes was also commented on by Parker, a researcher and expert participant in this research:

The family background, going beyond the socioeconomic status, because there are lots of families that can probably have a high income, but they just don't value education as much as others, and you can also have families with a low socioeconomic status that know and believe that education is the [vehicle for] social mobility and that's everything they have to focus on. So, I do think it's a bit of... yeah, this like cultural knowledge about education and how much they prioritise it. So, I heard from a lot of these EC educators that were working in some

challenging environments that parents would do everything they could to support their children. Like they used all their savings to buy a cell phone so that the student could have access to WhatsApp and speak with the EC educator every day and they were monitoring the assignments, and at the same time there were some parents that could probably afford having someone to support their kids so they would hire someone that comes every day in the afternoon to just work with the students, but they wouldn't allocate any time for that because they were....¨ [not interested in supporting personally]. So yeah, I think for sure yes, the socioeconomic status was an important factor, but the parental education and the value they placed on education was actually more important than that. (Parker, expert participant - researcher)

Here we can see how Parker, a researcher and expert participant, suggests that more significant than socioeconomic status is how parents value education, particularly as a vehicle for social mobility. Highlighting this point is not to say that parent participants in Case Study 1: Rural Private Cusco and Case Study 3: Urban Private Lima did not value ECE, on the contrary we see that they had strong opinions about the appropriateness of online learning and the impact both positive and negative that this could have on children. They were involved in their children's development and learning and valued ECE so much that they were willing to participate in this research study. Rather this finding simply highlights that although significant and underpinning many of the conditions in the microsystem, socioeconomic status and economic capital were not the only factors which should be considered.

d) Parents' knowledge of children's educational development

Whilst some parent participants spoke positively about the experience of supporting their children's learning to a greater extent during the period of school closures, there were also those who self-reported limited knowledge of educational development and ECE curriculum. In particular parents at Case Study 4: Rural Public Huancayo perceived that they were not EC educators and did not have the required skill set. EC educator participants from case studies one, two and three stated that whilst parent involvement was necessary, they also perceived some of the support parents provided was inappropriate. This highlights what EC educators perceived to be the parents' limited understanding of children's educational development. Evidence of this across the differing geographical locations and socio-economic statuses of communities suggests that this was a significant challenge for ECE stakeholders and that with parents spending more time with their children during this period there was the potential for negative impacts on children's educational development.

There were, however, two parents in Case Study 3: Urban Private Lima, Sofia and Flavia, who withdrew their children from school during the first year of school closures as they perceived that they were able to provide a more individualised learning experience for their children. This contrary finding is significant as it suggests that there were parents who perceived that they had the skills and knowledge to support their children's educational development. The actions and motives of these parents are explored in greater detail in finding 5.

Finding 3: ECE stakeholder well-being was negatively impacted during the period of school closures across contexts.

Parent and educator well-being have been shown to influence children's learning and development (Penttinen et al., 2020; Egan et al., 2021). Across all four contexts ECE stakeholder well-being was reported, both directly and indirectly, to have been negatively affected during the COVID-19 pandemic. The most significant concerns which affected well-being are now explored under the following headings: a) work-life balance, b) fear, and c) uncertainty.

a) Work-life balance

Some EC educators in each of settings reported that they were being asked to work very long hours, both at the onset of the pandemic, when they were required to adapt and develop a distance learning programme, but also later, during the period of school closures when they were being contacted by parents after normal working hours. For some parents these were the only times that they were available, and some EC educators reported that they had shared their phone number in order to support families; in doing so they allowed parents to contact them out of hours. Case Study 3: Urban Private Lima had a no WhatsApp policy in place before the pandemic, and this was largely adhered to during the period of school closures.

However, the reports of increased working hours were not universal, indeed, three EC educators in total, all from private schools, reported that at distinct points across the pandemic period they had actually experienced the opposite of this intrusion into their private lives. These EC educators reported that being able to work online had allowed them to work remotely whilst travelling, to go out shopping as soon the school day was over, and to get up later as they no longer needed to commute to work. There were mixed reports from parents too with regards to the demands placed on their time during the period of school closures. For example, as previously explored in Case Study 1: Rural Private Cusco, Alba a parent participant reported

how the negative effects of taking on more roles in the home with her partner (such as household chores, accompanying their children in learning experiences, supervising the children throughout the day and completing their own paid work online) negatively impacted their relationship.

Conversely some parents found that these new roles provided opportunities rather than being perceived as challenges that caused stress as seen in the parent comment below:

I got involved, in fact, much more with him [Juan her son], because I used to go to the restaurant to work more often and the lady who worked with me, who helped me with Juan, his nanny was here, she was the one who spent quite a few hours with him. But actually, now I have begun to spend much more time with Juan. Until now I have been doing it [spending more time with him], that has changed in my life because I was dedicated to work before. I spent a lot more time at my business and I tried to be there whatever, but the pandemic changed this, because I started being in the house. I started to spend much more of the day, playing more with him, interacting, doing things together and with my husband too and that has been maintained so far, right? (Luna, Parent, Case Study 1: Rural Private Cusco)

These contrasting parent perspectives and experiences within Case Study 1: Rural Private Cusco were replicated in other case studies where similar patterns were found in each case with some parent participants finding it stressful to take on the new roles whereas others reported that they enjoyed them and actively sought to maintain them. This demonstrates the nuanced family dynamics in each home.

b) Fear

The concept of fear was reported directly by EC educator and parent participants across the four case studies. They spoke about the reality of seeing friends and family, along with the wider community through media, getting sick and in some cases passing away. The consistent reporting across cases suggests a significant shared environment in the microsystem (personal experiences of sickness) but also in the exosystem (through the media and government restrictions) across rural/urban and socioeconomic contexts. Having this fear so present in participants' day to day lives not only had an impact on their behaviours such as staying at home, disinfecting and mask wearing but also emotionally as an impact on well-being. Links were made by participants between these behaviours and their well-being emphasising the impact of this shared experience.

As previously explored in the literature review, EC educator and caregiver well-being has been shown to influence child-EC educator and child-parent relationships, indirectly impacting on child well-being and development (Jeon et al., 2014; Sandilos et al., 2015; Morelli et al., 2020; Eadie et al., 2021). This finding suggests that regardless of cultural capital, children in Peru were inherently vulnerable to the effects of their caregivers and EC educators' well-being being negatively affected by the shared environmental conditions in relation to fear of COVID-19 during the pandemic period.

c) Uncertainty

The nature of the pandemic meant that an abrupt disruption was caused at the outset of the pandemic and the necessity to shift to a distance learning model brought with it feelings of uncertainty. This was reported across contexts by both EC educators and parents suggesting again the shared circumstances in Peru particularly in the exosystem through the implementation of government restrictions had a significant impact on society regardless of their socioeconomic status or geographical location. The uncertainty manifested itself in several ways, for example, EC educators were met with the challenge of not knowing the best approach to take in adapting teaching and learning to meet the needs of children in general as illustrated below.

I did not know how to react in this situation. I did not have the tools; I did not feel like I knew what had happened? How do we fill this vacuum? I felt something that I didn't expect. I don't think many EC educators were ready, and I think a lot of people didn't expect all this. So, I kind of feel, I don't know… without hands, without mouth, without eyes. I felt the drift, I couldn't focus on the situation, I had to see how I could reach my students, how could I reach them. How could I generate learning for them. (Catalina, EC educator. Case Study 2: Urban Public Lima)

Similar reports by EC educators across contexts emphasise Catalina's reports of the unknown and the lack of a recognised emergency plan. Parents reported feelings of uncertainty too, although their reports focussed on the length of time the government restrictions and school closures would go on for. Not having a clear understanding of when this period would end appears to have been particularly concerning for parents. The impact of this shared sense of uncertainty across contexts, by both parent and EC educator participants highlights the lack of control that was experienced due to influences within the exosystem.

Finding 4: Adapting pedagogical approaches and making emotional connections with children were significant challenges for EC educators.

The shift to distance learning was a shock for ECE stakeholders in Peru with leaders, EC educators and parents across case studies stating that they were not ready and had no preexisting plan in place. Despite this, EC educators at case studies one, two and three all established programmes within one or two weeks of the initial school closures. Due to the limited access to technology and infrastructure as highlighted in Finding 1 this was not possible at Case Study 4: Rural Public Huancayo until two months later and significantly did not involve daily interactions between children and EC educators. The programmes were modified over time according to feedback from parents, the development of EC educator digital skills and responses to changing government restrictions. EC educators who were able to implement programmes experienced similar challenges, which are now explored through the following sections: a) fostering meaningful connections with children and b) adapting pedagogy.

a) Fostering meaningful connections with children

For teaching and learning to be effective in classroom settings research suggests that relationships between educators and children are fundamental (Murray & Greenberg, 2000; Crosnoe, et al., 2004; Sabol & Pianta, 2012), particularly in ECE (Eadie et al., 2021). Forming these connections was perceived to be a particular challenge for EC educator participants when working with the distance learning programmes that were implemented across contexts. Participants used powerful language when describing the challenge of forming relationships through screens such as 'dehumanising' and a 'difficult time', reflecting the perceived complexity. This finding has wider implications as even if EC educators who were able to see their students, albeit through a screen, found it difficult to form bonds and engage children in learning activities how would other EC educators who had fewer resources and limited access to technology have managed this challenge.

EC educator participants in case studies one and three (where stakeholders held greater cultural and economic capital in the form of access to technology and parents with time and skills to support children) were able to compensate for the limited in-person interactions necessary to create bonds with children by scheduling 1:1 online sessions, arriving to the online classes earlier and maintaining regular contact with parents.

b) Adapting pedagogy

Inclusive education forms a key component of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal Four (United Nations, 2015a), with EC educators often at the forefront of efforts within the classroom adapting teaching and learning to the individual needs of children. The EC educators across case studies were faced with the challenge of adapting their pedagogical approach to a distance learning programme whilst still meeting the individual needs of young children in a developmentally appropriate way. The Reggio Emilia philosophy was highlighted by EC educators at both case study two and three. This established approach to ECE involves child exploration and expression, with the EC educator taking on a faciliatory role. During the shift to a distance learning model the EC educators reported that it was a challenge to adapt the teaching philosophy and that they took on different approaches.

Emilia a EC educator at Case Study 3: Urban Private Lima commented that 'I wasn't feeling that prepared' when referring to the challenge of adapting the Reggio Emilia approach to distance learning. This reflects similar findings by Inan (2021) who found that Reggio Emilia inspired EC educators in Turkey were not aware of the different ways adapt to a distance learning model and focussed solely on online learning. This finding suggests that pre and in service training could focus on developing skills and familiarity with digital tools (OECD, 2021), but also recommendations from other contexts which state that distance learning in ECE should incorporate a diversified blend of synchronous and asynchronous teaching methods (Lau & Lee, 2020; Timmons et al., 2021).

Finding 5: Power dynamics influenced EC educator-parent relationships.

EC educators particularly those in the public sector are poorly paid compared to other similar professionals and perceived to do work of low to very low quality by Peruvian society – this was the assessment by Saavedra and Gutierrez (2020) as they cited the results of a national survey. Since then, there has been little research to re-examine the way the teaching profession is viewed. With this societal context in mind the pandemic offered a unique opportunity for parents to see EC educators in action and potentially alter perceptions of the teaching profession. This was expressed in three ways in the case studies: a) EC educator-parent varied dynamics, b) relying on EC educators' input and valuing EC educator skills and c) respect and appreciation of EC educators' efforts.

a) EC educator-parent varied dynamics

The necessity for positive EC educator-parent relationships in ECE is not a new phenomenon nor is it specific to the Peruvian context. Its prominence in the literature since the pandemic has put it firmly back on the agenda (Soltero-González & Gillanders, 2021, Byun, et al., 2022 and Keengwe & Onchwari, 2022). Indeed, in other international studies the opportunity for parents to be more involved in ECE and the developing of positive EC educator-parent relationships have both been highlighted as positive consequences of the pandemic. Evidence of greater collaboration and a strengthening of parent-EC educator relationships could be found in all four case studies as parents and EC educators both reported reaching out to each other. The value of this relationship was highlighted by all of the EC educators across cases describing instances where they had reached out to parents with positive outcomes. There was also evidence that this relationship has been maintained since the return to in-person-schooling.

Strengthening the parent-EC educator relationship may have been a natural consequence of EC educators and parents relying on one another to ensure that children were able to access ECE, but significantly at Case Study 4: Rural Public Huancayo and to a lesser extent at Case Study 2: Urban Public Lima this relationship required stakeholders to overcome the limited technological infrastructure and access to resources. The common factor which can be seen across cases was that distance learning programmes encouraged parents into the 'classroom' whereas previously they had been left, both literally and metaphorically, at the door. Significantly, just one EC educator participant from the two private schools perceived the presence of parents in online classes as an opportunity to show how they worked, illustrated by Gabrielle, an EC educator at Case Study 1: Rural Private Cusco:

Sometimes families don't see what you do as an EC educator in class and with your students. So sometimes to agree with parents [about children's development and needs] it's difficult and the online system really allowed us to be really open with the families, and the families to be open with us. It was like an opportunity for them to really see how the dynamic [between EC educators and children] worked, and I think that was great. (Gabrielle, EC educator, Case Study 1: Rural Private Cusco)

This positive perception provides a contrast to all of the other EC educators across the two private schools (case study 1 and 3) who were apprehensive about the access that parents had to them and their teaching. EC educators perceived that parents were making judgements of their teaching and that these judgements could lead to negative consequences for them,

specifically that parents could withdraw their children from the school affecting the EC educators' job security. Indeed, the leader at Case Study 3: Urban Private Lima explained that in some respects these perceptions were reality in an explanation explored previously where he used the words 'massacred' and 'butchered' to describe how parents criticised the school and EC educators. This suggests that parents at Case Study 3: Urban Private Lima and to a degree at Case Study 1: Rural Private Cusco, where EC educators and the leader also spoke about the need to justify the fees parents paid, wielded significant power over the school and EC educators, highlighting the complexity of the hierarchical EC educator-parent relationship at fee-paying schools.

Ana, an expert participant and curriculum developer in the public sector, highlighted the impact of this dynamic on ECE when she explained how private schools prioritised online lessons that attempted to mirror the school day due to the influence of parents. This highlights the perception that some parents who possessed economic and cultural capital influenced ECE at fee-paying schools during the pandemic significantly. This has potential implications for the future as it suggests that policy makers should focus on not only fostering relationships between school and home but by establishing recognised 'best' practice for distance learning models in ECE (according to the context and access to technology) that is data driven rather than motivated by seeking perceived value for money or solely driven by parent perceptions of ECE. By working together in this way not only will there be positive outcomes in child development and progress in the short term but that this will help to bolster the resilience of ECE as a whole.

b) Relying on EC educators' input and valuing EC educator skills

Some parents, particularly at Case Study 4: Rural Public Huancayo stated that they did not have the necessary skills to be able to support their children's educational development and learning, adding weight to findings from other international research (Dong, et al, 2020). On occasions this was stated directly but there were also reports from parents that they relied on EC educators' expertise. This indirectly suggests that parents perceived they did not have understanding or skills of young children's educational development or at least to the same degree as the EC educators. There were some differences between cases in the degree of dependency that parents had on EC educators particularly between parents with children enrolled at private schools compared to those in public schools. For example the comments highlighted previously in Case Study 4: Rural Public Huancayo from parents in interview group two where parents stated that they asked the EC educator to give in person lessons to their

children as they were ‘going crazy’ and that their ‘heads hurt’. This reliance on the EC educator’s input was also reflected in Case Study 2: Urban Public Lima, where the EC educators themselves described how they were key figures in not just guiding parents with child development but through supporting families in a more holistic way.

Some parent participants from the two private schools (case study one and three) reported, similarly, that they relied on the EC educators during the pandemic. However, by withdrawing their children from the school and developing their own informal ECE plans, Sofia and Flavia, parents from Case Study 3: Urban Private Lima, demonstrated that they were not solely reliant on the EC educators’ input. One possible reason for this was that these two parents had the cultural, social and economic capital to draw on prior experiences of technology and how it could be used, access to other sources of expertise, time to invest in finding out more, and perhaps an already existing understanding of ECE pedagogy. As previously discussed in the findings from Case Study 3: Urban Private Lima, both parents also felt that the distance learning programme developed by the school was not appropriate for their children’s developmental stage rather than any direct criticism of the EC educator and their skills.

Despite Sofia’s and Flavia’s decisions to withdraw their children from Case Study 3: Urban Private Lima, we can see that generally there was a trend for parents to look for the guidance from EC educators across all four case studies. Two of the expert participants were also keen to highlight the positive impact of EC educators in ECE during the pandemic suggesting that parents and other professionals in the ECE field valued the EC educators as professionals for the skills they could provide highlighting how the pandemic provided an opportunity for the profession to be viewed positively within society.

c) Respect for and appreciation of EC educators’ efforts

The value and respect parents and society have for EC educators are two closely related factors. The key difference highlighted in this research is how parents treated EC educators knowing that they would be relying on their skills. There were some parents and EC educators across all case studies who made comments that demonstrated an appreciation of EC educators’ efforts and an awareness of the difficulty of their roles.

Almudena as an EC educator, I take off my hat to her, those classes which were modified very quickly, very good. She had no qualms about working in the morning and the children could

return to work in the afternoon too. Very willing. Very good person, very talented as a EC educator. (Monica, Parent, Case Study 2: Urban Public Lima)

An appreciation that was reciprocated by EC educators showing characteristics of strong partnerships being forged between the two stakeholders.

To the parents who did support I made clear to congratulation them, because they have also made an effort, a great effort to connect. Even, there is a little boy who lives near my house and the parents go and ask permission [to be absent from work] and connect to be there [with him] for his lessons. They make an effort. They make a very big effort and I as an EC educator have to recognise in every aspect the things they have done until the last day. For example, also when the parents began to work at night they came home, reviewed the video or the activity and at that time they started working with the children, being able to send their evidence, so that has also been a process, no? And very commendable on their part on part of the parents. (Catalina, EC educator, Case Study 2: Urban Public Lima)

Finding 6: Children's educational development and well-being were negatively impacted

Undoubtedly there is universal agreement in the field that children, particularly those in ECE, were affected by the pandemic, with some estimating that the implications will last for generations in terms of future income as adults (Nugroho et al., 2021) and negatively affect a country's GDP (Lopez Boo et al., 2020). This finding explores the perceptions of EC educators and parents on the consequences on children. Reported under two headings: a) child educational development and b) child emotional well-being, this finding highlights not only the impact on learning and the achievement of educational developmental goals but also the potential emotional implications for children.

a) Child educational development

EC educators across all contexts were concerned that children were developmentally behind where previous cohorts of children had been at the same age. In particular EC educators at Case Study 4: Rural Public Huancayo highlighted how many children had not achieved age expected educational developmental objectives as noted by Melanie, an EC educator:

The issue was that the children have not achieved the learning that they really should have. They have not met their developmental objectives each child should have had at the end of each

school year because of the difficulties here. (Melanie EC educator at Case Study 4: Rural Public Huancayo) (context and extended comment available in Appendix 3c).

The areas of child educational development focussed on a variety of areas such as children's social and emotional development which EC educators attributed to limited interactions with peers and fewer opportunities for children to be autonomous. Language acquisition delays were also reported with EC educators proposing that children were not exposed to a broad vocabulary and had fewer opportunities to speak and listen. Related to both of these perceived differences in educational development were attention deficits with students struggling to focus for extended periods during lessons.

There were, however, subtle differences in the areas of development that were highlighted in each setting, for example at case study two and three, both urban schools, four of the eight EC educators highlighted physical development as being of concern when asked the direct question: *What have been the main consequences on educational development of children during the period of school closures?* Opportunities for children to move and develop physically especially through outdoor play have been highlighted in curriculum and pedagogy across contexts, with movement being directly related to brain development (Rushton & Larkin, 2001).

A possible reason for physical development being highlighted by EC educator participants in Case Study 2: Urban Public Lima and Case Study 3: Rural Urban Lima is that in these contexts children in their classes may have been in smaller homes and/or without outdoor spaces, indeed, in metropolitan areas of Lima apartment buildings are with fewer gardens than in rural areas. Parents also cited that they were concerned about this, Luciana, a parent at Case Study 2: Urban Public Lima related changes in her daughter's behaviour to the changes in access to outdoor spaces during the period of school closures, believing that outdoor space was crucial for her child's development and well-being. The impact on child physical development may have been more severe on children in Peru than in other regions or countries due two conditions in Bronfenbrenner's model; firstly, from the exosystem where the restrictions imposed by the government prevented children from leaving their homes and secondly, within the chronosystem as the school closures and restrictions stayed in place for significant periods of time (children were not permitted to leave the house at all between March and May 2020 and for the following months they were limited in how long they could leave the house).

b) Child emotional well-being

Alongside the child educational developmental delays and deficits previously explored, parents in particular, reported changes in children's behaviours during the pandemic period. The changes included bedwetting, difficulty sleeping, tantrums, difficulty from separating from main caregivers and fear of leaving the house. All of these changes in behaviours are indicators of child well-being and have been reported by parents in other international contexts (Egan et al., 2021; Malta Campos & Vieira, 2021). In contrast to the educational developmental delays which varied according to contexts the indicators of child well-being were consistently reported across cases. This emphasises the shared environmental aspects of the pandemic period across Peru at multiple layers of Bronfenbrenner's model. For example, all children were required to remain inside for significant periods regardless of economic, cultural and social capital affecting the child's immediate environment in the microsystem. Whilst capital may have influenced the quality of the environment, all children were exposed to the same condition of remaining inside or within a few hundred metres of their homes.

6.3 Key findings in relation to research questions

The following section concludes this chapter by discussing how the key findings from the cross-case analysis directly address the four research questions which this study set out to answer.

- **RQ1. What were the challenges for EC educators in Peru during the period of school closures caused by the COVID-19 pandemic?**

The challenges for EC educators in communities where parents had access to technology were similar to those identified by educators in the literature as they involved educators learning how to adapt methodological and pedagogical approaches to a ECE distance learning model (Crawford et al., 2021; Gomes et al., 2021; Inan, 2021) and in building emotional connections with children (Steed & Leech, 2021; Jalongo, 2021; Gomes et al., 2021; Ford et al., 2021). This study highlights the capacity of educators to adapt their approach and digital literacy skills over time, with the support networks available to them being considered particularly important.

EC educators reported that during the period of school closures they had experienced negative impacts on their well-being, a finding that largely aligns with research in other international contexts (Berger et al., 2022; Eadie et al., 2021; Jalongo, 2021; Rogers et al., 2023; Swigonski et al., 2021). As previously highlighted in the literature review EC educator well-being has

been related to educator-child relationships and the potential impact on child development (Jeon et al., 2014; Sandilos et al., 2015). This finding highlights the need for further research to explore EC educator well-being and the longer-term impact of the extended period of school closures and uncertainty that characterised the country context in Peru.

Teacher-parent relationships were also highlighted as a challenge, particularly in terms of EC educators managing increased parent communication outside of working hours, parent involvement in online lessons both to support children in accessing technology and engaging children with their learning activities. The reliance on parents being reported as a challenge was also identified in the literature (Steed et al., 2022) and highlights how parent engagement was both a fundamental component of distance learning programmes but also a challenge. However, this study goes further than the existing literature as it examines the complex power dynamics between EC educators and parents in Peru. At private schools EC educators perceived that parents held power over them, whereas parents in public schools were far more reliant on EC educators.

- **RQ2. What were the challenges for parents/guardians of children enrolled in ECE in Peru during the period of school closures caused by the COVID-19 pandemic?**

The challenges reported by parent participants mirrored those of parents from international studies. For example, the challenge of taking on the role of being the educator (Dong et al., 2020), taking on other responsibilities in the home (Levickis et al., 2023) and the negative impacts on well-being (Spinelli et al., 2020) were all reported. However, whilst the existing literature emphasises parents' concerns regarding eye strain (Dong et al., 2020; Enthoven et al., 2020; Huang et al., 2015; Ku et al., 2019; Wong et al., 2021) when faced with increased screen time, this opinion was not expressed in this study. Instead parents from affluent backgrounds were concerned about the personalised learning content which the distance learning programmes offered by schools could provide and parents in less affluent communities were concerned that they did not have the skills and knowledge to support children's educational development.

- **RQ3. How were challenges for EC educators and parents/guardians of children enrolled in ECE in Peru during the period of school closures caused by the COVID-19 pandemic different across contexts?**

The main findings collectively highlight an unequal ECE system where the opportunities for children to access and engage in quality early learning experiences were influenced by wider societal conditions such as affordability of technology, digital infrastructure, the ability of parents to be physically present in the home and parents' digital literacy. These challenges align with existing research which shows that risk factors combined to compound vulnerability (UNICEF, 2023) and that those already thought to be vulnerable have been disproportionately affected by the period of school closures (Spiteri, 2021; Spiteri et al., 2023; De Witte & François, 2023; Jakubowski et al., 2025).

- **RQ4. What are the implications for ECE considering the challenges faced by EC educators and parents/guardians during the period of school closures?**

The experiences of participants emphasise how the process quality of ECE in the form of frequent interactions between children and their parents and EC educators are critical to children's educational development. Furthermore, the findings demonstrated that, all children were inherently vulnerable to the effects of school closures as they were dependent on the opportunities adults in their immediate environment could provide. The effect of this inherent vulnerability is evident in the perception that children's educational development was negatively impacted to some degree during the period of school closures. This finding adds to the growing literature which shows that children's development was affected by the period of school closures (Bartholo et al., 2022; Naufal Arzaqi & Faizah Romadona, 2021; Uğraş et al., 2023; Jakubowski et al., 2025; Betthäuser et al., 2023; De Witte & François, 2023). Children in rural areas, attending public schools, who had less frequent interactions with EC educators and did not have their parents present in the home faced further situational vulnerabilities. This builds on the existing literature in Peru which showed that before the pandemic children from poorer, rural communities were less likely to have access to quality education (Arteaga & Glewwe, 2014; Behrman et al., 2017; Saavedra & Gutierrez, 2020; Alcázar, et al., 2020).

Prior research also highlighted that developmental gaps in Peruvian children appearing before primary age were likely to be maintained throughout schooling (Arteaga & Glewwe, 2014; Cueto et al., 2014, 2016). Therefore, we see how significant this period could be for both the

individual child and their development but also more widely in terms of the longer-term consequences for society when we consider that ECE is viewed as vehicle to address societal inequalities and reduce poverty in Peru (Castro & Rolleston, 2018; Josephson et al., 2017; UNICEF, 2014, 2021; Villalobos et al., 2019).

With 16% of the rural population in Peru without access to electricity in their homes in 2021 (IEA, IRENA, UNSD, World Bank, WHO, 2023, p.241), just 4.8% of the same rural population having access to the internet and a computer at home in 2019 (INEI, 2019b, p.5) and 30.1 % of the total population living in poverty in 2020 (World Bank, 2023, p.10), there is a suggestion that access to technology would have been a significant challenge for many ECE stakeholders during the period of school closures. These figures can be put into context internationally when compared to the 96% of all households in Great Britain who had access to the internet at home (ONS, 2020). This highlights the potential for inequalities between nations to have grown and builds on existing research that demonstrates that a digital divide exists between countries in the Global South and those in the North (World Bank Group, 2024).

Chapter 7: Conclusion

7.1 Introduction to Conclusion

This final chapter of the thesis is divided into two main parts. Section 6.2 summarises the main findings of the study and leads to an outline of the contributions made to knowledge. Section 6.3 draws on both to provide detailed conclusions and implications for what has been learnt. The limitations of the thesis are then explored and areas for future research are identified. A summary of final thoughts is then articulated to conclude the thesis.

7.2 Summary of main findings and contributions to knowledge

This study explored experiences and perspectives of ECE stakeholders during the period of school closures caused by the COVID-19 pandemic in Peru. It focused on the challenges faced by EC educators and parents/guardians of young children in rural and urban areas and in private and public schools. A multiple case study design was used to obtain rich contextualised data that provided nuanced and insightful findings. Through this chapter the main findings are re-stated and then the contributions these make to knowledge are considered.

7.2.1 Summary of main findings

The following represents a recap of the key findings explored in the previous chapter:

- Finding 1: Systemic inequality of access to technology shaped the nature of ECE stakeholder challenges.
- Finding 2: Parent engagement was critical for children's educational development.
- Finding 3: ECE stakeholder well-being was negatively impacted across contexts.
- Finding 4: Adapting pedagogical approaches and making emotional connections with children were significant challenges for EC educators.
- Finding 5: Power dynamics influenced EC educator-parent relationships.
- Finding 6: Children's educational development and well-being were negatively impacted.

7.2.2 Contributions to knowledge

The above findings contribute to the existing literature and make a unique contribution in a variety of ways. Firstly, recruiting parent and EC educator participants in Peru who were able to speak first-hand about their own experiences, alongside expert participants who reported their perceptions and second-hand experiences of ECE stakeholders provided a range of

perspectives. This allowed me to explore the experiences of people through their own words, a cornerstone of phenomenological research (Giorgi et al., 2017). Furthermore, conducting the study in Peru, a middle-income country in the Global South, provided an opportunity to explore the lived experiences of communities outside of the Western-centric dominated research community.

This study also explored the impact of the pandemic on different communities in Peru and as a result included participants who were considered to be vulnerable. Including such participants gave often underrepresented individuals and communities a voice and also provided an opportunity to better understand the challenges they faced from their own lived experiences and perspectives. Such opportunities are deemed important so as not to focus on those considered privileged who are more likely to have the capacity to speak out and be heard (Gallegos et al., 2023). With much of the Peruvian population living in poverty (World Bank, 2023) and considered to be vulnerable, including this group was particularly important. Whilst there are anecdotal and informal accounts of vulnerable individuals' experiences of education in Peru during the pandemic (Chauvin & Faiola, 2020) and there are reports which highlight how vulnerable groups may have been particularly susceptible to the effects of the pandemic in Peru (Lavado et al., 2020; Vázquez-Rowe & Gandolfi, 2020) to date there have been few, if any in-depth, qualitative case studies which have explored how vulnerable communities were impacted by the pandemic with respect to ECE. The multiple case study research design used in this study enabled a thorough exploration both within and across contexts of the experiences of ECE stakeholders yielding rich, in depth, contextualised accounts.

My research provided the unique opportunity to explore the experiences and perspectives of several participants considered to be vulnerable and analyse how these experiences differed to individuals from communities in other contexts across the country. Whilst highlighting expected inequalities, the research also shines a light on how the lives of individuals in vulnerable communities were affected in several ways which could be traced back to the cultural, social and economic capital available to them. Using Bourdieu's ideas as an analytical framework we can see how vulnerable communities were likely to have experienced the negative impact of the pandemic to a greater extent than other communities due to a cycle of social reproduction, whereby individuals' life chances are predetermined depending on the family and context they are born into. The purposeful inclusion of vulnerable participants and the use of Bourdieu's framework therefore provided a contribution to knowledge by providing

those most affected during the pandemic the opportunity to share their experiences within contextualised analysis.

Existing research has found that educators in Latin America in general are perceived to be of low status (Elacqua et al., 2024) and specifically in Peru are underpaid and largely undervalued by Peruvian society (Saavedra & Gutierrez, 2020). Within this historical context, this study reveals that parent participants, particularly those whose children were enrolled in the public sector were appreciative of educators and reported that they came to rely on the teachers' input. Whilst there is some evidence of this with parent participants whose children attended private schools, the teacher-parent interactions were more varied, and complicated by a perceived hierarchical relationship. It appears that this had the potential to lead to some teachers being wary of parents due to the perceived power they were seen to possess. To date within the Peruvian context this study is unique in the respect that it has explored how the pandemic has impacted this relationship and the perception of educators.

This research adds weight to the evidence that the pandemic provided opportunities as well as challenges. Whilst this study focussed on identifying challenges, in the process it demonstrated how the pandemic had the potential for some teacher-parent relationships to be improved, a crucial factor in successful high quality ECE programmes. By effectively relying on parent involvement, every formal distance learning programme required interaction between EC educators and parents. Additionally, in some communities the family support provided by some educators went beyond that of a traditional educators' role demonstrating the importance of the connections between these two key ECE stakeholders.

An unexpected finding from this study was the widespread acceptance that online synchronous lessons for young children were an appropriate, and in many cases, the favoured form of ECE by EC educators and parents during the pandemic. In contrast, play-based and experiential, hands-on learning are widely recognised as the most effective approaches to young children's learning (Britto, 2017; UNICEF, 2018). Whilst current research suggests that technology can be useful in ECE (as previously explored in the literature review) the recommendations on screen time are clear: 'less is better' (WHO, 2019). Two parents at Case Study 3: Urban Private Lima who withdrew their children from the online learning programme and one expert participant from the Ministry of Education did raise concerns about the developmentally appropriate use of screens and online learning, however, this was not as dominant a theme in the data as it was in existing research (Dong et al. 2020; Plotka & Guirguis, 2022). This study

therefore shows that in this context, during crisis conditions, the priority was to provide synchronous interactions between EC educators and children, suggesting that the need for human interactions at this time superseded the recognised pedagogical approaches and/or concerns about high levels of screen time. There is a need for further research to specifically explore how ECE programmes may be planned and delivered during potential similar crisis situations without this reliance on screens.

Finally, the research draws on two theoretical frameworks, Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory and Bourdieu's Theory of Social and Cultural Reproduction which complement one another in exploring the challenges within the context of each individual participants' account and each case study. This approach provided a comprehensive understanding of the impact environment has on ECE and ultimately on child development. This provided a nuanced understanding of the phenomenon, revealing insights that may be missed by other comparable studies in different contexts which have sought to understand the experiences of EC educators and/or parents during the pandemic. The synergy of the two frameworks within the case study research design offered a unique perspective on the participants' experiences focussing both on the individuals' context and on the influence of societal structures, firstly within each case setting and then across the various case studies. The case study approach allowed me to use background information and rich contextualised data in my interpretations and analysis, adding to the validity of findings.

7.3 Conclusions, limitations and suggested future research

The following section outlines the conclusions drawn from the study's findings and what has been learnt, the limitations of the study and the suggested future research areas.

7.3.1 Conclusions and implications

As reported previously in the introduction chapter those considered to be living in disadvantaged communities in many international contexts were disproportionately affected by the restrictions of movement put in place to protect populations from the spread of COVID-19 and subsequent school closures (Spiteri, 2021; Spiteri et al., 2023; De Witte & François, 2023; Jakubowski et al., 2025). This study supports this consensus and adds weight to the call for further support for communities such as those in Case Study 4: Rural Public Huancayo to address the inequalities that have further increased during the pandemic period. The difficulties

in terms of infrastructure and affordability mean that providing access to technological resources for all, particularly those in rural and remote regions may be a more of a long-term objective. Instead, more immediate action could take the form of parenting programmes which provide parents with the knowledge and expertise to support their children's educational learning and development. In Peru, existing social support programmes can be scaled up and expanded to include a greater emphasis on parents' engagement with children's educational development. This may also include strategies to empower parents to share the skills they already possess and promote the value of the experiences they can provide for children. This would be particularly useful for parents from contexts such as we saw in Case Study 4: Rural Public Huancayo who were dismissive of their own ability to support their children's educational development coming to rely on EC educators for what they perceived to be important learning.

Additionally, the study highlighted that despite some parents' poor perceptions of their own knowledge of child educational development their engagement was pivotal in the effectiveness of ECE during the pandemic. This parent engagement was fundamental and developed through EC educator-parent relationships. Although the relationships with parents could be complex, particularly when considering the perceived power of fee-paying parents, EC educators on several occasions, remarked on the importance of parents in being able to deliver the distance learning model. Positive teacher-parent relationships is not a new phenomenon nor is it specific to this context or situation (Swick, 1991; Xu & Gulosino, 2006; Sucuoğlu & Bakkaloğlu 2018), but its prominence during the pandemic both in this study and in existing research conducted during the pandemic (Soltero-González & Gillanders, 2021, Byun et al., 2022; Keengwe & Onchwari, 2022; Hagenaars et al., 2024) puts it firmly back on the agenda. This has potential implications for the future as it suggests that policy makers should focus on fostering relationships between school and home. By working together in this way not only will there be positive outcomes in children's educational development and progress in the short term but that this will help to bolster the resilience of ECE as a whole.

The study adds weight to the recommendations by Atiles et al., (2021) as it highlights the need to provide support to EC educators both in terms of professional development both in-service and preservice so that they have the capacity to use technology to support children's learning more effectively, but also in terms of their well-being. Existing research has also highlighted

internal drive and motivation in EC educators' responses during the pandemic (Gomes et al., 2021) which were similarly evident in this study. Educators going above and beyond in their efforts to deliver a distance learning programme is particularly significant in the Peruvian context as this is a country where the teaching profession, particularly in the public sector, is historically perceived as having low prestige and relative low pay in comparison to other professions (Sataloff et al., 2017; Araujo et al., 2017; Saaveddra & Gutierrez, 2020).

By providing a professional support network for EC educators practical changes to pedagogy can be made, and individuals know who to turn to for help. The study revealed examples of EC educators sharing new teaching strategies and resources and offering emotional support to each other. These examples highlight the collaborative spirit shown by EC educators and serve as a reminder that resilience is more than just dependent on individual traits or experiences as it is also reliant on the collective effort. Recognising the positive impact of providing EC educators with support through fostering a collaborative approach to problem solving and creating a culture of collegial learning highlights the importance of developing these factors in school communities in the future to give them the best chance to be resilient when faced with challenges. The immediate support network felt by the EC educators underscores a sense of belonging and togetherness which was fostered. This has implications for school policies moving forward as it suggests that strengthening relationships could enhance overall resilience in educational organisations. This would benefit not only EC educators but the students and communities that they interact with.

7.3.2 Limitations

This study used purposive sampling to intentionally include communities from varying contexts. Whilst this was successful in recruiting a range of different participants, there was a limitation in that only community members who had access to technology from case studies one, two and three were able to participate. This was due to data collection at these three sites being conducted online as outlined in the methodology chapter. Therefore, a prerequisite for the populations at these case studies to participate was that they had access to technology. For communities at case studies one and three this may not have been too much of an issue in terms of access, although the effects of ‘zoom fatigue’ (Nesher Shoshan & Wehrt, 2022,p.828), may have limited participation. However, it is a fair assumption that many parents at Case Study 2:

Urban Public Lima may have been excluded as the school served a community where access to technology was limited. This indicates that data collection from this case study may not be considered 'typical' (Bryman, 2016, p. 62) of the parents in the community.

Data triangulation was achieved by including a variety of participant voices such as ECE experts and a mixture of parents, EC educators and leaders at each case study. However, all interviews in the case studies were conducted between May and November 2022 a significant period after schools were initially closed in March 2020 and several months after they had all fully reopened in March 2022. Interviewees were therefore required to think back and reflect on their experiences rather than speak about their current experiences.

The nature of qualitative research involves the researcher being an active participant in constructing knowledge through building relationships with participants and the interpretation of data (Cohen et al., 2007). Whilst efforts were made to be reflective and demonstrate awareness of my status as an outsider during contact with participants and subsequent interpretations of data, there is the potential that the dynamic between myself and participants may have been affected by my status. Indeed, Kerstetter (2012) would suggest that I had taken on not just the role of being an outsider but a privileged one due to my formal education and access to resources. Bridges (2001) highlights how disempowered groups have previously criticised outsider research as being unable to fully understand and represent experiences, being exploitative, and outsiders articulating perspectives being intrinsically disempowering. Whilst my status as an outsider could not change, my awareness and acknowledgement of the cultural, socio-economic and linguistic differences that I share with the participants offered an honest and open relationship. It should also be noted that being an outsider also provided benefits as my own experiences and perspectives as an educator and researcher both in the UK and Peru helped to shape my interpretations during the analysis of data.

7.3.3 Suggested Future Research

This study adds weight to the existing research that suggests that many young children may have experienced negative consequences in terms of their educational development due to the school closures caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Educators and parents across contexts in Peru perceived that children were behind their peers from previous cohorts across several areas of educational developmental indicators. As of now there are few studies, either quantitively or qualitatively seeking to assess or explore this phenomenon on a greater scale in Peru. Possible future studies should focus on how children perform on standardised tests in

comparison to past cohorts but also on how educators have observed behaviours, progress and adapted their practices. Pascal and Bertram, (2021) advocate the inclusion of children's participation in future research seeing their input as essential 'to realise children's rights and the civic role of early childhood settings' (p.22) giving this often-neglected group (in terms of research participation) a voice and greater understanding of their experiences. An exploration of children's perspectives would also be valuable in the design and implementation of interventions and possible future support for children and families.

Since the period of school closures has passed there are few studies which have sought to understand the longer-term effects on EC educators both in terms of their professional practice but also their well-being. There is a need to understand how EC educators have or have not recovered from their experiences and there are potential insights to be gained by returning to the four case studies to explore the ECE stakeholders' perspectives on life since returning to school in person. Finally, whilst the views of ECE experts were included in this research, there is scope to explore the experiences of a wider variety of stakeholders to learn about their perspectives on the challenges for ECE in Peru during the period of school closures and the return to school.

7.4 Final Thoughts

With the pandemic period having a life changing impact on many people across the globe, it comes as no surprise that ECE in Peru was impacted to such a great extent. Whilst comparisons with other countries and contexts can be useful, the participants from this study articulate perspectives within a unique societal and historical context. Whilst the study did uncover inspirational stories it also highlighted the potentially severe consequences which may have a lasting impact on society, particularly on those in vulnerable populations. The stark inequalities which existed before the pandemic both within and across nations may have been exacerbated, an assumption articulated and explained by Daniela, a researcher and expert participant in this study as she stated:

So, what you can see is the already existing inequalities are deepening because those parents with more resources can seek this type of alternative for their children [in person classes in the park] and those that do not have resources are stuck with their children at home. I mean they don't have access to the internet so they cannot connect to school. The parents are less equipped

and even feel less capable, capable of helping children with their home learning, with their school activities.

Or they don't have the time to do support children because they are working because they need to work to have some money to be able to eat and to have a place to live or whatever. And yeah, they barely get the minimum to cover their basic needs if anything, so they can't invest anything extra on getting activities for their children to replace the lack of access to school so, yeah, I mean with closing of schools you are just deepening the inequalities.

Daniela (Expert Participant, Researcher)

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Peru: I Learn at Home

The following extracts are from Munoz-Najar's (2022) review of the 'I Learn at Home' programme published in the OECD's report 'How Learning Continued during the COVID-19 Pandemic: Global Lessons from Initiatives to Support Learners and Teachers' to provide a general description of the programme and the main problems the programme addressed.

> General description
> Peru's school year runs from mid-March to mid-December. Classes were ready to start on 16 March 2020, but instead, the president announced a strict lockdown. The country only had 86 cases of COVID-19 then, but the government worked quickly to close all 54 000 schools to try to prevent further spread of the virus. Peru's Ministry of Education, with support from non-governmental organisations, technology companies, telecommunication operators and broadcasters launched a multichannel remote learning initiative to mitigate learning loss as a result of school closures: Aprendo en Casa (I Learn at Home). The initiative is noteworthy because the Ministry of Education planned, developed and launched a comprehensive multimodal strategy to deliver remote learning at scale in just 12 days. The whole programme aligns to Peru's national curriculum and has been designed to provide remote education through four channels: television, radio, web and printed material. Equally important, the Ministry of Education's Monitoring and Evaluation Unit, with the support of Innovations for Poverty Action, began monitoring levels of adoption and satisfaction of the Aprendo en Casa strategy with principals, teachers and families through regular phone calls. (p.270)

> Main problems addressed
> As Peru's school year starts in mid-March, the COVID-19 pandemic prevented approximately 8 million students (from pre-primary to secondary public and private schools) from starting the 2020 school year. The challenges were twofold: on the one hand, the Ministry of Education had to deliver quality educational resources to all students in a country where household access to resources required for remote learning is highly unequal. For example, while almost 99% of urban homes have access to electricity, only 69% of rural ones do (UNICEF data). On the other hand, although the Ministry of Education curated existing learning material, most of the content and platforms had to be developed from scratch. Ministry of Education officials needed to come up with innovative solutions for this challenge in a short time frame and in the middle of a strict nationwide lockdown. (p.271)

Appendix 2: Ethics

2a Participant Information Sheet

Dear Participant,

Thank you for taking the time to read about this research. Before confirming that you can participate in this study, it is important that you take the time to read the following information to ensure that you understand the purpose of the research and what will be required from you. If at any point you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact the researcher, Tom Chambers, at XXX

Overview

You are invited to participate in a PhD research project which explores the impact of COVID-19 on early childhood education in Peru. The research aims to gain insights from the experiences of those living and working in Peru during the pandemic, identifying the difficulties faced and highlighting any strategies that have worked well. The results will help inform policy and provision of early childhood education in the future.

How can you participate?

Participants will be invited to share their experiences and perspectives through a confidential virtual interview. These should last no longer than 45 minutes and will be arranged at a time and date of the participants' convenience prior to the end of December 2022.

How will you benefit?

By participating in the study, you will have the opportunity to reflect on your experiences and will be making a significant and meaningful contribution to research in Peru. Finally, your perspectives will help guide and inform future policy.

What will happen to your data?

All responses are confidential. However, selective quotes from answers given may be used to provide examples to support conclusions within my thesis. All responses will be anonymised, and care will be made to ensure that participants and institutions cannot be identified either

directly or by inference. Your data will be securely stored until the research has been concluded, after which it will be destroyed.

Please be advised that you have the right to withdraw your data from this research without question at any point up until March 1st, 2023. Participants can do so by contacting Tom (email XXX or phone: XXX.

The research is being overseen by Dr Jane Barnard, a Lecturer in the School of Education at the University of Greenwich, London who can be contacted at: XXX and Dr Panagiotis Pentaris, an Associate Professor of Social Work and Thanatology in the School of Human Sciences at the University of Greenwich, London who can be contacted at: XXX.

2b ethical approval from the University of Greenwich

Signatures

I undertake to carry out research in accordance with the University's Research Ethics Policy. In the case of a postgraduate research degree, I confirm that approval has been given by the Faculty Research Degrees Committee.

Signature of applicant Thomas Chambers **Date** 08.02.2021
Print name THOMAS CHAMBERS

I have discussed the project with the applicant, I confirm that all participants are suitably qualified to undertake this research and I approve it.

Signature of supervisor (to be signed if applicant is a student) **Date**
Print name Dr Jane Barnard

I have reviewed the project with the applicant, or applicant's supervisor, and I confirm that all participants are suitably qualified to undertake this research and I approve it.

Signature of UREC representative **Date 10/5/21**
Print name Dr Mark Goss-Sampson

PLEASE INSERT ELECTRONIC SIGNATURES OR SCAN THE FINAL SIGNED FORM. SIGNED FORMS AND APPENDICES SHOULD BE SENT BY EMAIL TO RESEARCHETHICS@GRE.AC.UK BEFORE THE UREC APPLICATION DEADLINE. YOU DO NOT NEED TO SUBMIT THE FORM IN HARD COPY.

2c: Participant Consent form

Thank you for expressing an interest in volunteering to participate in this research. Before confirming your participation, it is important that you take the time to read the Participant Information Sheet to ensure that you understand the purpose of the research and what will be required of you. If you have not had access to this document please contact the researcher, Tom, at: XXX

To be completed by the participant. If the participant is under 18, to be completed by the parent / guardian / person acting *in loco parentis*.

- I have read the information sheet about this study
- I have had an opportunity to ask questions and discuss this study
- I have received satisfactory answers to all my questions
- I have received enough information about this study
- I understand that I am free to withdraw from this study:
    - At any time (until March 1st 2023)
    - Without giving a reason for withdrawing
    - without affecting my future with the University (If I am, or intend to become, a student at the University of Greenwich)
- I agree to take part in this study
- We may wish to use your research data for a further project in anonymous form. If you agree to this, please tick here ☐

Signed (participant)	Date
Name in capital letters	
Signature of researcher	Date

Name in capital letters
This project is supervised by: Dr Jane Barnard Dr Panagiotis Pentaris
Researcher's contact details (including telephone number and e-mail address): Thomas Chambers XXX XXX

Appendix 3: Data and analysis

3a Codebook example

Codebook developed at Case Study 1: Rural Private Cusco

Name	Description	Files	References
a.EC educator Challenges	Reported by EC educators and leader - Challenges faced during the period of school closures	6	116
EC Educator Well-being		5	91
managing work life with home life		3	12
Teacher Motivation		5	29
Love of the job		3	16
Responsibility		5	13
Teacher workload		5	20
Uncertainty		5	30
How to adapt curriculum for distance learning		2	9
Job insecurity		3	10
Teachers leaving		3	7
lack of experience		3	3
Length of time		4	7
Making bonds with children-engaging		4	11
Missed 'spontaneous teaching moments'		2	2

Name	Description	Files	References
Managing parents during online classes		5	14
Conflicts teachers-school and parents		1	3
Parents giving too much help		4	11
Being overprotective		1	1
Impact on independence		2	2
Impact on teachers assessments and feedback		1	6
b. Parent Challenges	Reported by parents - challenges faced during periods of school closures	9	140
Being confined at home		6	13
Financial		6	28
for parents		6	18
For the school		1	6
Justifying school fees		1	4
Space at home		4	7
Stress		4	16
The role of parents		9	76
Families spending more time together		6	26
Parents frustration		5	12
parents with children during classes		7	14

Name	Description	Files	References
Parents with children outside of classes		6	10
Teacher and Parent relationships		4	8
Collaboration	Partnerships and relationships between participant groups and sources of outside support	9	105
Extended family supporting parents		4	9
Parents support parents		3	11
School and teachers supporting parents		9	41
Financial support		4	8
Fluid communication and access to teachers		9	16
Seeking and responding to parent needs		4	15
School supporting teachers		5	26
Access to Tech		1	2
Support from Psychology department		1	1
Support from senior leaders		3	13
Training and courses		4	8
Schools supporting schools		1	1
spouse support for teachers		1	4

Name	Description	Files	References
Teachers supporting teachers		3	13
Emotional support		2	5
Planning-meetings-collaboration		3	4
Sharing ideas - online tools		3	4
Distance Learning Model	Descriptions of the form of distance learning developed	9	115
Aprendo en Casa		1	1
giving accurate feedback		4	17
More comfortable during second year		6	14
Return to school		6	17
Satisfaction in ECE distance learning		4	7
Strategies and organisation		9	59
Perceived Impact on Child development	Reported by stakeholders - the consequences for children	8	60
Behaviour, limits and consequences		2	2
Concentration and Focus		1	3
Expected development		1	1
Experiences vary according to social economic context in country		3	6
Feeling that impact of pandemic would have been greater for older children		2	2

Name	Description	Files	References
independence - autonomy		4	10
language and writing-phonics		3	6
Less willing to make mistakes		1	1
No formal ECE		4	6
Parents choosing against virtual lessons		1	3
private classes in person		2	2
Unknown academic difference between children who stayed and children who left		1	1
Physical		3	6
Social and Emotional		5	17
Shared EC Educator and Parent Challenges	Overlapping challenges faced by both ECE stakeholder groups	9	55
Impact of COVID on health and access to health care		4	8
Internet Connection		7	11
Resources		4	7
Knowing which technology resources to use		1	1
Resources in the home		4	6
screen time		7	13
Technology		4	9

Name	Description	Files	References
Using Tech		4	9
Age of teacher impacts tech skills		2	4
Young children with no previous experience of education being distracted		1	7
Opportunities	Perspectives on ECE from different backgrounds	8	31
Benefits of virtual system to continue		2	3
children developing tech skills		3	4
Families could see what happens in the classroom		3	4
International online classes		1	2
Job opportunities-new roles		4	8
longer adaptation period for children between home and school		1	2
Teachers collaborating across the school		1	1
Teachers learning new skills		3	6

3b: Interview transcript example 1

Final question and response from Tiago, a parent participant at Case study 3: Urban Private Lima.

00:25:01 Tom

Look, perfect, well, that's all of my questions, but before we finish, is there anything else that you want to share, something that is very important and very meaningful to you, and you think Tom, you need to know this about my experience?

00:25:24 Tiago

Regarding his learning during COVID. Let's see...

What a good question...

I think it was key the presence of two things: One is how the school approached it, because it was very friendly, that is, it was fast, and it was very friendly mhm.

The second is saying how are they going to achieve it? Convert the Reggio Emilia education that is flexible, hands-on learning, how are they going to achieve that kind of teaching or learning from behind a screen? For me it was an unknown, I said Hey, this is impossible.

I said, it's not going to be possible, we're going to pay for school for nothing. I was frustrated because I'm paying for the floor, for the wood just so that they can go can grab a book, that they can't touch, that's not live and just look at the screen, this doesn't exist, does it?

But they somehow succeeded. They succeeded, they divided the group into two sections, each classroom had a teacher, one here and one there and they were alternating the schedules.

How to share screen, how to have the kids interact with their little finger on the iPad and they made it very, very tangible. Bring items, we're going to cook, we're going to do this, we're going to do math, and you need beans, bring beans, bring recycled materials, we're going to glue. It's Reggio Emilia online, and I liked that a lot.

For parents who put their children in this school, even though the effort was going to be there in the classroom, they were going to have to be like a step back. It was a challenge because hey, where do I get recycled material from, where do I get magazines, where do I get newspapers from, no one reads the newspaper anymore. Where do I get this toilet paper tubes? And there were challenges on that side, no, but that's precisely why this circle of support that we had was so important and the presence of the father and mother side by side, in our case in a way it was simplified, because as I say, I was with my a light workload of course stress was on top of me, obviously, but I could dedicate myself to him, couldn't I?

So, think those two things were important and as I say, I mean, I was surprised by the school, and I always repeat it and I said it before, I think it was like four times the speed with how they were able to close [the school] and then be ready on a screen.

I was left very happy, very happy with the capacity of the teachers as well. We saw it when they did the mid-year reports and the year-end reports. Everything they had captured. I mean, my wife said that she's studied some of these curriculums, Waldorf, etc. She said to me, I

don't know how they're going capturing and everything to make a report. They had pictures and they had videos, and they had things to go here and there. At what point did they do that. I mean, did they so it during the class when they were connected with the children? Were they making notes and looking from photos and in how?

It's spectacular, but it was super good and, as I said, the role of the institution, the quality of the teachers and the accompaniment of the parents and the support circle were key. Ah, I think that kind of sums up everything I told you.

3c Interview transcript example 2

Questions and responses from Melanie, an EC educator participant at Case study 4: Rural Public Huancayo.

00:02:41 Tom

Tell me about some of the challenges you faced here through the period of school closures.

00:03:03 Melanie

Of course, since the start of the pandemic, 2 years ago, it has been 2 years of the pandemic. There were great difficulties in terms of children's learning, since this is the place where we are... [looking around the room], there is no internet signal, we cannot count on parents to have the economic stability, to perhaps, many times recharge their data [buy more internet data]. The issue was that the children have not achieved the learning that they really should have. They have not met their developmental objectives each child should have had at the end of each school year because of the difficulties here. Well, I know that in urban areas, I know they have internet or mobiles, laptops, I know that there are more facilities for them to do their classes, but here, from this town where we don't have those things. There are deficiencies either economically or, perhaps as I told you, because of the internet signal.

So, what happened was that the teachers could not work. Last year we had a lot of difficulties to be able to work and then when the school year started in 2022, and children began returning to the institution, well, I found quite a few children with difficulties.

They were shy, just because of the fact that they had been in their homes, in quarantine or perhaps the fact that there was no socialisation with other children in those 2 years as we had to be inside our homes. So, it has been found that the children were quite shy when talking or interacting with others in ways that they would normally develop.

The other way in question was in terms of their learning, there were children in first grade [in 2022 when they returned to school] who could not hold a pencil. Well, it wasn't only first grade but also in second grade, because they were also children who have lost 2 years, 2 years in second grade, many children without being able, perhaps to read, or perhaps to write, to develop orally I say again they were had this shyness.

Children in all grades were in some way affected, since they have not advanced according to the level.

Those are the difficulties that have been encountered. But well, you can't catch up the 2 years we have lost so quickly, maybe in 1 year we have done some, but this is a good start with my own perseverance and more that the children are wanting to learn. Well, it has been, it has been done and well, we have worked. Maybe we haven't achieved it 100%, but we're there, we're there.

00:06:26 Tom

OK. How do you think the role of the parents have changed during the period of school closures?

00:06:36 Melanie

Well, sure, quite a lot. Parents played a very important role at this time. Well, in times of pandemic not only that they have been their teachers at home because they had to guide their children, support them since there was no way for the teachers to be close to them, and it was they, the parents, who are often there in the home.

Even with the difficulties that we have here, for example, some parents have not had or let's say completed education, primary school, or many parents have had difficulties in being able to support their children. Some parents have done it, they have done so, they have supported their children, either in getting them activities to do, that could be left with them and then also teaching the children how to do things. Helping with each experience that could not be shared during classes.

I can't really tell you how we as teachers could have held these classes here in this place. I mean, we have they done it, we used WhatsApp. Sometimes when the signal came in, the teacher could contact the parents to be able to do the classes, right? And well, as I say, there was no comparison, it was a rather abysmal comparison with an institution that is in an urban area.

But the parents have played a very important role in terms of education, since they have not had to support their little ones to be able to make the children achieve, maybe not 100% but, but they have worked with their children and for that we must many times say thank you and congratulate them. To those parents who have made that effort and been able to work with their children.