



Title: An Evaluation Study of the ECEL Programme: A Leadership Development Programme based on a Work-study Arrangement

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The following study was presented by our colleagues Ms. Mia Harrison, Mr. Yu Min Lye, and Ms. Lynn Heng at the 22nd PECERA Conference in July, 2022

Summary

To enhance early childhood program quality, NTUC First Campus (NFC) launched the Early Childhood Education Leadership (ECEL) program in 2020. Co-developed with the Singapore University of Social Sciences (SUSS), ECEL aims to cultivate leaders in Early Childhood Education (ECE). It involves a twelve-month work-study initiative that incorporates evidence-based practices through an academic modular component, work-based practicum, and a triad mentorship model. This study examines the progress and outcomes of the ECEL program one year after implementation, assessing its strengths and weaknesses to identify improvements for future cohorts and determine its sustainability.

To address the two primary research questions regarding the effectiveness of the ECEL program in fostering and sustaining leadership practices, as well as the attributes of successful ECEL graduates, a survey was conducted involving 23 ECEL participants and 22 preschool centre principals. The survey measured changes in four key learning domains: curriculum and pedagogical practices, well-being of teachers and children, diverse needs of children, and teaching quality. Further, to gain an understanding of the program's impact beyond quantitative data, focus group discussions (FGDs) were held with 10 ECEL participants and 4 principals. Centre principals, who served as mentors of the participants, were included to provide a more comprehensive report of the program's outcomes.

Self-ratings and mentor observations showed improvements in all four learning domains. Examples include identifying strengths and areas for improvement in teaching

practices (deepening curriculum and pedagogical practices), utilising positive psychology to enhance the well-being of teachers (enhancing the well-being of teachers and children), establishing more effective collaborations with stakeholders (supporting the diverse needs of children), and gaining a better understanding of quality assurance tools and assessments (enhancing the quality of the centre). Participants also demonstrated growth in critical reflection and developed professional strengths such as mentoring skills and adaptability. These strengths reflect the participants' growth in leadership skills and disposition.

FGDs revealed enabling factors (e.g., alignment between SUSS modules and the work-study program, focus on leadership dispositions, and a well-designed curriculum) and disabling factors (e.g., challenges in managing workload and building/managing relationships). Based on these factors, two archetypes of ECEL graduates emerged. The first archetype, referred to as "Flourishing Francesca", is a self-directed leader who benefits from ECEL by effectively connecting the content taught in SUSS modules with the tasks in the WSP. However, there is still room for improvement in terms of integrating the learning into her work and articulating the concepts behind strategic planning with teachers. The second archetype, known as "Trudging Theodora", failed to derive significant benefits from ECEL. Theodora faced challenges in building collaborative relationships with colleagues and encountered difficulties in academic learning and writing. Therefore, she would benefit from more dedicated time and support for personal growth and development.

Given the two archetypes above and the overall findings of the study, the researchers propose several recommendations. Firstly, the positive outcomes of the ECEL program highlight its benefits, particularly the unique work-study arrangement and strong mentorship model. Therefore, it is recommended to continue to promote the ECEL program. Secondly, the ECEL program can be positioned as a significant milestone within NFC's leadership professional development pathway. By integrating ECEL as part of this pathway, staff members who are interested in pursuing a degree with SUSS while working are provided with an opportunity to do so. Thirdly, participants should be provided with more "white space" to flourish. This entails creating an environment where participants feel comfortable expressing their viewpoints openly and are supported in building relationships with their mentors and



colleagues. Lastly, it is recommended to further strengthen the program structure. This can be achieved by improving the cadence of the modules as well as by actively involving all stakeholders to deepen their engagement and commitment.

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