

Examining the Definition and Measurement of quality in early childhood education: A review of studies using the ECERS-R from 2003 to 2010 ^[1]

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Abstract:

The field of early childhood education continues to grapple with the issue of understanding quality in classrooms. The lack of clarity in definition (or conceptualization) and related ability to assess (or operationalize) quality has contributed to a reliance on the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS-R), which is often interpreted to be synonymous with the quality of a classroom. Likewise, the ECERS-R (although a measurement tool) is often used to define quality. Because of the widespread use of this measure as an evaluation tool, early childhood programs have strived to achieve high ratings on this measure, and subsequently the item content of the ECERS-R has often become a focus for quality enhancement initiatives. The present study examines the definitions of quality (i.e., how quality is operationalized) in research studies using the ECERS-R over the past 8 years (2003-2010). A content analysis of 76 studies conducted in the United States indicates that studies using the ECERS-R to operationalize quality do not use a consistent definition; instead they conceptualize quality in a variety of ways ranging from "quality is ECERs" or "classroom quality" to "environmental quality." In light of these varying definitions, implications for research and policy in early childhood education are discussed.

Region: United States ^[4]

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