

**ENHANCING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF ECD POLICY AND PROGRAMMES IN  
GERT SIBANDE DISTRICT**

**By**

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**Submitted in fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of**

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**FACULTY OF EDUCATION**

**at the**

**UNIVERSITY OF MPUMALANGA**

**Supervisor: Prof. E. Jansen van Vuuren**

**DECEMBER 2024**

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SL Vilane

## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this study to both my late parents, Fish Eddie and Ntokozo Lizzie Vilane whom their memories have been a source of inspiration to me. Although they were illiterate, they were determined to do everything to the best of their ability to ensure that their children receive education.

This dissertation is also dedicated to all my nieces, nephews and grandchildren with the hope that it will be a source of inspiration to them to believe in the richness of continuous quest for knowledge.

Makhulandle, 'Akunani, sinyathel'ucingo"

This is for you!!!

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

There are several people without whom this dissertation might not have been written, and to who I am greatly indebted.

First, thanks to God the Almighty who continues to make the impossible possible.

I would also like to thank my Supervisor, Prof. E Jansen van Vuuren whose office was always open whenever I ran into a trouble spot or had a question about research or writing. She consistently allowed this dissertation to be my own work but steered me in the right direction whenever she thought I needed it.

To Mr David Moholo. Baba, a very special thanks to you for your moral support. You played such an important role along this journey, as we mutually engaged in making sense of the various challenges we faced and in providing encouragement to each other at those times when it seemed impossible to continue.

Finally, I must express my very profound gratitude to my colleagues, Ms Sanelisiwe Mbhele, Marlene Schimdt and Mr Walter Maluka, for providing me with unfailing support and continuous encouragement throughout my years of study and through the process of researching and writing this dissertation. This accomplishment would not have been possible without them.

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## ANNEXURE A

## ETHICAL CLEARANCE



Prof Mahlomaholo Geoffrey MAHLOMAHOLO

Dear Vilane L

220608768

**Protocol Reference Number:** UMP/Vilane/SECE220608768 /MEd/2023

**Project Title:** Enhancing the implementation of Early Childhood Development policy and programmes in Gert Sibande district.

### Approval Notification

#### FULL APPROVAL.

Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interviews Schedule, Informed Consent form, Title of the project, Location of the study, Research Approach and methods must be reviewed and approved through the amendment/ modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number.

**PLEASE NOTE:** Research data should be stored securely in the School/ division for a period of 5 years.

The Ethical Clearance certificate is only valid for a period of 3 years from date of issue. Thereafter, Recertification must be applied for on an annual basis.

Wishing you the best with your study.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be "MG", written over a horizontal line.

Prof MG Mahlomaholo

#### Name of Chairperson (Chair FREC)

Cc: Research Office Administrator: Mr N Kashe and Ms T Mlambo

Cc: Faculty Research Committee Chair: Prof H Israel

#### DECLARATION OF INVESTGATOR(S)

I/We fully understand the conditions under which I am/we are authorised to carry out the abovementioned research and guarantee to ensure compliance with these conditions. I agree to completion of a yearly progress report.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be "P. A. I. E.", written over a horizontal line.

Signature

31/08/2023

Date

**PLEASE QUOTE THE PROTOCOL NUMBER ON ALL ENQUIRIES**

## ANNEXURE B

## PERMISSION LETTER TO CONDUCT RESEARCH



Khamanga Building, Government Boulevard, Riverside Park, Mpumalanga Province  
Private Bag X11341, Moombela, 1200  
Tel: 013 766 5552/5115, Toll Free Line: 0800 203 116

Ukholo le Tefundiso, Umyango we Fundo

Departement van Onderwys

Ndrazawulo ya Dyondzo

Ms. Sonto Vilane  
University of Mpumalanga  
Tel: 082 696 1528  
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**RE: "ENHANCING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION PROGRAMMES IN SELECTED SCHOOLS IN THE GERT SIBANDE DISTRICT OF MPUMALANGA PROVINCE."**

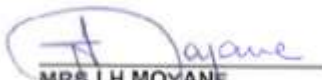
Your application to conduct research study was received and is therefore acknowledged. The title of your research project reads: "Enhancing the Implementation of Early Childhood Education Programmes in Selected Schools in the Gert Sibande District of Mpumalanga Province."

I trust that the aims and the objectives of the study will benefit the whole department especially the beneficiaries. Your request is approved subject to you observing the provisions of the departmental research policy which is available in the department website. You are requested to adhere to your university's research ethics as spelt out in your research ethics.

In terms of the research policy, data or any research activity can be conducted after school hours as per appointment with affected participants. You are also requested to share your findings with the relevant sections of the department so that we may consider implementing your findings if that will be in the best interest of the department. To this effect, your final approved research report (both soft and hard copy) should be submitted to the department so that your recommendations could be implemented. You may be required to prepare a presentation and present at the departments' annual research dialogue.

For more information kindly liaise with the department's research unit @ 013 766 5015/5124 Or [c.maphanga@mpuedu.gov.za](mailto:c.maphanga@mpuedu.gov.za)

The department wishes you well in this important project and pledges to give you the necessary support you may need.

  
MRS LH MOYANE  
HEAD: EDUCATION

11 / 09 / 2023  
DATE



## ANNEXURE C

## LANGUAGE EDITOR CERTIFICATE

### ANNEXURE C

### LANGUAGE EDITOR CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the Master's in Education dissertation titled 'Enhancing the Implementation of Early Childhood Education Programmes in Selected Schools in the Gert Sibande District of Mpumalanga Province' commissioned to me by **Sonto Vilane, L.**, has been edited for grammar, punctuation, and spelling by **Mawabo E. Sijila**, an English editor.

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Date: \_\_\_\_\_

First names and Surname: **Mawabo Elijah Sijila**

Signature:



## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS**

|           |                                                                                       |
|-----------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| CPD       | Continuing Professional Development                                                   |
| ECD       | Early Childhood Development                                                           |
| ECE       | Early Childhood Education                                                             |
| ECCE      | Early Childhood Care and Education                                                    |
| ETDP SETA | Education, Training and Development Practices Sector Education and Training Authority |
| NIECD     | National Integrated Early Childhood Development Policy                                |
| NDP       | National Development Plan                                                             |
| NELDS     | National Early Learning Development Standards for Children                            |
| NQF       | National Qualifications Framework                                                     |
| RP        | Reflective Practice                                                                   |
| SACECD    | South African Centre for ECD                                                          |
| SAQA      | South African Qualifications Framework                                                |
| UNESCO    | United National Education, Scientific and Cultural Organisation                       |
| UNICEF    | United National International Children's Fund                                         |

## **ABSTRACT**

South Africa prioritizes the implementation of policies and activities related to Early Childhood Development (ECD). The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (2000), both emphasize the importance of early childhood development by putting out proposals and regulations to help communities implement it more effectively. Following these guidelines, the South African government launched various courses, through the Departments of Basic Education (DBE), Social Development (DSD), and Health (NDoH) to prioritise early childhood education. These courses covered the National Early Learning and Development Standards for Children (NELDS) and the National Integrated Early Childhood Development Policy (NIECD), which ensures that every young child received the best possible early childhood education. Most young children lack the requisite basic knowledge when they enter formal schooling due to a gap in the implementation of these policies and the accompanying programmes in ECD facilities, which is still an ongoing issue in South Africa. To increase the quality of early childhood care and education, this study investigated how ECD policies such as the National Integrated Early Childhood Development Policy, the National Early Learning and Development Standards for children from birth to 4 years and the Guidelines for Early Childhood Development Services as well as their aligned programmes are implemented. The fundamental premise is a qualitative interpretivist worldview. Schön's conceptual framework on reflective practice provided invaluable insight for the study. Participants in the study included a total of six ECD practitioners, from the three various ECD centres, two non-practitioners, of which one was responsible for administration in one of the centres while the other one was a member of the School Governing Body and two ECD Learning Facilitators (LFs), from the education district made up the team of participants in the study regarding the enhancement of the implementation of the ECE programmes. These ten participants worked as a team to design an effective implementation strategy for the ECE programmes for ECD Practitioners in the 2 schools with ECD centres and the one independent centre. ECD Learning Facilitators, non-teaching stakeholders who served on the School Governing Body (SGB), and ECD Practitioners, all of whom share equal responsibility for implementing the ECD policy and its programmes.

Data was collected using semi-structured interviews, field notes, observation, and voice recording, which was then analysed using inductive categories and theme descriptions. Thematic data analysis identified three themes that reflected participants' experiences with implementing ECD policies to improve the quality of care and education for young children. The findings suggested that ECD stakeholders should work together and interact on a continuous basis to improve policy and programme implementation. The recommendations of the study emphasized the need of ECD managers, practitioners, and officials at all levels to promote the implementation of ECD policies and programmes for optimal care and education.

**KEYWORDS:** Implementation, Early Childhood Development, Early Childhood Development policies, ECD Programmes

## **CHAPTER 1**

### **INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY**

#### **1.1 INTRODUCTION**

The base and foundation of all learning in a child's life beyond home, lies in Early Childhood Development and Education (ECDE) (Ilifa Labantwana 2017:4). It is extremely difficult and expensive to assist children to catch up later if they do not receive the required input and support to promote their development during this critical stage. According to the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (Viviers: 2014), each country should build its own comprehensive national policies to ensure that quality services for the development of its children are rendered. It is necessary to implement and coordinate strategies, policies, and resources to guarantee the child's successful development.

Following the conference of the African National Congress (ANC) in December 2015, Cabinet approved the National Integrated Policy for Early Childhood Development. (RSA, 2015). This was the culmination of many years of challenging work to ensure a better start for many children in South Africa, regardless of where they live. During the State of the Nation Address (SONA) of 2019, President Cyril Ramaphosa subsequently announced that Early Childhood Development (ECD) should be transferred from the Department of Social Development (DSD) to the Department of Basic Education (DBE) (Ramaphosa, 2019). In April 2022, this process was finalized and ECD became part of the DBE.

According to Harrison (2018) the field of early childhood care and education (ECCE) is often seen as having fragmented knowledge. In this regard, it is therefore uncertain, whether Early Childhood Education (ECE) is being fully implemented in Foundation Phase schools/ECD Centres, and whether the implementation is indeed done according to the ECD Policy framework

This gap in knowing how the implementation is happening, coupled with the lack of formal ECD training, makes the ECD personnel extremely vulnerable. Therefore, it is crucial to understand the predicament of the ECD Practitioners, considering the underdeveloped systems, under-qualification, and injustices that primarily affect ECD Practitioners working outside of formal educational settings. Given the foregoing context, it is critical that South Africa ensures the sustainable implementation of ECD through a well-trained workforce of early childhood educators, capable of meeting the needs of children.

ECD programmes are scheduled activities that aim to improve the emotional, mental, spiritual, moral, physical, and social development of children aged newborn to nine years. Early Childhood Development (ECD) is a critical component in creating a solid foundation for a child's development, which has a significant impact on how the child performs later in life. Early childhood development programmes are recommended based on convincing evidence of their effectiveness in preventing cognitive development delays and increasing learning readiness, as evidenced by lower grade retention and special education placement (RSA, 2005).

ECD programmes aim to narrow the learning readiness gap between disadvantaged children and their more economically advantaged peers. Systematic assessments of the scientific literature show that these programmes are beneficial in preventing developmental delays, as evidenced by lower grade retention and placement in special education (Davids et al., 2015). They are designed inside ECD services to give learning and support that is appropriate for the children's developmental age and stage. Early childhood development is impacted by the qualities of the kid, the family, and the larger social environment. Physical health, cognition, language, and social and emotional development are all essential components of school preparedness. Publicly sponsored, centre-based, comprehensive early childhood development programmes are a valuable



community resource that supports the well-being of young children (Anderson et al., 2003).

Provide the names of the important policies and say which one/s you are using in this study. This policy must be part of the literature review.

For the purpose of this study, the following Acts and policies were reviewed:

- The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996, (RSA, 1996)
- The Children's Act, Act No. 38 of 2005, (RSA, 2005)
- The National Integrated Early Childhood Development Policy. (RSA, 2015).
- National Early Learning and Development Standards for children from birth to 4 years (NELDS), (DBE, 2009)

This study aims at pinpointing challenges that teachers and practitioners are currently experiencing in the implementation of the Early Childhood Policy and programmes and to provide turnaround strategies to assist these Grade R teachers and ECD practitioners in its implementation. The study took place in three ECD centres – two are attached to government Foundation Phase schools whilst the third centre is unattached and functions on its own. The policy on which the study was focused was the National Integrated ECD Policy Framework (NIECD) and the Continuing Professional Teacher Development (CPTD) programmes for Grade R teachers, which is an initiative of the Department of Basic Education (DBE).

Continuous professional development (CPD) refers to the process of training and developing professional knowledge and skills through independent, participation-based or interactive learning which allows professionals to improve their capabilities with the help of certified learning. CPD is a critical component of education that allows teachers to stay current with the most recent knowledge in their field. It is critical because it allows children to receive the highest quality education possible, as educators will be fully equipped with the most up-to-date

skills and knowledge to help them thrive both personally and academically. By engaging in reflective CPD, one can pinpoint knowledge gaps and adjust behaviour and actions to achieve intended goals more easily. Reflection is a crucial element of the CPD process because the information and skills required to practice can evolve alongside the career goals. Because CPD programmes for teachers are implemented without involving teachers at the conceptual level, they fail to address the challenges that teachers face (Moloi, 2010:72). Geldenhuys and Oosthuizen (2015) assert that for teachers to continue being effective, they must constantly learn new things and develop individually in order to avoid misalignment between teachers' deficiencies in terms of ability to implement ECD programmes effectively and training they received at CPD programmes.

Moswela (2006:628) found that educators preferred professional development from peers in their own institution over that from outsiders or consultants because the latter may not be familiar with the challenges they face in the real world. This finding was part of a study on continuing education programs for educators in Botswana. To be successful, CPD programmes require communication between educators and persons wishing to enhance their careers. Kutame (2010:97).

First implemented in 2015, the ECE curriculum aimed at enabling employed ECD teachers and ECD practitioners, to provide ECD services in formal ECD centres. This ECE curriculum promotes a child-centred activity-based approach in teaching so that children can gain appropriate scientific skills and attitudes while acquiring knowledge (Nicholas, Rouse & Paatsch, 2021). However, this activity-based approach requires a trained workforce.

The motivation for this study stemmed from the researcher's professional experiences as an Education Specialist involved in policy development. During this time, the researcher collaborated with teachers in all nine provinces on policy implementation issues and discovered that children attended pre-school facilities such as day care centres, crèches, and nursery schools, where the minimum

requirement for a pre-school teacher was a NQF Level 1 qualification (Grade 9). The required trained workforce to implement the policies are thus not available.

## **1.2 THE PROBLEM STATEMENT**

Over the years, the Department of Basic Education (DBE) and school administrators have faced the challenge of increased grade repetition and dropout rates in the education system from Foundation Phase (FP) to Further Education and Training (FET) level. However, with the main emphasis remaining on Grade 12, the root of the problem which lies in early childhood education, is not receiving enough attention. The vast majority of ECD schools/centres simply do not produce the desired outcomes in terms of learner attainment, due to teachers' failure to implement the prescribed ECE programmes and policies within the context of basic education.

According to the literature that was reviewed, some of the ECD teachers/practitioners lack sufficient opportunities for professional development, effective monitoring, and experience results in them being ignorant of the policy on transitioning ECD centres from merely being regarded as day-care centres to official functioning pre-schools and, as a result, they are unlikely to follow the policy prescripts when teaching children. (Bipath & Aina, 2022). Without an ECD workforce that is supported and developed by appropriate CPD programmes, policies cannot be implemented successfully.

In South Africa, there are several reforms and pressure on educational systems to provide high-quality education, but policymakers do not always pay close attention to how well these reforms are conducted.

Feryok (2009), in Malaysia presented a school-based training paradigm in Kenya, wherein qualified instructors collaborate with three peers to impart their knowledge. Challenges faced in Malaysia included a lack of time and resources, understaffing, test and syllabus pressure, a lack of motivation, and a lack of collaboration and support from other instructors. All these impediments prevented

effective and improved teaching and learning, which had a higher negative impact than the programme designers had intended.

The School Management Governance Developers (SMGDs) in South Africa are responsible for ensuring the implementation of the CPD programmes for teachers according to the Employment of Educators Act, 1998: Chapter C, Sub-Section 3.4 (RSA, 1998). SMGDs are expected to contribute to staff development programmes and the coordination of resources to support them, as well as to have a solid understanding of the many alternatives available for such programmes; however, based on the continuous *yo-yo* attainment of learners, this does not appear to be the case (Duke,2011).

Moloi (2010:68) claims that the policies are still failing to provide the desired results since SMGD's attempts continue to express power-coercive relationships that teachers despise. Teachers are still viewed as rational "consumers" of innovation, but they are not consulted on the types of CPD programmes that are offered to them.

Literature reviewed also suggests that capacity building of teachers, parents, the community, the government through its various ministries, as well as non-governmental organisations are key factors for the effective implementation of ECD policies (Mason, 2016: 437- 440). General learner attainment will remain a challenge unless this renewed focus on supporting early childhood teaching and learning is enhanced, by providing professionals with the best available researched evidence on '*what works*' to raise standards through CPD (Sergon, 2011: 28).

According to Allcock et al., (2015) the current approach to capacity building for those at the coalface for successful policy implementation has long been criticized for its shortcomings. The Education, Training and Development Practices Sector Education and Training Authority (ETDP SETA), which facilitates and promotes

the delivery of education, training, and development to improve the skills profile of the Education, Training, and Development (ETD) sector, initially developed Levels 1-5 qualifications for ECD Practitioners. Despite the creation of these qualifications, the Project for Inclusive Early Childhood Care and Education (PIECCE) report (Harrison, 2017) found that training standards and rollout had quality issues. The roll-out is intended to happen either through DHET or through privately registered training institutions with ETDP SETA.

Difficulties arose with monitoring of the quality of training and implementation, furthermore a lack of knowledge about application for accreditation, and dysfunctionality in ETDP SETA, resulted in training organisations offering courses but being unable to issue certificates. (ETDP SETA, 2018: TVET SSP). The credibility of Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) as service providers and the ability of participants to gain from qualifications are both significantly impacted by this.

The acquisition of qualifications is yet another matter of concern (Bridge, 2016). Some of the aspiring ECD teachers are forced to study in English, which is not their mother tongue, and they come from disadvantaged educational backgrounds that do not allow for a strong knowledge base. NQF Levels 4 or 5 may be challenging to complete and have a high attrition rate as a result.

To close this gap and to ensure the creation of a sustainable learning environment, the implementation of continuing professional development (CPD) programmes for ECD teachers and practitioners should be enhanced. (Bantwini, 2009:177).

With the new ECD curriculum being implemented in a rural area where the gap is prevalent, this study aims to provide guidance for ECD teachers and practitioners on how to provide quality learning opportunities for young children.

### 1.3 RESEARCH QUESTION AND AIMS

The importance of implementing constraint-free and sustainable educational policies has long been recognized by policy implementers. (Bantwini, 2009). However, numerous policies are still plagued by delays and non-adherence at implementation stage, which can frequently be attributed to ineffective identification and treatment of constraints during that stage. First, when a constraint is not properly identified during implementation, subsequent conflicts at operational level are inevitable.

The teaching and learning processes are exposed to even more complicated constraints as educational policies today have become increasingly logistically and technically challenging.

Based on the preceding context, the following research question is posed:

*How can the ECD Policy and programme implementation be enhanced to produce sustainable learning environments at selected schools in the Gert Sibande Education district?*

In summary, there is a need for a better understanding of constraints in policy implementation and a structured approach in identifying and demonstrating constraints to ensure a constraint-free policy implementation. More specifically, the following research sub questions need to be addressed:

- (a) What are the barriers associated with implementing various ECD policies and programmes?
- (b) How can constraints in the implementation of ECD programmes be identified and overcome?
- (c) How successful are capacity building approaches for implementing ECD programmes?

(d) Why should the strategy for implementing ECD programmes be enhanced?

The aim of this study was to pinpoint challenges in the implementation of Early Childhood policy towards sustainable learning environments at selected schools in the abovementioned education district.

To achieve this, the following specific objectives were met:

- (a) To identify the barriers encountered in the implementation of ECD programmes.
- (b) To identify and prevent constraints in the ECD programme implementation process.
- (c) To evaluate the efficacy of capacity-building approaches for improving ECD programme implementation.
- (d) To demonstrate and justify the need to enhance the strategy for the effective implementation of ECD programmes.

The subsections that follow explain how each of the objectives will contribute to the overall aim of the study:

#### **1.3.1 Identifying the barriers encountered in the implementation of ECD programmes.**

The first objective of the study was to identify the barriers encountered in the implementation of ECD programmes and comparing what the policy documents say with what the research shows.

#### **1.3.2 Identification and prevention of constraints in the ECD programme implementation process.**

The second objective of the study was to look at the best practices in the implementation of the CPD programmes and policies. This was achieved by looking at such practices from United Kingdom (UK), Ghana, Nigeria and South Africa.

### **1.3.3 Evaluating efficacy of capacity-building approaches for improving ECD programme implementation.**

The section examined the literature to determine the conditions that allow the implementation of successful capacity building initiatives for ECD teachers in the afore-mentioned countries.

### **1.3.4 Demonstrating and justifying the need to enhance the strategy for the effective implementation of ECD programmes.**

The fourth goal of the study was to demonstrate and to justify the need to enhance the strategy for the effective implementation of ECD programmes. It also investigated the threats to the implementation of the strategy in the two schools under investigation. Following the presentation of the study's purpose and objectives, the next section will provide a brief overview of the framework that underpins it.

## **1.4 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK FOR THE STUDY**

This study was based on Donald Schön's (1983) Reflective Practice theory, which he developed in 1983. His theory was based on reflection from the perspective of professional knowledge and learning (Bolton, 2014: 6). Reflective practice, according to Schön (1983), is the practice in which professionals become aware of their implicit knowledge base and learn from their experience (Anderson, Knowles & Gilbourne, 2004).

Schön's (1983) theory that teachers construct their own approach to teaching and reflective practice, encourages teachers to solve problems, make changes, and be adaptable to provide learning environments that meet the needs of each child. Learning based on their beliefs, values and understandings is supported by reflective practice. Reflection is consistent with socio-constructivism, which describes how people construct their worldviews based on their experiences.



Building both teaching and learning depends on the experiences and values that everyone brings to the classroom.

The fundamental tenet of reflective practice is that any reflection necessitates thought, which results in action that depends on the outcome of the thought that took place.

Schön (1983) distinguishes between reflection in action and reflection on action. The reflective practice theory has been applied to a variety of professions, including teaching. It can be viewed from the perspective that by reflecting on actions taken while practicing, both the practical disciplines of teaching and learning can be improved.

As a result, in this study, this framework reinforced the need for ECD teachers/practitioners to reflect on their practice, which can be individual, where one analyses their practice with a view to improve lesson delivery, or group, where the shared practice is discussed to enhance output through CPD. Through critical reflection on practice, better ways of operating could be improved by changing or incorporating new strategies into ECD teaching practice.

According to Bleach (2014: 185-197), the need for teacher CPD stems from the fact that being actively reflective entails jointly identifying problems and putting skills to use to solve them through experience. Professional development for teachers can be divided into two categories: cognitive and affective, which are both key factors in determining teacher efficacy.

The cognitive component relates to the development of pedagogical knowledge and better instructional skills that will support teachers in managing and teaching in the classroom (Bleach, 2014). Muijs et al., (2014) also support the view that a key emotional factor in teacher development is teacher passion and commitment to their profession.

## **1.5 PRELIMINARY LITERATURE REVIEW**

To fulfil the objectives of the proposed study, a literature review approach was adopted as one of the important aspects of the study, and it focused on the following subsections:

- (a) Constraints associated with implementing various ECD programmes,
- (b) Identifying and overcoming constraints in the implementation of ECD programmes,
- (c) The extent of effectiveness of capacity building approaches for implementing ECD programmes; and
- (d) The rationale for enhancing a strategy to implement ECD programmes.

### **1.5.1 Constraints associated with implementing various ECD programmes**

Even though ECD is regarded as an important stage in a child's physical, cognitive, and psycho-social development, educators from various countries continue to face challenges in ECD provisioning (Ige, 2011). The implementation of the national curriculum that each ECD centre must follow is another challenge that various countries are dealing with (Neugebauer, 2009). Educators in the United Kingdom (UK) face inadequate resource structures, and the costs of putting such structure in place are prohibitively expensive (Ige, 2011).

According to Neugebauer (2009), countries such as the United Kingdom continue to face challenges in ensuring that parents participate in their children's learning. This is even though research has shown that parental involvement in their children's learning is beneficial to the learners.

As a result, parents must be encouraged to participate in their children's early learning and care. When parents start to comprehend the value of ECD for their children, it can be very empowering for them. Due to busy schedules, study or

work obligations, some parents in the UK who work, or study full-time find it difficult to be more engaged in their children's learning (Harris & Goodall 2006).

In Nigeria, one of the overarching challenges facing educators is the low teacher quality due to inferior quality training in ECD (Onu et al. 2010; Sooter 2013). ECD centres are privately owned. Corporations and wealthy individuals own the privately held ones. Graduates and individuals with education certificates are mostly employed in cases where wealthy people own ECD centres. Despite this, many ECD centres have few qualified personnel and many unqualified personnel with secondary education, general certificates, and grade two instructors. (Sooter 2013; Oluwafemi et al. 2014). As a result of poor training and low levels of education, Nigerian ECD educators have been found wanting when it comes to using adequately instructional materials and strategies for ECD provisioning (Oduolowu & Oyesomi 2014). The literature further revealed that the vital materials for early childhood classrooms such as toys, charts, TVs/computers were unavailable (Oluwafemi et al. 2014).

Some of the challenges that ECD educators face in Ghana include parental non-participation and commitment to ECD, a lack of teaching staff, inadequate facilities, and institutional barriers (Barnett, 2010). Institutional barriers can be seen in the way ECD is implemented, in government policies and programmes related to ECD, and in how society views ECD (Barnett, 2010).

In South Africa, the specific challenges facing early childhood educators in implementing ECD policies range from poor training of educators in ECD, poor infrastructure, shortage of teaching resources, a standardized curriculum, institutional barriers, less involvement of the private sector and the government inconsistencies in the funding structure (Western Cape Department of Social Development (WCDS) 2010; DBE et al. 2010).

### **1.5.2 Identifying and overcoming constraints in the implementation of ECD programmes**

It is critical to recognize that Grade R is the first year of formal schooling. White Paper 5 (DoE 2001) states that young children's rights to education must be recognized for them to reach their full cognitive, emotional, social, and physical potential.

According to Atmore (2007) since 2001, the number of children in Grade R has tripled, with government spending on education and social development significantly increasing, and 58% of children in ECD centres nationwide now receiving financial aid. Early childhood education is being provided to more children than ever before, and the quality of that education is also improving.

Notwithstanding the progress made in early childhood development and in Grade R provision since 1994, children in South Africa still face significant challenges. The focus here on infrastructure, nutrition, programme options, ECD teachers, institutional capacity, and funding.

There is no doubt about the fact that the implementation of ECE is faced with diverse challenges which need to be given adequate consideration by relevant stakeholders to implement ECE programmes successfully.

### **1.5.3 The extent of effectiveness of capacity building approaches for implementing ECD programmes**

The success of sustained expansion of quality ECD programming depends critically on the capacity in practice and the capacity in knowledge among all relevant stakeholders, including designers, planners, trainers, managers, practitioners, monitors and evaluators, funders, and parents. Building teachers'

individual and collective capacity to promoting children's learning proves critical for sustainable learning (Hall & Hord 2015; Stoll et al., 2006).

The abilities of direct practitioners, such as social workers, nurses, and preschool instructors, are referred to as capacity in practice. The expertise of legislators, program creators, educational institutions, implementing managers, funders and contributors, parents, and community people is equally important. To effectively perform their duties, each of these needs to be well informed about the bigger picture and how they fit into it. To ensure quality sustainability at scale, it is necessary to design capacity development initiatives beforehand and to keep them in place once the scaling process is finished. This applies to both practice and knowledge.

It is imperative to guarantee that ECD principals, supervisors, teachers, and members of the governing body have the necessary training in order to operate ECD centres that are effective, efficient, and sustainable in the education and care of young children. Several South African universities are currently involved in Early Childhood Education teacher-training programmes and recommend pre-service teacher training. Most of these universities organize and implement the learning and teaching areas using the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS). However, many pre-service teachers are unable to effectively impart ECD content during the teaching practicum (Arasomwan & Mashiya 2018), because they lack pedagogical strategies and thus have difficulty practically implementing the theory.

#### **1.5.4 The rationale for enhancing the implementation of ECD programmes**

The Education White Paper 5 on Early Childhood Education (DOE, 2001:2) makes a few compelling arguments for investing in ECD, including, but not limited to the following:

- (a) Early years are crucial for the growth of a person's potential because they lay the groundwork for later or lifelong learning.
- (b) The skills of South Africa's population, which are formed and shaped early in life, determine its place in the global economy.
- (c) Early intervention helps to reduce the social and economic disparities, as well as race and gender inequalities, which divide South African society.

Supporting early childhood development has the potential to improve everything from growth and development to school performance and life productivity (World Bank, 2022). ECD programmes are beneficial, but the quality of ECD in South Africa varies greatly and many young children find it difficult to access such facilities due to issues like travel time to ECD centres, cost, and poverty.

Geographically, ECD programmes and centres are not evenly and effectively dispersed, with a disproportionate number of centres in urban areas and not enough in rural ones. Many ECD centres in rural communities are also of inferior quality and lack access to many resources that children require, such as health clinics, nutrition programmes, speech therapists, occupational therapists, and physiotherapists.

Given the foregoing, it is imperative that the relevant departments decide on implementation of enhanced policies, laws, programmes and the allocation of sufficient funding for ECD, because these are the years that receive the least attention worldwide, including in South Africa.

The analysis of the literature showed that there are still several challenges with ECD provisioning. The difficulties ECD encounters affect how its policies are put into practice. Government departments have taken steps to provide ECD services, but they are not supporting teachers in putting ECD policies into practice.

## **1.6 METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN**

The researcher used the interpretivism paradigm to investigate the nature of continuous professional development programmes for ECD teachers. This approach opened the door to multiple methods and different worldviews, as well as to different forms of data collection and analysis procedures that can be utilized (Creswell, 2017), such as questionnaires, interviews, group discussions, and observations.

Using multiple sources of information allowed the researcher to have in-depth data from participants on the nature of continuous professional development programmes happening in schools meant to support ECD teachers so that they could deliver effective lessons that benefit learners at the reception stage of their learning.

### **1.6.1 Research design**

A qualitative research design was employed in the study which will allow the researcher to collect qualitative data and then integrate it in the interpretation of the overall results (Yin, 2013). The design will provide a broader insight on how public primary schools and implement ECD policy and programmes to empower ECD teachers to be competent and understand strategies to deliver in various settings.

### **1.6.2 Research methodology**

This study adopted qualitative research methods to understand the perceptions and experiences of ECD national, provincial and district officials in implementing

the ECD policies in their natural context. According to Creswell and Poth (2017), qualitative research is a naturalist approach that seeks to understand the participants' real world.

Furthermore, the qualitative research approach was used to get rich and in-depth information on the views of ECD officials from national, provincial and district offices, including ECD managers and practitioners. The researcher selected this approach to draw meaning from participants' lived experiences in implementing the ECD policies (Almalki, 2016). The researcher observed, recorded and analysed data from the notions that emerged from the participants to understand how ECD policies and programmes are implemented in the selected ECD centres. Creswell and Poth (2017) concur that themes and categories are not pre-determined but emerge from the collected data.

Finding themes - that is, significant or intriguing patterns in the data - and using these themes to address the research or make a point about a problem are the objectives of a thematic analysis. A strong thematic analysis does much more than just summarize the data; it analyzes and makes meaning of it.

### **1.6.3 Population**

A selected population of Amersfoort, eZamokuhle township village, in Gert Sibande Municipality was chosen as a population sample because it represented a community of interest where there is diverse rural and semi-urban socio-economic setting. Participants selected were eight ECD practitioners in centres attached to two primary schools and one independent ECD centre as well as two ECD centre managers working in each of the selected centres. According to Tongco (2007), a population of interest is a primary source of information in a research study. Therefore, the researcher selected the aforesaid population because of their knowledge and experience in the topic of the research study.



#### **1.6.4 Sampling**

The study selected a total of two ECD centres attached to public primary schools as well as one privately owned ECD centre, using cluster and purposive sampling techniques. Additionally, the researcher used cluster sampling to ensure the two geographical and administrative educational zones in the district are represented through random sampling from each cluster.

Each of the administrative educational zones has demographic distinctions in terms of resource allocation (financial and human). Purposive sampling was used to select those schools that are accessible and where the teachers have the experience in working with Grade R learners. These are likely to provide desirable data for the study (Maree, 2007). The District Education Inspector was approached to assist in selecting schools that have a reputation of in-service training for Grade R teachers in early childhood education programmes.

The research study was inductive and iterative due to the lack of insight into policy implementation and the dedication to a grounded approach to knowledge development in policy-relevant areas. Individual semi-structured interviews with ECD teachers and practitioners in pre-school settings who frequently interact physically with Grade R students made up the study. To spread knowledge of and spark interest in the research, it also included additional ethnographic techniques like reflexive interviews, informal group discussions, and participant observation.

The sample consisted of teachers and practitioners who had overseen ECE for at least a year, as the goal of this research was to develop a plan for improving the efficient implementation of ECE programmes for ECD Practitioners at ECD schools in the Gert Sibande Education District.

The study was conducted over a period of six months. A total of six ECD practitioners, from the three various ECD centres, two non-practitioners, of which one was responsible for administration in one of the centres while the other one was a member of the School Governing Body and two ECD Learning Facilitators

(LFs), from the education district made up the team of participants in the study regarding the enhancement of the implementation of the ECE programmes. These 10 participants worked as a team to design an effective implementation strategy for the ECE programmes for ECD Practitioners in the 2 schools with ECD centres and the one independent centre.

The researcher invited the selected participants to a meeting to plan the way forward. The study was outlined and suitable dates and locations for conducting interviews were considered during the sessions with each participant. At the end of the meeting the researcher informed participants that participation was voluntary and asked participants about their willingness to participate in the study. Participants who were willing were then asked to sign consent forms. (Appendix A and Appendix B).

## **1.7 DATA COLLECTION**

### **1.7.1 Data collection instruments**

The researcher used a variety of data collection instruments in order to validate the accuracy of the information (Creswell & Poth, 2017). Furthermore, Bryman and Cramer (2012) affirm that qualitative research requires different measures to validate information. Therefore, a collection of varied instruments was used which included, semi-structured interviews, writing notes, observation of the interviewees' environment to understand the ECD participants' lived experiences in implementing the ECD policies. The semi-structured interviews were conducted with the ECD, and district officials. In addition, ECD Learning Facilitators and practitioners were interviewed to investigate the research questions and collect data on participants' experiences in their natural environment at the ECD centres.

Semi-structured questionnaires were administered to school the District Learning facilitators, the ECD practitioners and to the district officials to determine the nature of constraints associated with implementing various ECD programmes.

To maintain anonymity, pseudonyms were used to refer to the case study centres.

## **1.8 DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION**

In qualitative research, data analysis is an ongoing process which entails the following: observation of patterns, collecting data from participants, organising, preparation of data for analysis, reading through the entire set of data to pinpoint persistent problems and derive an overall understanding of the data (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Mayo, 2013). The information gathered from the questionnaires was coded and analysed. To identify the major concerns that would surface, the qualitative data was grouped into common themes, tales were written, and answers were tallied and ranked (Mertens, 2010). The study's conclusions were compiled from the problems identified through observations, questionnaires, interviews, and document analysis.

The study adopted a thematic analysis strategy by reading the notes, grouping words into categories and themes emerging from data, generating a description of the setting or people, identifying themes, and interpreting the meaning of data (Stenfors-Hayes, Hult & Dahlgren, 2013). To analyse the collected data, the researcher developed a coding system and used it to transcribe the recorded data. The patterns in the codes (categories) were examined, followed by the identification and description of themes to comprehend the meanings from the participants' perspectives. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), which corresponded to the RP, was used to gain a better understanding of the meanings from the perspectives of the participants. Member checking was also performed to avoid misinterpretation of the spoken words.

The four study objectives that serve as a framework for the presentation and discussion of the findings were utilized to systematize the conversation:

- The challenges posed by putting ECD programmes into practice.
- Identify and prevent drawbacks in the ECD programme implementation process.

- Assess the effectiveness of strategies for increasing capacity to enhance the execution of ECD programmes.
- Prove and defend why improving the plan is necessary to carry out ECD programmes in an efficient manner.

When selecting the most effective programmes, one should consider the proficiency of the ECD practitioners participating in them. Therefore, to run ECD centres that are effective, efficient, and long-lasting in providing care for young children, it is imperative that supervisors, practitioners, and principals acquire training.

### **1.9 DEFINITION OF OPERATIONAL CONCEPTS**

The implementation of curriculum policies and programmes in early childhood education has a significant impact on teacher performance. Clear and complete execution of curricular policies provides instructors with a solid platform for constructing learning programmes that meet the needs and characteristics of learners at their developmental stage. In the context of early childhood education, a well-integrated curriculum provides a clear foundation for ECD practitioners to create effective learning programmes. A structured and planned curriculum enables practitioners to comprehend and identify important learning objectives, as well as select methods, tactics, and materials that are appropriate for children's needs.

With the proper curriculum policy in place, teachers can create learning programmes that focus on children's overall development, including cognitive, physical, emotional, and social components. Teachers can select activities and learning experiences that are exciting and relevant to children's development, so helping them develop the skills, knowledge, and attitudes required at their stage of development.

Aside from that, an integrated curriculum enables teachers to incorporate multiple areas of learning, such as language, mathematics, arts, and social science, into daily learning activities. This helps children build a more holistic awareness of

their surroundings and broadens their learning opportunities (Yasa, Kartika, & Cahyani, 2022).

In other words, implementing good curriculum policies in early childhood education gives instructors with clear guidelines in constructing learning experiences that are appropriate for children's needs and features. An integrated and structured curriculum assists instructors in establishing effective learning programmes that focus on the whole development of children. Thus, curriculum policy has a significant impact on teacher effectiveness in early childhood education.

Borrowed from Korea's curriculum, this can be illustrated by the table below which shows that certain knowledge (Know), skills (Do), and attitudes/values/behaviours (Be) function as an umbrella over the entire curriculum (Drake, Reid, & Kolohon, 2014).

| <b>KNOW</b> | <b>DO</b>                          | <b>BE</b>                                        |
|-------------|------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|
| skills      | and<br>attitudes/values/behaviours | act as an umbrella over<br>the entire curriculum |

Table 2. A representation of the Know/Do/Be (KDB) Umbrella for Korea's Curriculum (Drake, Reid, & Kolohon, 2014).

Such unifying frameworks make curriculum integration easier. The ECD practitioners can see the big picture – the KDB. Curriculum designers can align their curriculum with the framework and use it as a bridge across disciplines.

### **1.9.1 Enhancing**

Enhancing refers to increasing the progress towards producing the results that the policy intends to achieve. In addition, strengthening the implementation of ECD policies refers to giving directives to reinforce activities by assigning duties and responsibilities to the implementers (Hounghbo, Coleman, Zweekhorst, De Cock Buning, Medenou & Bunders, 2017).

According to Washington and Mintrom (2018), strengthening implementation involves building communication and dialogue among policy stakeholders through meetings and workshops. In the context of the study, strengthening the implementation of ECD policy implies implementing the ECD policy to effectively attain its objectives for quality, translating policy goals into operational guidelines and successfully producing the results (Washington & Mintrom, 2018).

### **1.9.2 Implementation**

Implementation is the carrying out of plans into actions; it is an evidence-based process. In addition, implementation can be explained as an execution practice of a plan with a specific standard and method. Therefore, it must follow preliminary thinking before it can happen (Gagliardi, Brouwer & Bhattacharya, 2014). According to DeLeon and DeLeon (2002), implementation occurs only when those who are primarily affected are active in the planning and execution of programmes. In addition, Yeaton and Sechrest (1981) state that implementation is the degree to which treatment is delivered as intended. Implementation in the context of this study focuses on how ECD policies are executed as intended by stakeholders.

### **1.9.3 Policies**

Policies refer to regulations, frameworks, principles, commitment and concerted efforts between government departments and ECD stakeholders to implement ECD policy (DBE, 2015). According to Khan and Khandaker (2016:238) “a policy entails a broad statement of future goals and actions, and it expresses the ways and means of attaining them”. Furthermore, a policy can be defined as a “purposeful course of action that an actor or set of actors follow in dealing with a problem or matter concerned” (Khan et al., 2016:539). Ali (2006) explains that policies aim at bringing behavioral change at an individual level. Furthermore, according to Khan and Khandaker (2016), policy implementation involves

translating set goals and objectives into practice. In the context of this study, policy refers to legal documents developed by governmental departments to ensure that the vision of government is implemented across the education system in the country. The researcher will be referring to policies that were developed by the Departments of Basic Education, Social Development and the National Department of Health which are the Integrated Early Childhood Development Policy (NIECD) and the Draft Early Childhood Development Policy and Health.

#### **1.9.4 ECD Programmes**

These are planned activities designed to promote the emotional, mental, spiritual, moral, physical and social development of children from birth to nine years. They provide one or more collection of services and support to children and/or caregivers to support ECD. These programmes can also be viewed as curriculum because they contain the curriculum that must be implemented – the actual content of the teaching. ECD programmes can be offered at, an ECD centres, Child and Youth Centres and at non-centres based ECD programmes.

#### **1.9.5 Curriculum**

Curriculum can be viewed as the result of several approaches to interpreting the interaction between schools, government, and society. In the current study, the term 'curriculum' refers to the history of national curricula in ECD as part of nation-building efforts. As a result, curriculum is more than just a consistent body of information within a certain discipline. It is also about meaning making and negotiation among various actors in society and the educational system, such as politicians, national education authorities, and instructors.

### **1.9.6 Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE)**

The term "early childhood care and education" (ECCE) describes a broad range of initiatives designed to give children from birth to age nine years old an all-encompassing approach to their successful physical, cognitive, and social development (UNESCO, 2007). According to UNESCO (2007), "early childhood care and education" (ECCE) refers to a wide range of programmes intended to provide children from birth to age nine with a comprehensive approach to their successful physical, cognitive, and social development.

### **1.9.7 Early Childhood Development (ECD)**

Early Childhood Development is a comprehensive approach to programmes and policies for the process of emotional, mental, spiritual, moral, physical and social development of children from birth to nine years. It seeks to protect children's rights to develop cognitively, emotionally, socially, and physically to the fullest extent possible.

### **1.9.8 ECD Centre**

Any building or premises maintained or used, whether or not for gain, for the admission, protection and temporary or partial care of more than six children away from their parents. Depending on registration, an ECD centre can admit babies, toddlers and/or pre-school aged children such as those in Grade R. The term ECD centre can refer to crèche, day care centres for young children, a playgroup, a pre-school, after school care etc. ECD centres are sometimes referred to as ECD sites.

### **1.9.9 Grade R**

The Basic Education Department (DBE) has identified three models of provision of Reception Year/ Grade R: those within the public primary school system, those within community-based sites and the independent provision of reception year



programmes. Grade R refers to the year before Grade 1. Participants in this study were from the public primary school system and a community-based site.

#### **1.9.10 ECD Practitioner:**

All individuals involved in providing services in homes and ECD centres, such as educators, trainers, facilitators, lecturers, caretakers, and development officers - including those who are qualified by experience - are referred to as ECD practitioners.

### **1.9 ROLE OF THE RESEARCHER**

The researcher played an instrumental role in the data collection process. Sanjari, Bahramnezhad, Fomani, Shoghi & Cheraghi (2014) concur that the researcher is considered to be instrumental in the data collection process. I also perceived my role in the research process as being two-fold, firstly being an active co-participant and an observer where I was able to engage with the ECD centre managers, practitioners, district facilitators and PED and DBE officials during the interview sessions. Secondly as a non-active participant I was able to observe, reflect and interpret the lived experiences of ECD managers, practitioners and PED and DBE officials.

#### **1.10 ETHICAL CONSIDERATION**

To comply with the ethical requirements for conducting a research study, permission was sought to conduct the research from the Faculty of Education of University of Mpumalanga's (UMP) research and ethics committees, the UMP ethics committee as well as from the Mpumalanga Department of Basic Education. (Maree, 2013).

Prior to the commencement of the fieldwork the purpose of the research was outlined, and all participants were given consent forms that were translated into a vernacular commonly used in the schools chosen as a case, to sign. On the

consent forms, participants were unequivocally assured that they would not be forced to participate. They received guarantees of confidentiality about the data they were asked to provide, as well as notice that they might leave the study at any moment and without explanation. There would be no unfavourable effects from such withdrawal for them or their kids.

## **1.11 LAYOUT OF CHAPTERS**

The layout of the study is as follows:

### **CHAPTER 1: Introduction and background**

This chapter provided an introduction and background to the study. It also included the rationale for undertaking this research and the research questions guiding the investigation. The definition of key concepts and an overview of the selected theoretical framework were presented in this chapter.

### **CHAPTER 2: Literature review**

This chapter offered a review of relevant literature with a focus on the phenomena under investigation. Furthermore, Chapter 2 explored the study in a wider context by reviewing the existing trends and debates relating to the strengthening of ECD policies locally, nationally and internationally. It concluded with a description of the effect of ECD programmes as a conceptual framework to explore the research problem.

### **CHAPTER 3: Research methodology**

This section described the research method and design in the collection and analysis of data. The section also highlighted the sample and sampling procedure. An explanation of an integrated process used by Creswell and Poth (2017), in collecting data and analysis within an interpretative paradigm, was explored in this chapter. Lastly, ethical considerations, validity and verification of data was discussed.

#### **CHAPTER 4: Analysis of Data, Presentation and Discussion of findings**

The results of the study and major findings which are based on a thematic analysis are discussed in this chapter. In addition, extracts of the raw data were included to validate and support the findings.

#### **CHAPTER 5: Conclusion and recommendation**

This chapter includes the contribution, strengths and limitations of the study. The conclusion drawn in this chapter was based on the key findings of the study and its implications. Finally, in this chapter, recommendations are made on how to strengthen the implementation of ECD policy and programmes to improve quality and suggestions for further research.

#### **SUMMARY**

Chapter one provided an overview of the study, including all important facets such as background, key concepts, theoretical framework, preliminary literature and methodology. Chapter two continues with a more detailed presentation of the theoretical framework and literature

## CHAPTER 2

### THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND REVIEW OF LITERATURE

#### 2.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter focused on orientation and framework of the study. It detailed the background to the research problem and the purpose, aim and objectives of the study. Chapter 2 offers a review of relevant literature on the implementation of Early Childhood Development (ECD). In this chapter, the overall topic to be investigated, outlines the approach taken for the literature review which is based on the research question: *“How can the ECD Policy and programme implementation be enhanced to produce sustainable learning environments at selected schools in the Gert Sibande Education district?”* The literature study is further explored through the sub-questions,

- What are the typical constraints associated with implementing various ECD policies and programmes?
- How can constraints in the implementation of ECD programmes be identified and overcome?
- How successful are capacity building approaches for implementing ECD programmes?
- Why should the strategy for implementing ECD programmes be enhanced?

Chapter 2 in addition explores the importance of ECD policies and the need for enhancing the implementation of ECD policies and programmes to yield the intended outcomes. The chapter also covers the actual measures of enhancing the implementation of ECD policies and programmes and the challenges experienced in implementing those programmes. It also argues the evolution of the problem based on the "gap" or "need" defined in the literature from its origination to its current form. The review further includes the measures adopted

by South Africa, Nigeria and Ghana to enhance the implementation of ECD policy strategies and methods to overcome constraints associated with implementing various ECD programmes as well as on how they can be identified and be circumvented.

The purpose of reviewing the literature is to create awareness of the most recent theories and findings on a particular topic and to encourage further research into a subject that has received little or no attention. It is against this background that this chapter informs the study by firstly providing a theoretical framework and then a literature review on policy implementation of early childhood education and care for children in Grade R in ECE centres as well as at the Grade R level in schools. The main aim of the review is to provide a comprehensive overview of what is known about effectiveness of early childhood education policy implementation to support and complement the analysis and interpretation of the data to be included in the study.

## **2.2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

This study is based on Donald Schön's (1983) Reflective Practice theory, whose theory was based on reflection from the perspective of professional knowledge and learning (Bolton, 2014: 6). Schön (1983), who drew inspiration from Dewey in his work, is best known for his theory of reflecting both on and within one's practice. His theory was based on reflection from the perspective of professional knowledge and learning (Bolton, 2014: 6).

Reflection is an activity or process that involves recalling, considering, and evaluating an experience, usually in a broader context. It is a reaction to a previously occurring event that is critically examined. But when reference is made to reflection in educational settings, it has many aspects. In the educational system, there is a need to define reflection in both the processes, i.e., teaching and learning.

The important thing is that these two processes are not independent and rely on each other. Therefore, if reference is made of reflection in the teaching process, it will affect learning as well, and as soon as learning is affected, it will also affect teaching. Because the reflection of learning is nothing more than the result of teaching that occurred in an educational setting, it will affect the teaching. Learning reflection merely serves as feedback for teachers and will aid in the quality of instruction. This framework is therefore befitting in that it will allow the ECD policy implementers to reflect on how the ECD policies and programmes are being implemented.

Situations where one can reflect while acting, include those instances during teaching where one thinks quickly, acts without hesitation, and considers the next step, as shown below:

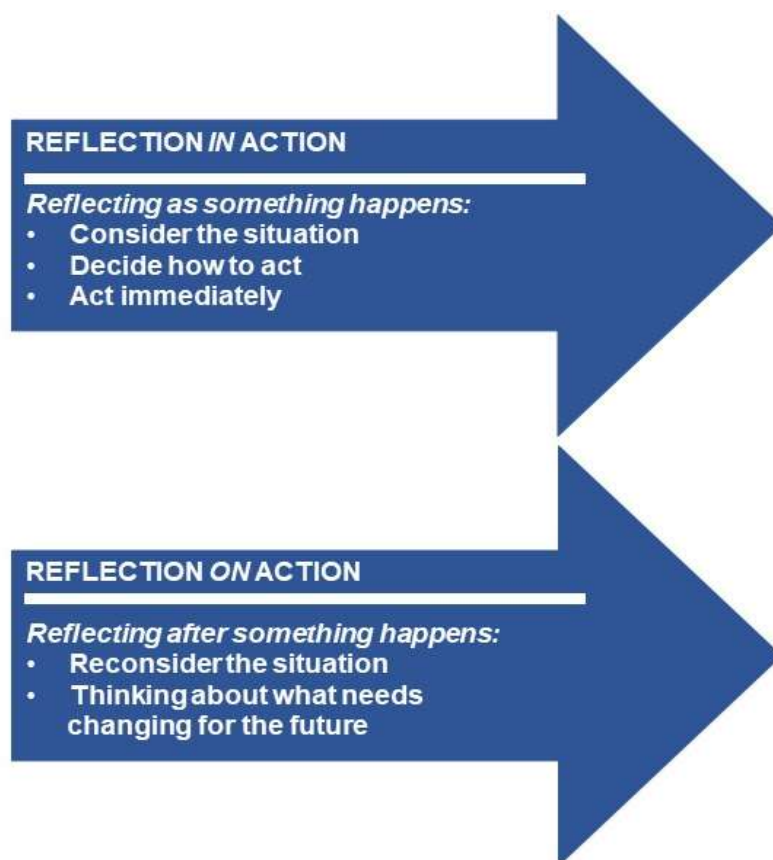


Figure 1: Reflection on action

Source: Al-Amrani Said Nasser (2021)

According to the above figure, ECD teachers might view reflection-in-action as a crucial quality to acquire self-awareness is a continuous, dynamic process that encourages educators to consider all facets of professional practice, including whether all children and families are included, with candor and critical thinking, which can be developed through the reflective CPD courses offered by the Department of Basic Education. It guides educators to gather information from different perspectives to gain insights that will support, inform and enrich their decision-making about each child's learning.

Teachers and practitioners of early childhood education can become more aware of their own professional actions through the practice of reflection-in-action (Erginel, 2006). Participating in reflection-in-action will also assist ECD practitioners and teachers in recognizing and correcting their own professional errors made while instructing. Reflective educators regularly analyzed their professional beliefs.

Teachers can more easily comprehend their reasons for supporting ECD policies teachers can benefit greatly from self-reflection (Spiller, 2011). Reflection will help teachers develop standardized responses for any given situation in the classroom (Peters, 1991).

Reflective practices can also empower teachers to become successful decision makers who take responsibility for their actions. Reflective practices led teachers to meet the learning needs of students in a better way (Zeichner, & Liston: 2013).

Schön's ideas from ECD perspective have been used as this wisdom tradition has much to say about reflection and its relation to practitioners, and his views on reflection-in-action will also be summarized and critiqued. Schön (1987:31) defines reflective practice as a "dialogue of thinking and doing through which one becomes more skillful.

The foundational idea behind reflective practice is that any reflection necessitates thought, which results in action that is based on the outcome of the thought that took place. It serves as the nexus between contemplation and action. (Thompson & Pascal, 2011). Schön distinguishes between reflection in action and reflection. Teaching has benefited from the use of the reflective practice theory. It can be viewed from the perspective that by reflecting on actions taken while practicing, both the practical disciplines of teaching and learning can be improved. Reflection helps teachers evaluate their current practices, identify areas for improvement, become better decision-makers, and deal with ambiguity, stress, and constantly changing circumstances. It also encourages teachers to confront and challenge their current conceptions of the teaching and learning process.

Therefore, this theory was supported by the findings of this study as it emphasizes the necessity for teachers to reflect on their practice which implementing ECD policies and programmes. This reflection can be individual, in which case the teacher examines their own practice when implementing ECD policies with the aim of improving lesson delivery, or group-based, in which case the shared practice is discussed to improve output through CPD.

If ECD educators and practitioners can critically reflect on how they implement ECD policy mandates, they may be able to improve and initiate better ways of operating by changing/incorporating new strategies into their ECD teaching practice. Being actively reflective entails collaboratively identifying problems and implementing skills to solve problems through experiences, bringing in change or adapting it, thus the need for teacher CPD (Bleach, 2014).

Professional development for teachers can be divided into two categories: cognitive and affective, which are both important factors in determining teacher efficacy. (Muijs, Kyriakides & Werf, 2014: 231–256) According to (Muijs et al., 2014), the cognitive component relates to the development of pedagogical knowledge and better instructional skills that will support teachers in managing



and teaching in the classroom. A crucial emotional factor in teacher development is teachers' passion and commitment to their profession.

When faced with the immediate demands of the school and the classroom, beginning ECD educators and practitioners may quite naturally place emphasis (and expect emphasis to be placed) on achieving competence in a limited notion of the language-game of teaching (Elliott, Stemler, Sternberg, Grigorenko, & Hoffman, 2011:99).

According to Philpott (2014:12), supply-side learning, in contrast to demand-side learning, "what is learned, how and when, is determined by the providers of the learning," which may mean that "teachers are being asked to make sense of ideas and models that do not yet relate to any experiences they have had" (Philpott, 2014:12).

Examining the myriad terminology of practitioner research, its philosophical foundation, and its potential impact reveals some of the challenges and opportunities for establishing methodological quality criteria. These concepts serve as the foundation for the subsequent literature review and methodology of this study.

The importance of Reflective Theory as a framework for this study contributed to the practice of early childhood learning by pointing out how reflection impacts learning and helps ECD learners to learn by increasing the depth of knowledge, identifying the areas that need improvement, personalizing and contextualizing knowledge, providing comparative references in learning, and helping ECD learners see the structural connections in knowledge and creating social connections among them.

This framework provided foundational ideas for designing reflective activities to promote early childhood teaching and learning in an ECD learning environment.

This framework also provided practical suggestions about how to embed reflections in ECE activities to support learners' gaining different levels of knowledge.

## **2.3 LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.3.1 Perspectives of early childhood development**

To improve integrated early childhood development (ECD) services, laws and policies need to be enhanced, claim Richter, Daelmans, Lombardi, Heymann, Boo, Behman, Chunling, Lucas, Perez Escamilla, Dua, and Bhutta (2017). Government regulations are the essential socioeconomic factors that determine a high-quality, healthy living environment, cognitive stimulation, and resources for early childhood development, according to the aforementioned authors.

According to Cortázar (2015), early childhood education research and policy have become more visible as a result of the positive impact of early childhood programmes on individuals' future development and the potential impact of early childhood education on reducing educational inequalities. Cortázar, (2015) further asserts that because of these developments, policymakers all over the world are emphasizing the importance of increasing access to early childhood care and education while also raising the standard of these programmes, particularly for those aimed at children from low-income families.

### **2.3.2 The importance of early childhood education and care**

According to Schweid (2016), early childhood - from birth to school entry - was ignored as a state policy concern worldwide during most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The researcher in question continues by stating that although children were once considered to be invisible to the state, they were viewed as extensions of their parents within the larger family system. Because they lack adult competency,

young children have been developing passively and under the guidance of their parents or families, according to study by Garbadino (2017) and Reynaert and Roose (2015). This led to the establishment of child protection legislation by western countries at the beginning of the 20th century, which changed the environment in which children lived (Reynaert & Roose, 2015).

When an international conference on Early Childhood Development (ECD) was convened in Ruschlikon, Switzerland in 1998, this reform signalled yet another change in the 21st century. International guidelines for early childhood education and care were discussed at the symposium (Gove & Black, 2016). For the first time, ECD specialists from 28 different countries came together to talk about and create global policies and initiatives for working with children under the age of four (Gove & Black, 2016).

As a result, worldwide efforts and attention were focused on children's early years in 1990. The United Nations World Summit was held in 2021, and 196 countries pledged to improve the survival, protection, and development of children worldwide (UNESCO, 2000). In this context, a Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) were adopted at the United Nations World Summit. Moreover, the international community endorsed the World proclamation on Education for All at Jomtien in Thailand (UNESCO, 2000), expanding upon the proclamation. This was a turning point in the history of the children's rights movement, which saw children as autonomous, engaged agents of their own lives (Theobald, 2019). The significance of a child's existence increased throughout this period, when several countries recognized children's rights, according to Gove and Black (2016).

Thus, early childhood development (ECD) was at last included in the agenda of international policy. According to the scholars Black, Walker, Fernald, Anderson, DiGirolamo, Lu, McCoy, Fink, Shawar, Shiffman, and Devercelli (2017), governments around the world identify the rights of early children as a universal

and interconnected set of rights. In this context, a global platform is being established to put pressure on governments to deliver on global pledges to provide quality care and education to young children in preparation for formal schooling. Numerous national and international research initiatives have demonstrated the significance of early childhood care and education in fortifying governmental commitments. For example, writers argue that early childhood development (ECD) helps children realise their full potential and generates significant economic benefits for the nations where they are implemented (Rebecca, Sayre & Amanda E. Devercelli & Michelle J. Neuman & Quentin Wodon, 2015; Boyden & Dercon, & Singh, 2012; Ruhm & Waldfogel, 2012).

In addition to lowering poverty and increasing children's chances of success in life, Atmore et al. (2012) claim that early childhood care and education directly invests in human capital. Vorster et al. (2016) support these views by stating that children need high-quality care and education to thrive in life and contribute to the long-term economic development of their respective nations.

Furthermore, according to Zelazo and Lyons (2012) and Atmore et al. (2012), proper ECD intervention can be a mitigating factor that leads to children's poor educational results and economic inequality. According to researchers Mbarathi et al. (2016), Biersteker (2012), the first four years of life are a time of dynamic growth during which foundational abilities can be developed. Additionally, a child's formative years can be a window of opportunity to enhance learning, development, and care Biersteker (2012). Children go through a phase of academically, socially, emotionally, and physically. Thus, providing young children with high-quality early care and education is essential to preparing them for primary and secondary schooling.

Moreover, Sayre et al. (2015) and Jamieson, Berry, and Lake (2017) concur that organized learning activities and a developmentally appropriate setting to enhance the caregiving environment are critical components of bolstering the

implementation of ECD policies. Researcher Biersteker (2012) explains the predicament that the majority of children in vulnerable communities' experience as a result of an inadequate environment for providing care. She contends that young children who are not reared in a loving environment are susceptible to long-term disabilities that may be expensive and challenging to treat when they get to school age.

Furthermore, young children's capacity to function at their best and achieve the desired learning outcome will be impacted by a dearth of high-quality early childhood development facilities (Biersteker, 2012). According to Mbarathi et al. (2016), Atmore et al. (2012), and Britto (2012), resolving social disparities is essential to ensuring that young children receive high-quality care and education. This includes providing social services, health care, and education. Sufficient infrastructure, nutrition, sanitation, facilities, and high-quality early childhood development programmes are required to promote holistic development and lifelong learning (Atmore et al., 2012).

According to researchers, investing in ECD helps to create a sound foundation and can benefit both young children and society (Wangila, 2017; Sayre, Devercelli, Neuman, & Wodon, 2015; Atmore et al., 2012). As a result, investment in ECD can be used to impact policy outcomes by increasing early childhood education and care, particularly in underserved populations. As a result, the amount that nations invest in early childhood care and education determines the amount of investment in young children. As a result of these factors, most governments around the world, including Finland, Botswana, and South Africa, have recognised that education begins at birth and have dedicated to improving the development of young children.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), which outlines children's rights to high-quality care and education, provides compelling evidence in favour of early childhood development (ECD) programmes around the globe

(Jamieson et al., 2017; Biersteker, 2012). As a result, early childhood care and education has become a medium for improving young children's physical, emotional, and cognitive development, particularly in under-resourced areas, to give them a better start in life.

Effective ECD programmes would be those that are bench-marked on comprehensive policies regulating the conditions and provisions towards efficacious implementation of ECD in schools. Sun et al. (2015) explain that effective government policies must be context - sensitive. In response, many countries, including South Africa have set forth ECD policies to operationalize and regulate processes and operations of ECD programmes. These policies should be sensitive to the needs of all young children, including those living with disabilities.

Education is the primary means of bridging the gap between the global socioeconomic position of states, according to Álvarez, Angelini, López-Lull, and Tasso, (2019). For this reason, there is a need to increase the execution of policies.

### **2.3.3 Constraints associated with implementing various ECD programmes**

Although early childhood development (ECD) is seen as a critical stage in a child's overall physical, cognitive, and psycho-social growth, educators around the world still face difficulties in providing ECD services (Ige, 2011).

The resource structures available to educators in the United Kingdom (UK) are insufficient, and the expenses associated with erecting these buildings are prohibitive (Ige, 2011). According to Cavallera *et al.* (2019), several countries, including Finland, Botswana, and South Africa, consistently strive to implement genuine policies to ensure accountability and produce believable results for stakeholders, including teachers, administrators, parents, and students. However,

the approaches to developing the ECD policies these countries would implement might differ (Cavallera et al., 2019).

The inability to apply to the national curriculum, which is required for all ECD centres, is another problem that various nations are facing. (Neugebauer,2009). Bukaliya and Mubika (2012) cite Myers (1982) as saying that international recognition of ECD is still relatively recent, especially in less developed nations. Not every nation has come to understand the significance of ECD just yet.

It is still difficult in nations like the UK to get parents involved in their children's education (Neugebauer 2009). This is true even though research has shown that parents' involvement in their young children's education benefits them. As a result, parents must be inspired to participate in their children's early education and care. As parents start to realize how important ECD is for their children's welfare, this may be quite empowering. Due to their hectic schedules and full-time work or study commitments, some parents in the UK find it challenging to be more involved in their children's education (Harris and Goodall 2006).

One of the main issues facing educators in Nigeria is the low caliber of teachers as a result of inadequate early childhood development (ECD) training (Onu et al. 2010; Sooter 2013). The majority of ECD centres are privately operated. The privately held ones are owned by wealthy individuals and businesses. When wealthy individuals own early childhood development centres, most jobs are held by graduates and those with education credentials. Despite this, many ECD centres employ a large number of unqualified individuals with general certificates, secondary education, and experience as grade two educators in addition to a small number of certified employees (Sooter 2013; Oluwafemi et al. 2014). Nigerian ECD educators have not been able to provide adequate instructional materials and strategies for ECD delivery due to low levels of education and inadequate training (Oduolowu & Oyesomi 2014). According to Oluwafemi et al. (2014), the literature also showed that toys, charts, TVs, and computers—all essential supplies for early childhood classrooms—were not available.

The lack of parental involvement and dedication to early childhood education, the lack of teaching staff, inadequate facilities, and institutional hurdles are some of the issues that Ghanaian ECD educators face (Barnett, 2010). Institutional impediments show up in the way early childhood education is carried out, in the government's policies and programmes pertaining to early childhood development, and in the way, society views early childhood development as a whole (Barnett 2010).

According to Zimbabwe's Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education (2015), early childhood development (ECD) is currently regarded as a crucial educational experience for young children in practically every country. However, ECD in Zimbabwe aims to provide young children with the foundational skills for lifelong learning through self-learning and problem solving, as well as to prepare them for literacy, numeracy, and technological skills (Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, 2015). It also aims to cultivate some awareness of personal and national identity.

Early childhood educators in South Africa face a variety of unique obstacles when putting ECD policies into practice, including inadequate infrastructure, a lack of resources for instruction, a standardized curriculum, institutional barriers, a lack of private sector involvement, and government funding structure inconsistencies (Western Cape Department of Social Development (WCDS) 2010; DBE et al. 2010).

ECD programmes that meet the criteria for being considered effective are those whose conditions and provisions are governed by thorough government prescribed policies. According to Sun et al. (2015), effective government policies must be contextually sensitive to the needs of all young children, including those living with disabilities. As a result, many countries, including South Africa, have established ECD policies to operationalize and regulate ECD processes and operations. According to Neuman et al. (2012), national ECD policies typically include a policy statement outlining the vision, goals, and key strategies, as well as a description of institutional structures.



#### **2.3.4 Identifying and overcoming constraints in the implementation of ECD programmes**

The South African government, according to Atmore et al. (2012), has recognized the necessity of expanding access to ECD and improving the standard of programmes and services, particularly for children from underprivileged groups.

Unfortunately, in South Africa, the Department of Health (DoH) and the Department of Social Development (DSD) were also involved in early childhood development. Because of the involvement of these various departments in ECD centres, there was no consistency in the application of ECD policies, and it caused the ECD provisioning structure to become disjointed. This is a result of various departments providing uncoordinated support for the application of the ECD policy. Additionally, this has led to disparities in funding across the various provinces. The good news is that all is not lost because since 2001, the number of students in Grade R has tripled, government spending on social development and education has expanded significantly, and 58% of students nationwide are now receiving subsidies for early childhood development programmes. More children are receiving care than ever before, which is of higher quality.

Despite the tremendous advancements in Grade R programming and early childhood development since 1994, South African children continue to confront numerous obstacles. Infrastructure, nutrition, programme options, ECD teachers, institutional ability, and finance are the main areas of concern here (DBE, DoSD & UNICEF, 2010).

There is no doubt that the implementation of ECE is still fraught with numerous challenges that must be addressed by relevant stakeholders in order for ECE programmes to be successful.

ECD facilities face several significant difficulties and hindrances, including a lack of learning resources and materials, particularly in the classroom, inadequate funding, unqualified teachers, inadequate security for children while they are at

the ECD facility, and below par restroom facilities. (DoBE, DoSD & UNICEF, 2010).

### **2.3.5 The extent of effectiveness of capacity building approaches for implementing ECD programmes**

The sustainability of continuous extension of excellent ECD programmes heavily depends on the capability in practice and knowledge of all relevant stakeholders, including designers, planners, trainees, managers, practitioners, observers and assessors, donors, and parents.

In practical terms, capacity refers to the abilities of direct practitioners, which includes social workers, nurses, and preschool instructors. The knowledge that lawmakers, programme-makers, educational institutions, implementing managers, funders contributors, and, in the end, parents and community members possess is equally important. To carry out their responsibilities effectively, each of these needs to be sufficiently aware of the bigger picture and how they fit into it. To guarantee quality sustainability at scale, capacity-building strategies for practice and knowledge must be created beforehand and maintained once the scaling process is finished.

It is imperative to guarantee that ECD principals, supervisors, teachers, and members of the governing body have the necessary training in order to operate ECD centres that are effective, efficient, and sustainable in the education and care of young children. Teacher training on a wide range of topics, selected as they relate to a specific group of teachers/practitioners, is essential.

### **2.3.6 The rationale for enhancing a strategy to implement ECD programmes**

There are several strong justifications for funding early childhood education (ECD) in the Education White Paper 5 on Early Childhood Education (DOE, 2001:2). These include, but are not limited to:

- (a) Early years are crucial for the growth of a person's potential because they lay the groundwork for later or lifelong learning.
- (b) The skills of South Africa's population, which are formed and shaped early in life, determine its place in the global economy.
- (c) Early intervention helps to reduce the social and economic disparities, as well as race and gender inequalities, which divide South African society.

Supporting early childhood development has the potential to improve everything from growth and development to school performance and life productivity (World Bank, 2022). ECD programmes are beneficial, but the quality of ECD in South Africa varies greatly and many young children find it difficult to access such facilities due to issues like travel time to ECD centres, cost, and poverty.

Geographically, ECD programmes and centres are not evenly and effectively dispersed, with a disproportionate number of centres in urban areas and not enough in rural ones. Many ECD centres in rural communities are also of poor quality and lack access to many resources that children require, such as health clinics, nutrition programmes, speech therapists, occupational therapists, and physiotherapists.

Given the foregoing, it is imperative that the relevant departments decide on implementation of enhanced policies, laws, programmes and the allocation of sufficient funding for ECD, because these are the years that receive the least attention worldwide, including in South Africa.

## **SUMMARY**

This chapter shed light on what has been written in the literature regarding the execution of ECD policies and initiatives in other countries. The analysis of the literature showed that there are still several challenges with ECD provisioning. The difficulties ECD encounters affect how its policies are put into practice. Government departments have taken steps to provide ECD services, but they are not supporting teachers in putting ECD policies into practice.

The research methodology employed in the study is described in the following chapter.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1 INTRODUCTION**

Chapter 2 focused on the literature and theoretical framework to explore challenges and solutions around teachers' implementation of ECD policies and programmes.

This chapter covers the design and methodology used to find answers to the research questions. It is critical to differentiate between the study design and the research methodology. De Vaus (2001) divides the two notions into three major sides which are function, focus, and base.

Under function, research methods are the procedures used to collect and analyse the data, whilst the research design is the overall structure of the research. As focus, research methods are concerned with suitable ways to collect and analyse the data whilst the design focuses on the type of study and the kind of results expected. As base, research methods are dependent on the research design, whilst the research design is retrieved from the research question.

Research designs include, gathering data through methods such as interviews, observations, focus groups, and analysis of documents or artefacts.

These methods allow researchers to collect detailed, descriptive information about participants' perspectives, experiences, and contexts.

In the case of this study, the phenomenological research design was applied because the aim was to understand the essence and meaning of human experiences related to a particular phenomenon.

Based on the de Vaus (2001) principles, under research design, the researcher provides information on the overall structure of the research, which includes

abstract, introduction, literature review, methodology, results, discussion, recommendations, limitations, conclusion, appendices and references.

The type of study and the results expected, which includes results of the gained information or data after the research, which, present and illustrate findings have also been highlighted. This chapter also discusses the conceptual basis for the research that was derived from the research question, which focuses on how ECD Practitioners might be empowered to implement ECD policies and programmes for a sustainable learning environment in the ECD sector.

In the same vein, under research methods, the chapter focuses on procedures used to collect and analyse data, which is inclusive of interviews and observations which consists of ECD practitioners.

The chapter will now move onto the research paradigm, before progressing to the detailed research design and research methodology aspects, respectively.

### **3.1.1 Interpretivism paradigm**

The interpretive paradigm is a research approach that seeks to understand the world as it is from subjective experiences of individuals. It uses meaning-oriented methodologies, such as interviewing or participant observation, which rely on a subjective relationship between the researcher and subjects. The interpretivist paradigm posits that researchers' values are inherent in all phases of the research process, and that truth is negotiated through dialogue.

This paradigm applies to this research because this research can identify in depth life experiences of ECD practitioners. Through the analysis of the data, researchers can explore, explain, express and attempt to place themselves in the participant's vision or thinking pattern to reconstruct the text's intended meaning.

The interpretive stance will assist a researcher to deliver deeply into the social fact via the testimonies of my individuals and “their lived situations” (Weaver & Olson, 2006). Through this method, the information, to be accumulated via narrative interviews, as extra or much less subjective; the individuals have

accrued experiences, beliefs, and views inside positive contexts and are encouraged through sure price structures of their tradition and society.

## **3.2 RESEARCH APPROACH**

### **3.2.1 Qualitative research as an approach**

The researcher used qualitative research as a research method, which according to Adnan (2014), is an inquiry process aiming at understanding human behaviour by constructing complex, holistic representations of the social and cultural circumstances in which such behaviour occurs.

This study used a qualitative method as well as a combination of primary and secondary sources to address the key research objectives.

This research followed a qualitative approach which was based on the premise that meaning is socially generated by individuals as they interact with their own reality (Merriam, 2009:1). It is about how people make sense of their surroundings and the experiences they have in it. It consists of a collection of interpretive, material acts that make the world visible since it is a situated activity that situates the researcher in the world.

The concept of context recognises the contextual character of investigation. It has been described as seeing people in their own environment, communicating with them in their own language, on their own terms, and striving to understand the complexities while analysing and interpreting data from numerous sources. As with other research initiatives, getting the intended findings depends on selecting the methodology that is most proper for the area of investigation. A judicious choice of method guides the research towards the intended aims and helps ensure that its products are useful and well received.

A qualitative researcher seeks to 'systematically explain the meaning' of materials in a way that the researcher specifies from research questions (Schreier, 2012:3).

There is a common misconception that social science and natural science are similar fields that can be studied in the same ways as physical objects, which makes some researchers reluctant to employ qualitative research in their studies even though they view it as inferior research (Bluhm, 2010). (Kottler & Victor, 2010).

The investigation was intended to empower the ECD practitioners and teachers to advocate for social justice, educational reform, and sustained Grade-R learner success, which is why a qualitative research approach was chosen. It is exploratory, and it is used to define the problem or set up an approach to the problem when it is unknown what to expect. It is also used to go deeper into topics of interest and to investigate intricacies relating to the subject at hand.

To borrow from Mason (2002:1), a qualitative research approach allows the researcher to investigate a wide range of dimensions of the social world, such as the texture and weave of everyday life, the understandings, experiences, and imaginings of my research participants, the ways that social processes, schools, and discourses work, and the meanings that they generate.

According to Muela (2006: 6), qualitative research is a process of inquiry that draws data from the context in which events occur to describe these occurrences, as a means of determining the process in which events are embedded and the perspectives of those participating in the events, and which uses induction to derive possible explanations based on observed phenomena.

Qualitative research is defined by Strauss and Corbin (1990) as "any sort of research that provides conclusions that are not arrived at by statistical processes or other means of quantification," as Hoepfl (1997:48) puts it. The qualitative study acknowledges the complexity and dynamic aspect of the social world." Ali and Yusof (2011) offer a similar definition, stating that any investigation that does not make use of statistical approaches is now called a qualitative investigation. This definition demonstrates how the findings of qualitative analysis differ from those of quantitative inquiry in terms of knowledge. Furthermore, the relationship



between the researcher and the participant in qualitative research is less formal than in quantitative research. Participants can react more elaborately and in greater detail than is normally possible with quantitative methods. In turn, researchers can reply to what participants say instantly by adapting later questions to the information the person has provided.

Kick and Miller (1968) offer a similar point of view, defining qualitative research as a method of studying social research that involves seeing people in their own territory and communicating with them in their own language and terms (Tailor, 2010: 62).

This study technique seeks an in-depth comprehension of phenomena while acknowledging that an existential objective reality cannot be grasped. According to Parker (2003:15), the qualitative researcher recognises and analyses a universe of intangible linkages, meanings, understandings, and interpretations that are complex, multidimensional, and cannot exist independently of actors and researchers.

According to Kasinath (2013:46), this technique is multi-method in nature, involving an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter, and the emphasis of qualitative research is on process and meaning. It employs a variety of ways to achieve intricacy, depth, richness, and rigour.

The intention was to interact with all key stakeholders so that, as a group, we could eventually produce an innovative plan to support ECD Practitioners in efficiently implementing ECD programmes. Qualitative approaches are often more adaptable, allowing for greater spontaneity and modification of the researcher-study participant relationship. For example, qualitative methods typically ask 'open-ended' questions that are not always phrased the same way with each participant. With open-ended questions, participants are free to react in their own terms, and these responses tend to be more complicated than just 'yes' or 'no'.

The qualitative research approach systematically employs a specific set of processes to address the question, in keeping with the theoretical underpinning of this study, which is Reflective Theory (RT). It also looks to reflect to understand a specific research problem or topic from the perspectives of the people involved in the research. Qualitative research is extremely successful at gathering culturally relevant information on specific groups' beliefs, attitudes, behaviours, and social contexts. (Mack, Woodsong, MacQueen, Guest, and Namey, 2005).

Contrarily, it must be understood that there are certain arguments against its application and that many scholars are still wary of it. The problems with subjectivity, validity, and dependability of findings are often brought up and have most often plagued quantitative researchers. Quantitative research uses a representative sample of a population to draw statistically significant conclusions about that community, Creswell (2003). The total group being researched is the population. It makes no difference whether the population is large or small if it has all individuals who fulfil the description of the group being examined.

The researcher chose the qualitative research approach because it is defined by an interpretative paradigm that emphasises subjective experiences and the meanings they hold for an individual, which play a significant role in the study results. The qualitative technique is also idiographic (Vogrin, 2008:14), emphasising an individual's perspective on the investigational setting, process, relationships, and so on (Vogrin, 2008: 19). It also entails direct interaction with participants and watching events unfold.

Additionally, as mentioned by Marshall and Rossman (2006, in Yunanda: 2016), qualitative research focuses on the intricacy of social interactions that occur in daily life as well as how participants interpret these interactions. Qualitative research is therefore "pragmatic, interpretive, and grounded in people's lived experiences."

According to Kothari (2004) qualitative approach is a function of a researcher's feeling and impressions whereby he gives his subjective assessment of attitude,

opinions and behaviours while quantitative approach involves the generation of data in quantitative form which can be subjected to rigorous quantitative analysis in a formal and rigid fashion.

However, the main weakness of the qualitative approach is that it produces generalized theories and conclusions based only on a small number of observations, thereby the reliability of research results being under question (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Qualitative research focuses in understanding a research query as a humanistic or idealistic approach.

### **3.3 RESEARCH DESIGN**

The research design is intended to supply a proper framework for a study. An incredibly weighty decision in the research design process is the choice to be made about the research approach since it decides how relevant information for a study will be obtained. The research design process involves many interrelated decisions. McMillan and Schumacher (2010: 24) define research design as "a blueprint of the procedures that enable the research to achieve its objectives." It is a research plan structure and strategy prepared to obtain answers to research questions. It includes the procedures for conducting the study, how the research is set up, what happens to the participants, and which data collection methods are used.

A phenomenological approach, which is a qualitative research approach that explores the lived experiences and meanings of individuals or groups was used. It assumes that the essence of anything depends on how it is perceived by the audience. It involves turning to a phenomenon, investigating experience as we live it, reflecting on the essential themes, describing the phenomenon through writing and rewriting, and maintaining a strong relation to the phenomenon.

Table 1. Data collection instruments

| <b>Participant/s</b>                    | <b>Number</b> | <b>Research question/s covered</b>                             | <b>Data collection instruments</b>                         |
|-----------------------------------------|---------------|----------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------|
| ECD practitioners                       | 6             | Training in teaching and child development than in management. | Free Attitude Interviews (FAI), Semi-structured interviews |
| Non-practitioner: Admin                 | 1             | Attendance of ECD-related workshops                            | FAI interviews<br>Semi-structured interviews               |
| Non-practitioner: School Governing Body | 1             | Access to standardised ECD programmes                          | FAI interviews<br>Semi-structured interviews               |
| ECD learning facilitators (DBE)         | 2             | Understanding and familiarity with ECD policies.               | Semi-structured interviews                                 |

### **3.3.1 Research questions**

According to Zull (2016), all research questions without a predetermined list of possibilities for answering are referred to as open-ended questions. An open-ended inquiry requires participants to come up with a response in their own words, which they must then either write down or present verbally. This indicates that respondents provide responses based on what is expected of them. The results of an open-ended questionnaire were used to elicit responses from ECD Practitioners about how they apply ECD policies in their classrooms and how they cope with any issues that may arise.

The researcher additionally used primary and secondary questions to confirm the information provided by earlier studies about the implementation of the ECD programmes.

The following research questions served as a guide for this investigation:

#### **(a) Primary research question**

How can ECD teachers be empowered to implement sustainable learning environments at selected schools in the Gert Sibande Education district?

#### **(b) Secondary research questions**

- (i) What are the typical constraints associated with implementing various ECD programmes?
- (ii) How can constraints in the implementation of ECD programmes be found and overcome?
- (iii) How successful are ability building approaches for implementing ECD programmes?
- (iv) Why should a strategy for implementing ECD programmes be enhanced?

Questionnaires were designed for scheduled interviews, with both open- and closed-ended questions for the ECD practitioners/teachers. The purpose of the questionnaires was to compare the participants' responses and feeling of the problems. The questionnaires focused on meeting the research objectives and answering the research questions.

### **3.3.2 Sampling technique**

Sampling, as defined by Babbie (2007), is the selection process of observations. Thus, in the context of this study, sampling refers to the process utilized to choose the ECD practitioners who would be involved in the inquiry.

The study examined how Early Childhood Development (ECD) practitioners in the Mpumalanga Province of South Africa implemented ECD programmes. Purposive sampling was the sampling method utilized. The researcher employed purposeful sampling, which Welman and Kruger (1999) characterize as "the most important type of non-probability sampling."

Babbie (2011:184) defines purposeful (judgmental) sampling as a type of non-probability sampling in which the researcher makes a judgment call on which units to observe depending on which ones are most representative or helpful. In order to get more data, the researcher needs to select a sample. Neuman (2011:267) defines purposeful sampling as a non-random sample that enables the researcher to use a range of approaches to find every scenario that could arise, including ones involving a population that is challenging to reach. Consequently, the investigator made a point of locating ECD practitioners who fit the study's requirements.

Purposive sampling was used in this study to choose study participants due to its benefits. Merriam (2002) states that intentional or purposeful sampling enables the researcher to select participants from whom information can be extracted that may provide light on the goal of the study. An information-rich sample should

always be used in every investigation. Because of this, the researcher chose ECD practitioners who fit the study's requirements and had previous experience in the field. Neuman (2011:268) claims that the best technique for selecting out-of-the-ordinary samples that can offer insightful information about the subject is purposeful sampling. Purposive sampling was employed by the researcher to identify important participants who were in the province of Mpumalanga, had been working with children from birth to four years old for two or more years, and had the required qualifications (NQF level 5).

As such, the researcher had a specific objective in mind when selecting participants. The researcher believed that the ideal sample strategy for this study was purposeful sampling. Purposive sampling was the sample strategy employed by the researcher to select participants who were believed to be the owners of rich responses. Conversely, if the goal of the study is to produce a representative sample, then purposeful sampling is useless (Neuman, 2011). Conversely, the difficulties associated with representative sampling would not impact purposeful sampling. The criteria employed to select study participants may be criticized by people who were not selected through purposive sampling. The researcher clarified that only ECD practitioners who meet the study's predetermined criteria are eligible to participate in the research.

Ten participants from various public schools, ECD centres, and the education circuit office in the Gert Sibande area made up the sample for this study. Owing to scheduling and budgetary limitations, as well as the likelihood of few public schools in the chosen town - a rural, densely inhabited area - the researcher mainly focused on the Gert Sibande district.

To ensure that all possible volunteers had an equal chance of taking part in the study, the researcher used basic random sampling. We only contacted potential participants who we knew would be willing and could provide the necessary data. To achieve the study's goal, the researcher took into consideration a variety of ECD practitioner groups when selecting samples. This was accomplished by

forming an opinion based on observation, paying particular attention to the prospective participants' outward appearance.

### **3.3.3 Research sites**

The study used two primary schools with ECD centres as well as one privately owned ECD centre in Mpumalanga Province. The units of analysis were ECD practitioners/teachers who are instructing children aged 0 to 4 years old and have two or more years of teaching experience in an ECD centre or school that offers Grade R, the ECD Learning Facilitators as well as a member of the SGB. The choice of the sites and participants for the sample was significantly influenced by ECE outcomes.

## **3.4 POPULATION AND SAMPLING METHOD**

### **3.4.1 Research participants**

Using the primary research question as a guide, the researcher was able to select the participants: “How can ECD teachers be empowered to implement sustainable learning environments at selected schools in the Gert Sibande Education district?”

The research population consisted of ECD practitioners/teachers and teachers in private ECD centres and public schools found in one town of Gert Sibande district.

The participant population for the research is a population of the totality of the objects under the investigation. It is a set of all cases of interest.

The ECD practitioners and non-practitioners intended to take part in the study were the team dedicated to the implementation of ECD policies and programmes consisted of 10 ECD practitioners and non-practitioners who work with children from birth to four years old. They were from three ECD centres/schools referred to as ECD Centre-1, Centre-2 and Centre-3 (pseudonyms). They must have spent



at least two years working at an ECD centre at the time of the study, whether it was private, rural, or public. Additionally, participants should be suitably qualified or not and be working within the Gert Sibande district.

The descriptions of the teachers above show a mix of seasoned and inexperienced educators. With the combination of the two groups, the team in charge of conducting the ECD programme would receive help from a variety of viewpoints. This served as a foundation for examining the similarities and differences between experienced and inexperienced instructors' perspectives on various issues.

Bringing together observations and information gathered through interviews would reinforce the data and ensure the validity of the study.

#### **3.4.2 Sample selection**

The researcher selected to search the ECD centres in the Gert Sibande district for people who fulfil the study's criteria. The researcher approached the ECD practitioners and non-practitioners she came across with and asked whether they meet the criteria and if they would be interested in taking part in the study. The researcher believed that this was sufficient to make a solid argument for the effective implementation of ECD programmes in South Africa while avoiding a large sample size.

#### **3.4.3 Intervention in the ECD programme and policy implementation**

After profiling the research participants, this section focuses on how intervention in the implementation of ECD programmes and policies was implemented. Because of the qualitative research approach, all participants actively took part in the process.

### **3.5 DATA COLLECTION METHODS AND INSTRUMENTS**

The next step was to choose the technique of data collection that will be used.

The gathering of data is a crucial step in the qualitative research process. Primary and secondary sources of data are two of the main types of data that can be used in qualitative research. In this investigation, primary data sources were consulted.

According to Merriam (2002), the choice of which data source will yield the most useful information that can be used to address the study's research questions will affect the data collection approach. To collect data for this study, semi-structured interviews, observations, and field notes were employed as research tools.

The researcher intended to collect in-depth insights, feelings, attitudes, perspectives, and experiences from ECD practitioners about the execution of the ECD programmes in South Africa, hence semi-structured face-to-face interviews were employed in this study.

In conducting the study, the researcher applied both primary and secondary data collection techniques. The researcher employed these techniques to get in-depth information on the ECD practitioners/teachers' participation in the implementation of the ECD programmes control system in public schools and ECD Centres in Gert Sibande.

Primary data was information collected specifically for the purpose of investigation under study. The researcher used researcher administered interviews in collecting data.

#### **3.5.1 Interviews**

An interview, according to Babbie (2007:306), is "an interaction between an interviewer and a respondent in which the interviewer has a general plan of inquiry, including the topics to be covered." The interaction may be face-to-face or telephonic.

Neuman (2011) asserts that in-person interviews offer numerous benefits, including the highest response rates, the ability to manage the largest and most complex questionnaires, the ability to ask a range of questions, and the utilization of prompts and in-depth probes by skilled interviewers. Additionally, Babbie (2007) argues that surveys given in person get better responses from respondents than those done by mail. The response rates increased when an interviewer was present because fewer people said they "didn't know" or "had no answers."

Even though the focus of the study was on the execution of ECD programmes, the field interview served as a collaboration tool between the researcher and the participants. Carefully chosen volunteers were used for these interviews. Experienced ECD practitioners that the researcher deemed to be knowledgeable about the topic would make up the sample.

ECD practitioners that fit the researcher's sample criteria were the main participants in this study. English is one of the recognized and accepted languages used in South Africa as a Language of Learning and Teaching (LOLT), and the researcher speaks it well. Because there were fewer "don't know" and "no" responses, the response rates increased with the interviewer present. The benefit of the interview is that it allows the interviewer to receive pertinent answers from the responder, even if they are unclear about the question's objective or anything else pertaining to what is required and asked (Babbie & Mouton, 2007). The researcher conducted the interviews herself to gain a greater knowledge of how ECD practitioners evaluate the way the programmes are implemented. To maximize participant reactions and convey subtle meanings, McMillan and Schumacher (2006:439) advise researchers to observe certain non-verbal cues, such as "facial expression, tone of voice," gestures, and body movements. Additionally, observation allows the researcher to evaluate the subject matter holistically. When combined with observations, field notes and interviews are used efficiently (Henning, Van Rensburg & Smit, 2004:82). Depth-of-issue exploration is another advantage of conducting interviews. As per Babbie and Mouton (2007),

interviewers could express if they have any queries or require additional clarification. In field interviews, participants express themselves spontaneously, offering knowledge about reality in the ways that people normally speak, think, and organize, according to Neuman (2011).

Additionally, bias might be introduced by the researcher during face-to-face interviews, which could damage their trustworthiness. The interviewer's prejudice, however, can be mitigated by the way he or she conducts the interview—listening, showing up, encouraging, interrupting, introducing subjects, and wrapping up. Babbie and Mouton (2007) state that the interviewer should act as an impartial intermediary when disseminating information regarding the questions posed. To lessen the negative effects of interviews, the researcher used field notes and observations. Interviews also have the benefit of allowing one to probe for more information about the issue at hand. Interviewers can communicate when they do not comprehend something or would want further explanation, according to Babbie and Mouton (2007). According to Neuman (2011), during field interviews, participants express themselves naturally and share knowledge about reality in the ways that they typically speak, think, and plan.

It was necessary to interview ECD practitioners who had taught children ranging in age from newborns to four years old for at least two of those years.

### **3.5.2 Observation**

To increase the reliability of the information gathered from the participants, the researcher also used observational methods. The "observational method relies on a researcher's seeing and hearing things and recording what is observed, rather than relying on a subject's self-report in responding to questions or statements," according to McMillan and Schumacher (2006:273). The observation strategy ensured that non-verbal cues were captured in the data collected.

Adnan (2014) claims that in research, observation is a technical term having a defined meaning. In common parlance, observation typically refers to the process of capturing and interpreting visual cues. To properly contextualize people's

words and behaviours, data for qualitative research is collected through seeing people interact in their natural environments.

The method of gathering information through observation demonstrates how well the strategy works to solve issues in the classroom. The facts pertaining to the established success criteria are the focus of the observation. In order to gather data at this observational stage, the researcher and the collaborator must specify the kind of information that needs to be gathered.

The researcher observed the Grade-R students' learning process activities at this point. Based on the observation, the researcher assumed the role of a non-participant observer by abstaining from the classroom activity. The researcher just observed the lesson while sitting in the audience and compiled data by composing a field memo to analyse the experiences of ECD teachers that would reveal any "frustrations" in the classroom. The checklist or observation list was supplied by the researcher as a means of data collection. It was available for observing how the teachers behaved and went about their business in their own classrooms.

### **3.5.3 The Free Attitude Interview (FAI)**

This study also used the FAI as a data collection tool. Unlike circumstances when people respond to questions that have already been addressed, participants in an FAI converse as they would in a normal conversation (Buskens, 2011:1). There is only one question that the participants and the researcher can investigate in their own brains during an FAI. I now realize that this has the benefit of giving respondents greater freedom to express themselves than they may have in a closed questionnaire. Because of how a typical discussion is conducted, participants are more relaxed. To answer the primary research question - how to implement the ECD programme - the researcher had to follow every one of the tenets of the FAI. For example, the researcher had to let the subjects to express their feelings to demonstrate interest in them and respect their opinions.

A FAI can be carried out in a group setting or between two people, according to Buskens (2011:2-3). When participants opt to speak up, the researcher can

answer in several ways. In order to collect data, the researcher conducted an open-ended conversational interview with the participants. With its flexibility, emphasis on respect, and desire to learn from the participants, it complemented RT, the theoretical framework that served as the foundation for this investigation.

#### **3.5.4 Qualitative data collection procedure**

Any findings of investigation can be universally accepted if they were conducted methodically (Shangase, 2013:44). The collecting of reliable data was a critical step before improving the implementation of ECD programmes for consistent ECD learner attainment.

With a recording device, data were gathered. All meetings were reordered in either a vernacular or English language, depending on the comfort level of the participants. The researcher requested verbatim translations of vernacular conversations. The verbatim transcriptions were returned to the participants for member checking and exact interpretation. The researcher created verbatim transcriptions for the contact sessions, and participants reviewed the transcriptions and message interpretations in the following available contact session.

### **3.5 ANALYSIS OF THE DATA**

The necessary data for this study was also collected and analysed using data analysis and qualitative methods.

One of the most important steps in solving a problem that is being investigated is data analysis. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), as defined by Bloor and Bloor (2007:2), is a cross-disciplinary approach to data analysis that encompasses text and speech analysis in all humanities and social science domains.

Critical discourse analysts, according to Van Dijk (1993:250), look at the language, discourse, and other components that tend to repeat power imbalances. These connections could be bottom-up, driven by acceptance,

compliance, and resistance, or top-down, driven by power. This study's primary focus is on the top-down dynamics of power.

The researcher concluded that adopting a critical viewpoint would enable her to carry out one of the study's objectives, which was to identify and discuss the components of a plan for the effective implementation of ECD programmes for teachers and practitioners. It was anticipated and presumed that the school community would collaborate to develop a trial-and-errorable action plan.

The process of analysis included controlling the data, identifying what was significant, and deciding what would be displayed consequently. Descriptive analysis was used to qualitatively analyze the study's data. Following data gathering, the steps in the data analysis process are as follows:

- (a) Collecting all the information from the interview, questionnaire, and observational notes;
- (b) Examining each piece of data;
- (c) Categorizing the information according to the causes of linguistic anxiety and instructional techniques;
- (d) Explaining the information using the techniques that ECD teachers employ; and
- (e) Composing the study report's conclusion considering the data analysis.

Prior to analysis, the data was also coded, cleaned, and modified.

### **3.6.1 Editing**

The process that raises the calibre of data coding is called data editing. To guarantee correctness, consistency, clarity, and completeness, the study's data was thoroughly examined.

### **3.6.2 Thematic analysis**

A thematic analysis, according to Patton and Cochran (2002:23), entails a thorough examination of all the data in order to identify the primary themes that emerge and obtain a general sense of recurring problems. Thematic examination is among the most appropriate methods for data analysis in qualitative research. Thematic analysis was a crucial tool employed by Mayo (2013) in an essay on teacher development. According to Neuman (2011:509), when analysing data. Broader groupings are created by classifying the raw data.

"Data analysis is the process of making sense out of the information collected, which involves consolidating, reducing, and interpreting what people have said and what the researcher has seen and read," according to Merriam (in Engelbrecht et al., 2003:18). To analyze the field data, the study used a thematic analysis approach. To identify patterns, categories were then scrutinized and altered in collaboration with the research participants. By classifying the data according to themes and concepts, the researcher conducted a thematic analysis of the data. When gathering data, the researcher first looked for trends or connections.

How validity and reliability are guaranteed in social constructionist and qualitative research is covered in the next paragraphs.

## **3.7 DATA VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY**

To guarantee consistent measurement throughout time and across components in the instrument, the reliability of measurements describes the extent to which it is without bias (error free) (Sekaran & Bougie, 2010). The reliability and consistency of data were examined throughout the reliability study by paraphrasing and elaborating when asking questions prior to the collection of data. The researcher checked if the questions were well understood by the participants and the reliability of the data provided.



A review of the literature on compliance with the application of ECD policies and programmes as well as data gathering techniques served as further guidance for the researcher.

### **3.8 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

The researcher sent a proposal to two university committees. Following clearance from the Ethics Committee and the Committee for Title Registration, the researcher sought permission to enter the school premises from the Mpumalanga Department of Basic Education, which granted permission (Appendix C).

In the first meeting, the researcher introduced herself, explained her area of study, and displayed the permission letter to let them know that the Mpumalanga Department of Basic Education was aware of the research project. Additionally, the researcher made it plain that withdrawal from the study at any time would not have any harmful effects.

Researchers believe that the right to privacy is a major ethical concern. According to Babbie and Mouton (2007:68), "violations of the right to privacy occur when researchers identify members of certain groups they have studied, release or show individuals' data or responses."

Despite having provided their consent to take part, the actions of the research participants may unavoidably have an impact on other individuals in the practice setting. Therefore, permission was also looked for before group members saw others or looked at documents created for a different reason. All parties concerned kept their confidentiality.

As a researcher who intended to write up the work for the research report often helped the group interviews. This objective was communicated to the participants at the outset, and ownership of the findings and authorship were explicitly discussed. Because of its collaborative aspect, progress made for the study was transparent and available to recommendations from others.

### **3.9 CONCLUSION**

The research design and methodology were discussed in this chapter, which provided an overview of the general flow of the study's research. The methods and sources of data were employed for data collecting. This research method, which included all parameters and covered the entire problem formulation to problem validation, also demonstrated the overall research strategies and framework. It established the framework for how research technique was formed.

A description of the study site and a discussion of ethical clearance concerns were also included in the chapter's end. The data analysis and discussion of the results about the plan for putting ECD policies and programmes into action are the main topics of the following chapter.

Additionally, the results, which were influenced by the study questions, offer insights on how to enhance the quality of care and education provided to young children by strengthening the implementation of ECD policies. It was also noted how inadequately ECD policies were being implemented at the chosen ECD centres to provide young children with high-quality care and education.

## CHAPTER 4

### DATA ANALYSIS, PRESENTATION, AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

#### 4.1 INTRODUCTION

The research design and methodology utilized to identify the answers to the research questions were emphasized in the preceding chapter. It was also noted how Reflective Practice (RP), the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), and the theoretical framework that guided the research were related. Furthermore, the chapter encompassed the intervention approach and participant descriptions and closed with the researcher's background and study site profiling. This chapter presents the data analysis and discusses the results in light of the qualitative analysis of the data, as well as the practical procedures involved in the analysis of the study's findings in order to respond to the following research question:

*In what ways may the Gert Sibande Education district's ECD teachers be given the authority to establish sustainable learning environments at schools?*

The purpose of this research is to improve the way that two Grade R schools and one ECD center in the Gert Sibande Education District are implementing ECD policies and programmes for teachers toward sustainable learning environments. This chapter's focus is on data analysis and findings discussion, which will help to improve a plan for the efficient implementation of ECD policies and programmes. This chapter also explains the analytical methodologies used, the qualitative data collection methods used to investigate how the ECD policies and programmes were implemented in the early childhood centres, and the research study findings from this phase.

## 4.2 INFORMATION ABOUT THE EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT CENTRES AND PARTICIPANTS

### 4.2.1 Information about the ECD centres involved.

Three ECD centres located in the Gert Sibande district municipality of the Mpumalanga province in South Africa were the focus of this study, as indicated in Figure 2 below.

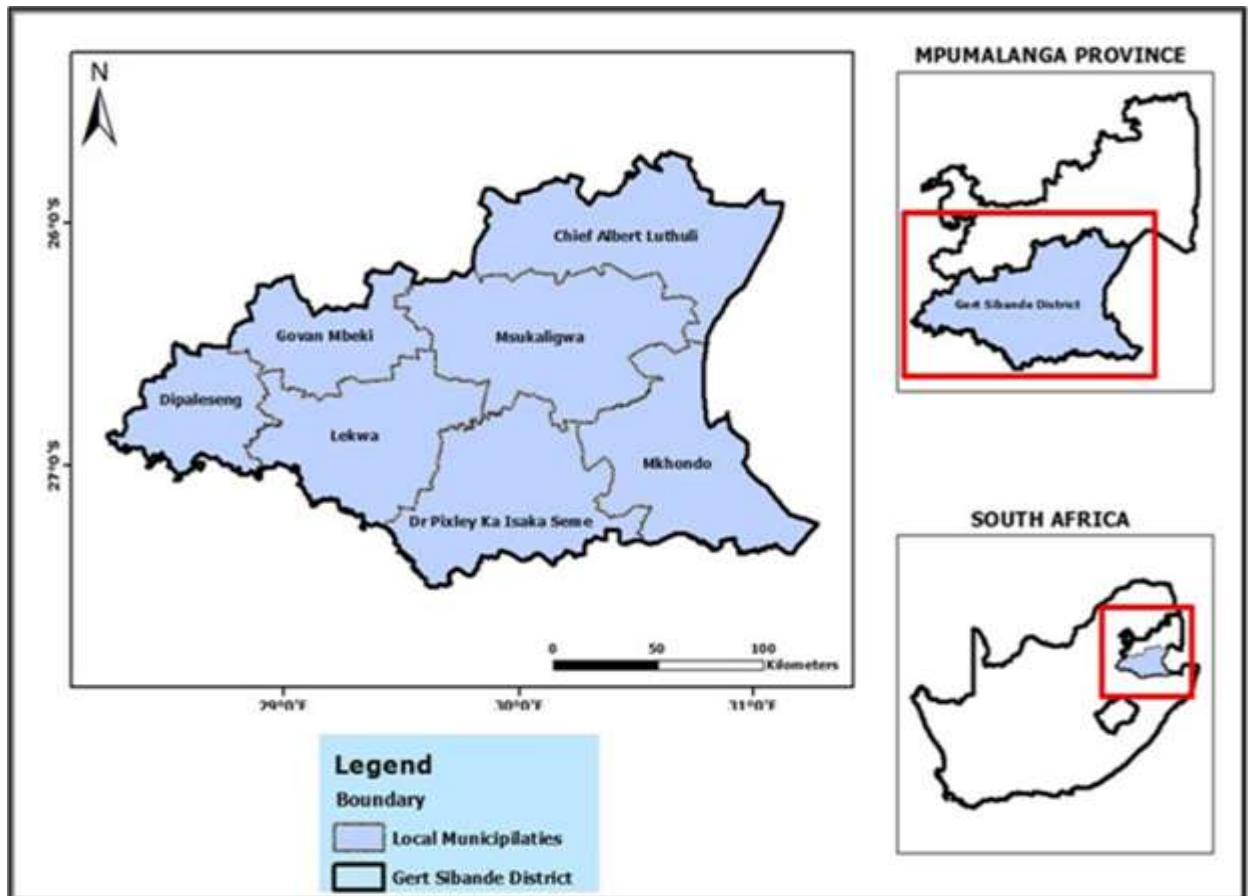


Figure 2: Map of Gert Sibande District municipality, Mpumalanga Province.

Source: <https://municipalities.co.za/map/132/gert-sibande-district-municipality> (2020)

These Early Childhood Development (ECD) centres are in a variety of neighbourhoods. In some, parents may afford to pay up to R500 per month for their children's tuition, while in others, the cost is so cheap that parents can hardly manage to pay R150. In the poorest regions, practitioners can earn as low as R200 per month, whereas in wealthy areas, they might earn as much as R1500.

Two of the three centres are privately held, and none of them get any major financial support from the government. The management and personnel of these two centres conduct various fund-raising projects in addition to receiving funding from school fees.

As shown in table 1 below, the three ECD centres that took part in the study were spread out over the eZamokuhle Township in the Gert Sibande district, some of which were in low density suburbs and some of which were in high density suburbs:

Table 1: Population and density distribution:

| <b>Indicator</b> | <b>Description</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | <b>Socio-economic status</b>                                                                                                                                                                                              |
|------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Centre -1        | High-density neighbourhood with tin housing and no basic infrastructure (electricity or running water). A high population density occurs when many live in a small geographical area, such as a city block. Another way to look at high density is that many housing units have been erected close to one another. | Inadequate living circumstances, little income, and a lack of employment.                                                                                                                                                 |
| Centre - 2       | Suburban area with a moderate density, comprising between 40 and 100 dwelling units per hectare (gross). This type of housing includes semi-detached, row, and three to four-story walk-up apartments.                                                                                                             | People employed in affluent neighbourhoods as domestic workers, carers, childminders, and gardeners, as well as in the hotel business, contribute to existing services and infrastructure while also giving prospects for |

| Indicator | Description                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | Socio-economic status                                          |
|-----------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------|
|           |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | residential growth inside metropolitan areas.                  |
| Centre -3 | Low-density housing is defined as housing with one or a few units in the same building. This style of housing is utilized in areas where there are a small number of people living in a specific geographic area. In suburban areas, low-density residential areas are commonly used. There are numerous advantages to low-density residential areas, including decreased pollution, better access to undeveloped land, more recreational space, and a higher sense of solitude. | A well-regarded profession and comfortable living arrangements |

As opposed to disclosing the real names of the ECD centres under investigation, pseudonyms were used, and they were referred to as "Centres 1, 2, and 3" when referenced.

### **Centre 1**

Centre 1 is in the densely populated area of eZamokuhle township. The centre's office is in a humble structure and lacks the requisite ECD infrastructure. The practitioner runs this centre out of her backyard, where she lives with her family. A table and a single chair for the practitioner were all that was used to set up this ECD centre's office in the corner of the space. In the so-called office, there are no extra office chairs or other office furniture. Children are kept in the same room, which also serves as a classroom. The youngsters were squabbling over some

toys on the floor. There was nothing to offer warmth for the children, the floor was devoid of carpeting.

The ECD practitioners were not well-trained or appropriately qualified. They were however, dressed appropriately to be able to engage with the learners during play time, easy-going, and wore flat shoes. One female who came in to pick up her child gave the appearance that she did not know the ECD Practitioner because she did not even greet her. When her daughter heard her calling her name, she stood up and walked straight to the door where the practitioner was standing. While she was standing outside the door, the mother took her daughter by the hand and went away without saying a word to the practitioner. Despite the attitude of the parent, the practitioner continued to work with the other children without expressing concern.

The overall ECD environment was not stimulating as there were no visible areas for in-door and out-door playing or opportunities for play. The mother's attitude towards the practitioner was disrespectful and could indicate that she does not value the practitioner.

## **Centre 2**

This centre is in an area known as eZamokuhle Township, a medium-density Amersfoort suburb. It boasts an orderly, polished office space. There were trained ECD practitioners/facilitators who were welcoming and loving. Guests in the office are welcome to use their phones while seated. The centre was enormous and housed what appeared to be boardrooms. There were not enough office chairs or office furnishings, such as a phone, in this office. From where I was seated, I could see that there were not enough resources in the classroom. There were only a handful of dilapidated chairs. Despite the limited resources the practitioners were treating the children gently.

Through the information known to me due to the nature of my work, I am aware that this Gert Sibande Circuit-managed ECD centre has problems in complying

with DSD requirements for the ECD centres such as being managed and maintained according to the Guidelines for Early Childhood Development Centres and being compliant with the national norms and standards for ECD centres; among others; a safe environment for children.

Despite non-compliance with DSD requirements, this was a stimulating ECD environment with areas for playing indoors and outdoors with varied opportunities for play.

### **Centre 3**

This centre is located in the Amersfoort province of Mpumalanga, in the low-density eZamokuhle township. In the area of the center devoted to education and learning, the office supplies were arranged neatly. The center has an environment akin to a working school. At their tables, the kids were all settled in with comfort. Each practitioner was absorbed in what they were doing, teaching. The spaces set aside for teaching and learning had spotless flooring and were tidy and well-organized. The center provided adequate resources to guarantee that the kids learned well. The ECD practitioners were friendly, caring, and seemed to be interacting with the children in a positive and healthy way. They were also properly trained and qualified. The play areas for this centre were well-kept, with trees for shade, a brightly painted outdoor play area, climbing frames, swings and other equipment for children's motor development, including ample space for them to run around. Children were seen having fun and running around unrestrained during playtime and teachers interacted with them.

The centre housed three times the number of children than most other ECD centres. The kitchen and toilets were spotless and because there was a security officer at the gate, it appeared that this centre prioritized children's health and safety. All visitors signed in before visiting the centre office. Table 1 provides a brief comparison of the centres.



Table 1: Comparison of centres visited.

| <b>ECD Centre 1<br/>(Not Conductive)</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | <b>ECD Centre 2<br/>(Moderately Conductive)</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | <b>ECD Centre 3<br/>(Conductive)</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>Insecure and unstimulating physical environment with insufficient clean and safe drinking water</p> <p>Unsafe, dirty and unhygienic ablution spaces</p> <p>There was no place for washing hands.</p> <p>There was no basic equipment such a bucket of sand in case of fires.</p> <p>There was no basic first aid kit or fences with a lockable gate, only a chain around the gate. A list of emergency numbers was also not displayed.</p> <p>The overall ECD environment was not stimulating as there were no visible areas for in-door and out-door playing or opportunities for play.</p> <p>Resources for play were not well-thought-through and the daily routines were unclear.</p> <p>There were no well-trained or appropriately qualified ECD practitioners who were also not welcoming and loving.</p> | <p>Reasonably secure and stimulating physical environment with clean and safe drinking water.</p> <p>Reasonably safe, clean and hygienic ablution spaces</p> <p>There was a place for washing hands.</p> <p>There was bucket of sand in case of fires.</p> <p>There was a small first aid kit and a fences with a lockable gate.</p> <p>There was no visibility of a list of emergency numbers.</p> <p>This was a reasonably stimulating ECD environment with areas for playing indoors and outdoors with somewhat, varied opportunities for play.</p> <p>Resources for play were well-thought-through and daily routines were available.</p> <p>There were trained ECD practitioners/facilitators who are welcoming and loving</p> | <p>A secure and stimulating physical environment with clean and safe drinking water.</p> <p>Safe, clean and hygienic ablution spaces</p> <p>There was place for washing hands.</p> <p>There was as fire extinguisher on the wall in case of fires.</p> <p>There was a basic first aid kit and fences had a lockable gate with a visible list of emergency numbers</p> <p>It was a stimulating ECD environment had areas for playing indoors and outdoors with varied opportunities for play.</p> <p>Resources for play were well-thought-through with daily routines visibly displayed.</p> <p>There we well-trained and appropriately qualified ECD practitioners who were welcoming and loving</p> |

#### **4.2.2 Information about the participants involved**

It was crucial to first reflect and build a relationship with the participants before the data collection process began. The total number of ten participants who took part in the study were the following:

- (a) Two ECD Practitioners from Centre 1
- (b) Two ECD Learning Facilitators from the Education District
- (c) Two ECD Practitioners from Centre 2
- (d) Two Representatives of Teachers Unions who were also ECD practitioners from Centre 3; and
- (e) Two members of the School Governing Body (SGB)

#### **The ECD Learning Facilitators**

Requests to participate in the study were made to ECD facilitators because the goals of the study align with their job descriptions. According to Chapter C: Subsection 3.4 of the Employment of Educators Act 76 of 1998, ECD Facilitators oversee staff development and are expected to take part in staff development programmes and the preparation of resources to assist them. The Employment of Educators Act (RSA, 1998) stipulates, among other things, that Learning Facilitators are in charge of organizing, planning, and carrying out professional development programmes for schools (Moloi, 2010:93).

These programmes must be created with practitioners' needs in mind, taking into account both their personal and professional growth (Moloi, 2010:93). As a result, the two ECD facilitators included in the study had to design staff development initiatives that were especially suited to meet the requirements of each ECD center. It was expected that the ECD facilitators would have access to a wide range of materials to help in the development of the ECD programmes under their supervision and would be well-versed in the range of possibilities available for these programmes. ECD professionals had the necessary training who was

interacting with the children in a positive and healthy way, and who were warm and inviting.

The two ECD Facilitators, assigned to both NGO ECD centres and DBE schools, were responsible for overseeing the proper implementation of the ECD policy, including the monitoring of recommendations for educational programmes that had to be provided (DoE, 2003:5). Despite their employment at the district office, their team membership gave them access to community opinions regarding the policies and initiatives being carried out in their cluster. Both spent their first years of employment as teachers educating themselves about the responsibilities of practitioners before joining the DBE five years prior. Participants expressed an interest in participating because they believed it would assist them to better understand the implementation of ECD programmes. Referring to the Facilitators of the ECD, one ECD practitioner shared her thoughts, '*Ama-LF azosiza ukuthi siqondisise kahle le-ECD,*' meaning that they will receive assistance in understanding the ECD policies and programmes from the ECD Learning Facilitators.

### **ECD Practitioners**

Out of the 10 research participants, six ECD practitioners were selected as part of the team responsible for implementing the ECD programmes. The ECD practitioners were important participants in the study since they were the intended recipients of the programmes developed by ECD Unit in the department. The inclusion of these people was crucial to determine whether the specified practitioner development programmes resonated with them. One of the main responsibilities of practitioners is teaching, which necessitates regular skill updates and the readiness to try out different teaching methods to satisfy curriculum objectives. In accordance with Sections 4.2–4.5 of the Employment of Educators Act, 1998 as amended in the Basic Education Laws Amendment Act 15 of 2011, teachers can achieve this if they are prepared to share their expertise, concepts, and materials with their colleagues to foster their professional

development and stay current on developments in educational theory and curriculum design. In the selected group of practitioner participants, there is a wealth of expertise that can be shared.

Before joining ECD Centre 3, the first educator from Centre 3 had been a teacher for more than 15 years and had taught in numerous schools. During interaction with him, he mentioned that at school, he prioritized ECD learners and went beyond to assist them. He took part in extracurricular activities including sports.

Due to continuing his studies in ECD, he held a Primary Teachers Diploma. His good achievement in Grade R reflected the positive relationship he had with his Grade R students. Another ECD Centre 3 practitioner was a newcomer with only three years of teaching experience. Despite her inexperience, she had shown herself to be a vibrant young woman. Upon her arrival, she was assigned a Grade R class, which she taught with great success.

There were also two ECD Centre 2 teachers in attendance. With a cheerful outlook, Teacher 1 has served on most committees during her 17 years of employment at the school. She enjoyed treating co-workers fairly and was inquisitive. Her pledge was to witness the implementation of teamwork. Her qualifications included an Advanced Certificate in Education, a Primary Teachers Diploma, and a Bachelor of Education (Hons). She had consistently had 100% of her learners pass language exams. The second teacher from Centre 2 had been a teacher for seven years. Despite being a newcomer, he had performed well across the board in performing his duties as a teacher. He was a resolute and upbeat teacher.

The teachers from Centre 3 were both enthusiastic practitioners. Teacher 1 recently graduated from university with a Postgraduate Diploma in ECD and with no experience in being an ECD Practitioner. She was a positive teacher who could maintain control of a classroom while promoting involvement. With decades of experience working with young children despite her education background,

another, Teacher 2 from Centre 3 was also a semi-skilled teacher. She tried to establish a rapport with every learner in her class and provided lots of encouraging feedback. The ECD practitioners from Center 1 were brought to their individual settlements by a variety of events and experiences from widely disparate backgrounds. The manager of the centre was late fifties married mother of four children. After completing her high school degree, she worked in an administrative capacity until losing her job. The family's house was evicted due to nonpayment of rent. After all, she had come to the hamlet where her dream was to create an ECD center. Although Practitioner 2, her helper, lacked a formal education in early childhood development, she was driven to help young children and thought that raising children in an informal settlement was not a respectable way to raise children. She was content despite having doubts about her practitioner skills.

The above profile of ECD practitioners includes a combination of experienced and novice educators. The team in charge of putting the ECD plans into effect would benefit from having people from both groups, providing a diverse range of perspectives and abilities. This was a forum for examining how experienced and inexperienced teachers perceive the same or different challenges.

### **Representatives of Teachers' Unions who were also ECD Practitioners**

Two educators who worked at the two ECD Centres and were members of teacher unions were on the team. Since teacher unions were also responsible for ensuring that their members were treated fairly and decently, it was determined to include them. Per the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed by the DBE and the teaching unions, the teacher unions were in charge of working with the DBE to offer professional development courses to its members (RSA, 2012:9). Moreover, as stated by Jansen (2004), Chisholm, Motala, and Vally (2003), and Biputh and McKenna (2010), they were an essential part of the opposition to the inspection system that was in place throughout the apartheid era. Teachers' unions want professional development for themselves as well as a uniform system of teacher evaluation.

A determined educator with previous expertise served as the first representative of the teacher union. He mentioned that he had been a standout student in every subject for about 20 years at ECD Centre 3. This educator possessed both a diploma and a B.Ed. (Hons). A six-year shop steward with a history of putting teachers' needs first represented the rival teacher union.

### **Members of the School Governing Body (SGB)**

There were two SGB members on the research study team. They are essential to the quality of education that the kids get. Children and parents, especially those in the SGB, engage in informal interactions. Children's perceptions of the school will be shaped by what they see and hear from the school community. The South African Schools Act, DoE 1996: Chapter 3, sub-section 20 (RSA, 1996:20) states that the SGB is required by law to promote the best interests of the school, strive to ensure its development by providing every pupil with high-quality instruction, and support the principal, teachers, and other staff members in fulfilling their professional obligations.

A support employee from Center 1 who had been there for 16 years made up the other SGB member on the team. Being a school clerk, she had not been actively involved in academic matters at the school; yet her knowledge and ability to support the principal and the center made her a valuable participant in the research. Since the SGB's membership included both professionals and less literate people, it was one of the groups that needed to be treated with deference and respect.

To align with ethical requirements, all participants and organisations were provided with pseudonyms to ensure anonymity as presented in table 2.

Table 2. Research participants' pseudonyms

| <b>Participant</b>         | <b>Area</b>         | <b>Pseudonym</b> |
|----------------------------|---------------------|------------------|
| ECD Learning Facilitator 1 | Provincial District | PD 1             |

| Participant                         | Area                   | Pseudonym |
|-------------------------------------|------------------------|-----------|
| ECD Learning Facilitator 2          | Provincial District    | PD 2      |
| ECD Practitioner 1 Centre 1 (Rural) | Informal squatter camp | EPR-1     |
| ECD Practitioner 2 Centre 1 (Rural) | Informal squatter camp | EPR-2     |
| ECD Practitioner 3 Centre 2         | Semi-urban             | EPS-1     |
| ECD Practitioner 4 Centre 2         | Semi urban             | EPS-2     |
| ECD Practitioner 5 Centre 3         | Urban                  | EPU-1     |
| ECD Practitioner 6 Centre 3         | Urban                  | EPU-2     |
| School Governing Body Member 1      | Semi-urban             | GB-1      |
| School governing Body Member 2      | Urban                  | GB-2      |

Table 3 lists research locations that were either the focus of the study or were cited in it.

Table 3: Site area and description

| Research Site                                | Area                                                                   | Brief description                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|----------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Provincial Education Department (PED)</b> | Mbombela Metropolitan Municipality                                     | The provincial department located in Mpumalanga province and is responsible for implementing policies of the national department.                                                                                                                   |
| <b>District</b>                              | Gert Sibande District Municipality                                     | The Education District is in the Volksrust area to provide an enabling environment and targeted support for schools within its jurisdiction in line with educational laws and policies.                                                             |
| <b>ECD Centre 1</b>                          | Gert Sibande District Municipality, Amersfoort area, (formal area)     | ECD Centre 1 is situated in a rural area and the structure is made of corrugated iron. Most young children's families at the centre live in informal settlements where poverty and unemployment are rife.                                           |
| <b>ECD Centre 2</b>                          | Gert Sibande District Municipality, Amersfoort area, (semi-rural area) | The ECD Centre 2 is in the semi-urban area of eZamokuhle Township village in Amersfoort. The ECD centre is located near a central business area where there are supermarkets and a taxi rank. The families mostly reside in semi-formal settlements |

|                     |                                                             |                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
|---------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>ECD Centre 3</b> | Gert Sibande District Municipality, Amersfoort (rural area) | The ECD Centre 3 is in the urban area of eZamokuhle Township village in Amersfoort the ECD centre is built with bricks and mortar and serves young children whose families mostly reside in formal settlements |
|---------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

### 4.3 THEMES AND SUB-THEMES EMERGING FROM THE ANALYSIS OF THE DATA

A theme is a significant aspect of the data that pertains to the research goal and denotes a commonality or connection throughout the data collection. As mentioned by Rice & Ezzy (1999), it entails closely examining and rereading the transcribed material to select themes. A detailed theme analysis technique, as mentioned by Nowell, Norris, White, and Moules (2017), can give trustworthy and relevant conclusions and are used by researchers to methodically collect and examine large, complicated data sets.

Themes and sub-themes that emerged from the data collected at the above sites and that were used to answer the research sub-questions are provided in Table 4 below.

Table 4: Themes and sub-themes of the study

| <b>4.3.1 Processes of enhancing ECD policies (Theme 1)</b>                                        |                                                                                  |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Sub-theme 1.1                                                                                     | ECD awareness-raising effort                                                     |
| Sub-theme 1.2                                                                                     | Supporting the ECD policies                                                      |
| Sub-theme 1.3                                                                                     | ECD officials, managers, and practitioners receive training.                     |
| Sub-theme 1.4                                                                                     | Keeping an eye on learning settings and curricular support                       |
| Sub-theme 1.5                                                                                     | Professionalisation of the Early Childhood Development sector                    |
| <b>4.3.2 Strategies for enhancing the implementation of ECD policies and programmes (Theme 2)</b> |                                                                                  |
| Sub-theme 2.1                                                                                     | Consultation and coordination with ECD forums and other COPs                     |
| Sub-theme 2.2                                                                                     | Management and leadership from various educational departments at various levels |
| Sub-theme 2.3                                                                                     | Negotiation and communication amongst ECD Stakeholders                           |
| Sub theme 2.4                                                                                     | ECD practitioner training programmes                                             |



| <b>4.3.3 Challenges faced by ECD stakeholders in improving the application of ECD policy at centres (Theme 3)</b> |                                                      |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------|
| Sub-theme 3.1                                                                                                     | Funding and financial oversight of ECD centres       |
| Sub-theme 3.2                                                                                                     | Capabilities and human resources of ECD officials    |
| Sub-theme 3.3                                                                                                     | Infrastructure: both within and outside the playroom |
| Sub-theme 3.4                                                                                                     | Registration with DSD/DBE                            |

#### **4.3.1 PROCESSES OF ENHANCING ECD POLICIES (THEME 1)**

Vorster et al. (2016) state that South Africa is renowned for its comprehensive and inventive ECD standards, which benefit young children in the short and long terms. To strengthen quality early childhood education (ECD) provision, South Africa has created several ECD policies, including the National Integrated Plan for ECD (NIECD) (DSD, 2015), the National Early Learning Development Standards (NELDS) (DBE, 2009), and the National Curriculum Framework for Children from Birth to Four Years (CAPS) (DBE, 2015).

However, the level of advocacy and understanding of ECD policies vary due to the diverse settings and contexts of the selected ECD centres, where there are discrepancies in the provision of ECD services.

##### **4.3.1.1 ECD awareness-raising effort (advocacy)**

The first sub-theme identified was lobbying for ECD policies, or awareness-raising, which is defined as information dissemination to support the implementation of ECD policies. Vorster et al. (2016) concur that advocacy fosters a climate that is favourable to bolstering ECD regulations and guaranteeing high-quality instruction in ECD institutions.

Face-to-face semi-structured interviews were conducted with ECD officials from the Provincial Education Department (PD-1 and PD- 2) as well as members of the SGB from one of the centres.

The first question asked to Learning Facilitators were:

*"How did you conduct advocacy on ECD policies?"*

The PD-1 participant responded:

*" Directors of Early Childhood Development (ECD) from the Provincial Education Department (PED) were invited to the Department of Basic Education (DBE) to present the ECD and promote the policy.,"* (PD-1)

She further added:

*"After the policy was introduced to the circuits by District authorities and PED officials, the policy was then made available to ECD practitioners throughout all circuits. (PD-1)*

The PD-2 participant from the Education District said:

*"The Provincial education Department (PED) organised stakeholders such as NGOs and the national office to do advocacy." There are people who are responsible for that."* (PD-2).

It appears from the participants' responses that there is a disconnect between the goals of the advocacy and the way it has been conducted as their responses implied that they were not part of the planning for the advocacy. Remarkably, participants' (PD-1 and PD-2) responses indicate a lack of understanding regarding the PED role and responsibilities about policy advocacy. The participants' responses did not, however, make it seem that they fully understood the purpose of the NIED strategy, which is to strengthen the roles and responsibilities of government agencies in the delivery of ECD services.

#### 4.3.1.2 Supporting the ECD policies

An awareness campaign was conducted in 2012, (Davids et al., 2015) to encourage engagement for all young children to access early education opportunities and to further enhance ECD policies through engagement with a variety of stakeholders, including legislators, funders, development agencies, faith-based organizations, civil society, and government departments.

ECD managers, practitioners, and district officials make up the study's end-users for ECD policies; yet the interviews with these individuals demonstrated scant awareness and comprehension of the policies. One person specifically in charge of ECD centres stated unequivocally that she is unaware of any ECD policy.

The second question posed to the facilitators regarding support on ECD policy implementation was:

To what extent has the district implemented the ECD policies to date?

According to her:

*"As of right now, they haven't implemented any policy for 0–4; it's still in the works." (EPU-1)*

The semi-urban ECD Practitioner likewise appeared to be unfamiliar with any of the nationally defined ECD policies, but she did share her knowledge of the internal operational policies used to operate the ECD centre.

When questioned, she stated:

*"The first policy is admissions so that parents can understand how I manage the school; the second is finance; the third is human resource and risk management; the fourth is abuse; and the fifth is HIV." (EPS-1)*

By referring to management policies as ECD policies, it is possible to conclude that she is aware of policies but not those that guide ECD curriculum at the centre. The ECD manager from Centre 1 was unfamiliar with ECD policies.

She stated briefly:

*"I am at a loss for ideas." (EPS-2)*

According to the comments of the district official and ECD Learning Facilitator, there may not have been an awareness campaign on ECD policies. If the district official were unaware of ECD policies, ECD managers and practitioners would be similarly unaware. As a result, quality in the application of ECD policies is jeopardised.

Focus groups with ECD practitioners and other members from the SGB were used for the interview discussions. Focus group interviews with ECD practitioners lasted over two hours. The two practitioners from the semi-urban area were interviewed throughout the first two morning hours.

Interviews with Centre 1 practitioners were then conducted at their centre. Even though most participants' replies from both focus groups revealed information on the ECD training they got, rather than ECD policies, their understanding appeared scattered.

When asked:

*What obstacles, in your opinion, can prevent the ECD centres from meeting government requirements in terms of offering a government-approved daily learning programmes?*

The following responses demonstrated lack of understanding of the question, which was attributable to the level of literacy:

*"I attended SGB training." (GB-1)*

Another participant made a follow-up response as follows:

*"I attended training on health, education policy, and abuse." (GB-2)*

Following their comments, practitioners from the second focused group said the following:

*"I received training from an NGO on behaviour, nutrition, balancing, and menu programme drafting." (GB-1)*

The second participant indicated that:

*"An NGO trained me in gross motor skills, cognitive skills, and emotional intelligence." (GB-2)*

Compared to the policies that direct their everyday practises, it is evident that the participants in both ECD centres were better knowledgeable about how to care for young children's emotional, intellectual, social, physical, and health well-being in their playrooms than understanding obstacles of implementation. Data revealed that because ECD Practitioners, EPS-1, and EPS-2 were not aware of some of the ECD policies and programmes, they did what they thought was appropriate for ECD learners in their care.

Voogt and Roblin (2012), however, argued that for policy implementers to follow rules and be capable in their day-to-day operations, they must possess policy knowledge. In this sense, young children can be given a solid foundation through high-quality care and education. Data, however, showed minimal indication of ECD policy awareness among those implementing the policy, as discussed with the participants.

#### 4.3.1.3 Training of ECD officials, managers and practitioners

A crucial component of enhancing the execution of ECD policies, according to Mbarathi et al. (2016), is the training of important ECD personnel from the provincial office and the Department of Basic Education. Most participants stated in the semi-structured interviews that they took the initiative to obtain ECD training.

According to the district office representative when asked about the kind of direct assistance anticipated from the government, the responses were:

*"As an official, I received training on how to implement the NCF." (PD-1)*

The provincial official stated:

*"We received training on the Children's Act, the National Curriculum Framework, the Inclusion Policy, and integrated policy." (PD-2)*

The information that the official communicated was not cascaded to the district, as shown by the following findings:

*"I have not yet gotten training on ECD 0–4..., there is no clear policy in place, and although it is now being discussed, although grade RR implementation had begun in 2022. (EPS-1)*

According to the data, there is a gap in training acquisition. PD-1 and PD-2 have received training, but EPS-1 has not. This could explain EPS-1's lack of comprehension of policies governing ECD centres, as well as her lack of training expertise. Based on the facts above, both PD-1 and PD-2 appear to have neglected their obligations to increase the execution of ECD policies for quality teaching to occur. However, Vorster et al. (2016) argue that disseminating information to ECD stakeholders is another strategy to strengthen ECD policy implementation, which is inadequate among ECD stakeholders.

The majority of ECD managers and practitioners recognised the importance of training and received some type of training on various programmes by various service providers. According to interviews with ECD managers and practitioners, the quality of the ECD programmes gained is inequitable.

The findings were as follows:

*"I was trained in service-level agreements, monthly reports, compiling, auditing statements, AGM minutes of meetings, invoicing, and receipts."*

*(EM1) "DSD, DoH, and NGOs provide workshops for practitioners, gardeners, cooks, and principals on DSD-organized human resource and risk policies." "DSD and some NGOs do visit, and the DSD provides us with a lot of assistance." (EM 1).*

The ECD Practitioner at the semi-urban ECD centre purchased a variety of training materials to aid in the training. She was knowledgeable in running the ECD centre. Her explanation of the contents of each ECD book guide demonstrated that she had received enough operational training for managing the ECD centre. The guides were easily presented and contained pertinent information.

The participant (EPS-1) stated confidently:

*"We report every quarter in accordance with the terms of our business plan agreement with DBE. (EPS-1)*

*"Service level agreement is the agreement between the school and DBE," (EPS-2)*

The participant went on to say:

*"The auditing statement is the declaration that..., the fiscal year, the minutes of the AGM, the AGM itself, and monthly meetings. The number of children enrolled in school must be recorded monthly. (EPS-1)*

With confidence and persistence, the ECD Practitioner described the contents and usage of her files:

*"Invoice and receipts in one file, six-month report; after every six months, we take that quarterly report for two quarters, then we compile them and make six-month report, which we submit to DSD." The money for teachers comes from the labour department; we also keep staff contracts and*

*chequebooks, which we get from the lottery and subsequently return from the bank. (EPS-2)*

She went on to say:

*"Then from the PED, there is a file..., we file when they bring the toys and each and everything, we write date ..., make the copy and file it" (EPS-2).*

According to research, ECD managers play a vital role in developing a work and learning environment that is conducive to the provision of high-quality care and education (Hujala et al., 2016). It is evident from the training that EPS-2 received from the licensed ECD centre that ECD centres need to be overseen by robust administrative and management frameworks.

There was, however, no documentation of files demonstrating the management of the ECD centre in the rural area. In contrast to the semi-urban ECD practitioner's expertise and training, the manager of the unregistered ECD centre in the informal area indicated in her response that they lacked confidence and had received insufficient training. Training was clearly mostly in teaching and child development than in management.

She gave a curt response, saying:

*"I received training from an NGO on early child development." (EPR-1)*

The present study bolsters previous research (DBE; DSD; UNICEF, 2010; Mbarathi et al., 2016) that indicates unregistered ECD centres in South Africa offer fewer training chances in economic management and governance compared to registered ones. As a result, working conditions that are conducive to providing ECD services are undermined at poor ECD centres.

As ECD practitioners, the participants were asked to "elaborate on the level of education they have to consider themselves as experts professional in their field; and in response, the first practitioner said,



*"I do not have any formal ECD qualification. I was only trained on abuse policy, health and safety policy and I get assistance from my friends who are qualified teachers" (EPR-1)*

The second practitioner said:

*"Me too. I was trained for an Aftercare course, DSD arranged for training at a school, but it was like a workshop." 2. (EPR-2)*

The second focus group's practitioners supplied the following explanation:

*"I received training from Siyazama NGO on balancing, nutrition, and behaviour observation" (EPU-1), with a follow-up response:*

*"I received training from Sunrise NGO in cognitive, emotional, gross motor, leaping, and motor skills." (EPU-2)*

The participants from the district said:

*"Training is necessary; practitioners require an experienced individual." (PD-1)*

According to the participants' perspectives, there appears to be little acquisition of skills and knowledge to strengthen the application of ECD policies at the district office and corresponding ECD centres. Furthermore, insufficient abilities and understanding could jeopardize the provision of high-quality instruction at the ECD centre level.

During the interview, one participant explained that:

*Some DSD authorities, especially Social Workers, go check the curriculum because practitioners occasionally get confused." (EPU-2)*

This is because, although not receiving training in early childhood development (ECD) modules at universities, social workers have a duty to educate practitioners on how to care for young children. Moreover, it seems that social workers are playing inappropriate roles based on their limited comprehension of the ECD curriculum.

The participant went on to say that instruction is crucial:

*"They need to be trained before they can monitor so that practitioners are not confused." (EPU-1)*

It appears that unequal training has been given to a number of significant stakeholders and ECD practitioners in poor areas, which has an effect on the calibre of professional development. Important ECD stakeholders, such as DBE and DSD officials, appear to be operating independently because they do not share the same information with the ECD professionals. To ensure that early childhood education and care is of good quality, adequate instruction on ECD policies is required at all levels (Excell, 2016; Britto, 2011).

#### 4.3.1.4 Keeping an eye on learning settings and curricular support

When asked obstacles that can prevent the ECD centres from meeting government requirements in terms of offering a government-approved daily learning programmes;

The participant from the provincial department provided an update on the department's monitoring activities regarding the implementation of ECD policy, as well as the problems encountered in providing support and oversight for these centres.

*"It is only registered individuals that the province monitors and assists. We do not supervise that part of the process further because the Education*

*District does not receive funding; instead, we just look at how the curriculum is implemented. (EPR-1)*

Participant EPR-1 states that due to a lack of resources, they are unable to monitor the ECD centres. These findings imply that resource constraints have an impact on ECD centre monitoring. In this manner, young children's development is jeopardized and continues to lag behind

The assertion made by participant EPR-1:

*"Policies in registered ECD centres are developed by the national department, put into effect by the provinces, and overseen by the districts." (EPU-1)*

According to EPR-1 claims, policies are formed in a hierarchical way, and there is no evidence that district and provincial officials keep an eye on ECD centres.

The participant went on to highlight the oversight and help provided to the provinces, saying:

*"Funding is provided to provinces to oversee and educate districts, train ECD professionals, and improve ECD facilities." Districts also provide reports to provinces and attend interprovincial meetings." (EPR-2)*

She continued by talking about the challenges faced by individuals putting policy into practice, stating that:

*"Districts are unable to conduct policies. Fifty centres will be overseen by a single ECD representative. Infrastructure is a problem; there are erected shacks with children of different ages living in them." (EPR-2).*

Participant EPU-1 responded as follows:

*"Grade R is monitored by SMT members. They monitor only the ECD centres that are close to schools; they don't conduct widespread surveillance."* (EPU-1)

These findings indicate that the information shared by participants EPS-1 and EPU-1 differ. While PD-2 asserts that the district only supervises Grade R and only partially monitors surrounding ECD facilities, EPS-1 claims that the district lacks the ability to enforce ECD policies. It raises the question of how to provide a conducive and sustainable learning environment for young children in the absence of a shared knowledge base and a clear definition of the roles of key early childhood development partners.

It was revealed during the interview with the district office participant that although the officials are keeping an eye on the ECD to some extent centres, they do not have any training on what to watch for. Based on the description below, district officials are only going to the centres:

*"We do not have policies, a monitoring tool for children aged 0 to 4 in these centres, and instructions on how to take care of them, feed them, or change their diapers. Officials should be trained on what to look for at the centres." All we do is see how they care for them. (PD-2).*

She went on:

*"Our responsibility is not for 0-4-year-old children, but for 5-6-year-old children," (PD-2)*

This conclusion supports the findings of Atmore (2013), who asserts that there is insufficient oversight and assistance in putting ECD policies into effect for young children to get high-quality training at the centres. Early childhood development (ECD) looks to be a no-man's land where no one wants to oversee a child's development.

There were notable disparities in the ECD managers' experiences monitoring ECD practitioners that they disclosed during the interview:

*“When children leave for the day in the afternoon, teachers head to their classrooms to prepare everything for the next day. When I arrive early in the morning, I make sure everything is ready before the children do, making sure everything is in order before they begin their work.” (EPS-1)*

The participant discussed the instructions she was given to keep an eye on her practitioners:

*“I receive guidance from Matthew Goniwe, the institution that trained us, through the level 1 and level 4 manuals.” (EPS-1)*

Based on our conversation and interview with the manager of the ECD centre in the urban community, the manager did not interact much with practitioners when it came to keeping an eye on their work and fostering a positive learning environment.

The ECD manager clarified:

*“I make sure balandela the daily programmes and ba priphera ama-lesson wabo (I make sure they are following the daily programmes and prepare their lessons), Ngibanabo eduze, ngi-cheka umsebenzi wabo, Ngi finde out ukuthi abana problems na.” (I sit down with them, check the work, and find out if they have problems.) (EPS-2).*

The participant went on to discuss her difficulties in keeping an eye on practitioners:

*“Sometimes uma ngikhuluma nabo aba-followi umsebenzi, sometime ngibona ukuthi they don't do the work” (Sometimes when I talk to them, they don't follow the work, I see they don't do the work.) (EPS-2)*

A lack of encouragement for on-the-spot practical demonstrations, which would allow practitioners to apply theory to practice, may be the cause of this participant's weakness. Research indicates that when it comes to supervising the curriculum at ECD facilities and creating excellent learning environments, district and provincial officials, especially those in rural areas, do not offer enough assistance or accountability.

#### 4.3.1.5 Professionalisation of the Early Childhood Development sector

The policies that ensure high-quality instruction at the ECD facilities are implemented in large part based on the perspectives of ECD practitioners in their field. According to Koster et al. (2014), the lack of formalized, systematic training for ECD practitioners in South Africa devalues their job. Participants' uncertainties about professionalising ECD qualifications are reflected in the data that was collected. Most interviewees said that they had heard about the professionalisation of ECD credentials.

In response to the question posed whether they have *“read the new ECD framework or have you been exposed to it in any way? If yes, in your opinion, does it benefit your career?, the following information was gained.*

According to one participant:

*“Universities are developing degree qualifications, though they are not yet ready; a policy on qualifications 0–4 years is still being developed.” (PD-1)*

This is noteworthy given that the ECD policy was implemented in 2017. It demonstrates that the policy was hierarchical in nature, which the provincial official at ECD was unaware of. As one participant expressed it, there appears to be a lack of collaboration between the DHET, DBE, and universities in terms of professionalisation:

*"Practitioners qualified for level 6 exist, "I have never seen any document, but I have heard them talking about it." and "Yeah, I know our childcare will expand and work will go on." (EPU-2)*

Professionalising ECD, in the opinion of several respondents, will enable them to rise in prestige and be acknowledged as public servants:

*"Professionalizing ECD will benefit us as most people criticize us and our work; it's as though we are employed by the principal". (EPU-1)*

*"We just heard about it..., we will be strengthened and take our work seriously..., being professionalised will be taken seriously," said a different participant. (EPU-1)*

*"As a professional teacher will go to school and study more, we hear about it, said the participant from the rural areas. (EPS-1)*

*"We heard about it..., it will help but others are old and also breadwinners, maybe they won't qualify," expressed a participant's fear". (EPS-2)*

The majority of participants appear to be unsure about the professionalisation and career pathing of ECD qualifications and seemed to think that there was a lack of specific information on career pathing and professionalising ECD. The results also demonstrated that the ECD managers and practitioners from both focus groups were unmotivated and did not think their skills were recognized. During the interview, I discovered that practitioners had low morale since they believe their line of work is low status and receives little respect. Due to the absence of acknowledgment of the ECD profession, service providers lay little priority on educating these demoralized practitioners, with their primary concern being the quality of care provided to young children.

Rather than focusing on handbooks and training manuals, which may reduce the quality of instruction, the Minimum Requirements for Qualifications in Early Childhood Education (MRQECDE) (DHET, 2017) requires ECD practitioners to be knowledgeable about the curriculum content. Consequently, decontextualized ECD practice standards and memorisation of facts are insufficient in teacher preparation. To provide early children with high-quality education and care, it is therefore essential for practitioners to complete an ECD course that deepens their grasp of the subject. As a result, South African education will be of higher calibre.

#### **4.3.2 STRATEGIES FOR ENHANCING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF ECD POLICIES AND PROGRAMMES (THEME 2)**

##### **4.3.2.1 Consultation and coordination with ECD forums and other COPs**

One of the participants emphasized the value of teamwork in fostering positive collaboration and a thorough execution of ECD services by ECD stakeholders. During the interview, the ECD Practitioners expressed that even though ECD policies, procedures, and forums are in place to promote collaboration with other departments, there is no constructive collaboration in the delivery of high-quality ECD services. She emphasized that key players in other departments do not collaborate by saying:

*“Partially, service integration presents difficulties. Officials occasionally visit ECD Centre A. As an official from DBE, I go there today; tomorrow, so and so go there as official from DSD; and on the other day, I have the day off from DoH. I believe that if at all feasible, travel there as a group, speak in a single language, and bring one item in common. The issue arises while visiting one ECD centre in an unusual way. How about making the trip there together? Although practitioners are perplexed, they clarify that they are government employees and do not have the authority to discuss compensation in any way. Anyone who goes there is welcomed and accepted. Instead of going there alone, we should work together to increase communication. For*



*instance, ECD centres become challenging for all ministries to keep an eye on when financing is given to them.” (PD-1)*

The participant also made recommendations about the support that various parties should get to improve collaboration and the implementation of ECD policies:

*“In order to advance early childhood development, we need help strengthening cooperation through the National Interdepartmental Committee (NIDC) and interdepartmental forums.” This can be accomplished by gaining training on curriculum, funding, and health care nutrition to improve our ECD centres. Having a single source of knowledge is critical.” (PD-1)*

#### 4.3.2.2 Management and leadership from various educational departments at various levels

The participant in charge of creating the ECD policy provided an explanation when questioned about the management position, saying:

*On a quarterly basis, the province makes a presentation at interprovincial meetings...The National Strategy for Learner Achievement (NSLA) sends us quarterly statistics that show the number of ECD practitioners who have been trained at various levels and are registered with SAQA as NQF Level 4 practitioners.*

*Thanks to the NSLA, we can see the quantity, how practitioners implement NCF, and how provinces are improving their collaboration with other authorities. Provinces attend interprovincial meetings every quarter, allowing us to observe how they implement the NCF and other measures.” (PD-2)*

Based on the reactions of the participants, there is a communication breakdown between the EPU-1 and PD-2 participants, even though the report states that interprovincial meetings take place at the national level.

Participants expressed:

*"Human resources are scarce. It is the department's mandate to restructure the industry on ECD. (EPU-1)*

*"We don't have a monitoring device for children under four." (EPU-2)*

These findings indicate that participants at the district and provincial office management levels require assistance in conducting the national office plan in their leadership responsibilities. This study validates the findings of Britto et al. (2011), who assert that leadership excellence presents itself at numerous levels. Furthermore, to improve ECD policy implementation, stakeholders must engage in a reciprocal relationship characterized by excellent leadership (Britto et al., 2011).

Excellent leadership is also dependent on the participants in the study. PD-1 and PD-2, opine those shared responsibilities and interaction among ECD practitioners to implement ECD policies was critical and having a sufficient level of knowledge and understanding of the responsibilities and tasks of ECD programmes was also important for effective implementation of the ECD policy and programmes. On the other hand, the findings seem to indicate that the district, provincial, and national offices are not coordinating well.

#### 4.3.2.3 Negotiation and communication amongst ECD Stakeholders

Many interview participants emphasized the importance of stakeholder interactions and negotiations in strengthening ECD policies.

*"NIECD policy is used to collaborate with various departments through the National Interdepartmental Committee (NIDC), which meets quarterly."*

*DSD, DoH, and DSD all meet quarterly...The National Curriculum Framework (NCF) for children aged 0 to 4 years is used in conjunction with the National Integrated Early Childhood Development (NIECD) policy, which was*

*established in partnership with other departments. Working with ECD, DoH, and DSD demonstrates the department's obligations." also*

*"We exchange ideas about how to advance the ECD. For example, the DoH is responsible for nutrition and immunizations, while the DSD registers all ECD centres, ensures that children eat, and pays stipends to practitioners." (PD-2),*

The attendees discussed the implemented strategy, which entails communication and compromise amongst important ECD stakeholders to create a supportive atmosphere within the centres. To improve the execution of ECD policies, stakeholders in ECD operate independently throughout the policy-formation stage, which affects the calibre of policy implementation. During these interdepartmental sessions, there seem to be no shared accountability or ongoing engagement to strengthen the application of ECD policies. The participant's earlier remarks in the conversation make this clear. No one knows what to do.

During the in-person, semi-structured interview with the provincial office participants, the following issues were uncovered:

*"We are guided by the Integrated ECD policy, and our role is to train practitioners on the National Curriculum Framework policy." (PD-1)*

According to the NIECD, the provincial department is required to guarantee equitable access to ECD services, which includes training on curriculum implementation for CAPS (DSD, 2015). However, data suggests that implementation is minimal at the lowest levels, such as the district office and ECD centres. The district official who is the direct implementer of the ECD policy provided the least amount of feedback during the interview, in comparison to the other authorities. According to her comments, the ECD centres receive little traffic.

She said:

*"When the MEC for Infrastructure was present, we visited the ECD centre to observe how it operates and its children, who range in age from 0 to 4 years. They claim to follow CAPS (National Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement), but thus none have." (PD-1)*

The CAPS policy displayed pertains to Grades R through 12. It is clear from the district official's remark that she is not familiar with the curriculum documents for children under four years old. Citing CAPS demonstrates that those in charge of overseeing and evaluating the curriculum on the ground are ignorant of the frameworks and regulations when it comes to the ECD sector. If managers lack the ability to motivate their staff, quality work cannot be done. To deliver top-notch ECD services, there does not seem to be an organized information flow from participants PD-1 and PD-2 to policy implementers.

EPU-2, a participant, has added:

*"A service provider sought to offer resources, train practitioners on ECD programmes, and serve as a sponsor. One responsible authority for the grade R visited several of them, and that is me. (EPU-2)*

Since the service provider seems to know more than EPU-2, the ECD practitioners were given the option to receive training from him. During the talk with the ECD manager, the following became clear:

*"How can we get more parents involved in the school?" They simply bring their children in the morning and say nothing if parents pay the fees at the end of the month. It is a major issue. We require assistance in developing team development activities. They can merge daycares and receive outside assistance. They can do what I do here at Sunrise because we are different." (EPS-2)*

Based on these comments, it indicates that there is a lack of contact and interaction between parents and schools to ensure the qualitative development of

young children in ECD facilities. In addition, the latter participant suggests cooperation with other early childhood development centres could create an atmosphere that is favourable to discussion and interaction to exchange best practices for the development of young children. However, there is little evidence of engagement and conversation at all levels, even though the NIECD has been in place as a policy framework to encourage positive collaboration among diverse ECD stakeholders since 2005 (DSD, 2015). The anticipated outcomes of ECD policy, which are to increase ECD policy implementation, appear to be counterproductive.

#### 4.3.2.4 ECD practitioner training programmes

An official participant explained to the group how disjointed the ECD policy programmes are at the centres. The participant went on to say that there are no guidelines available for practitioners to follow when implementing programmes.

This was in response to the question that:

*“As an ECD practitioner /educator, what are the day-to-day tasks you are required to perform and how much time is spent for each of those tasks?”*

*“The problem is that they don't have a policy, they have their own organization, and no one has ever instructed them..., they each have their own programme..., they have two levels, 0-4 age group and 4-6 age group in one centre...” “Those in charge of 4-6 are trained to follow CAPS.” (PD-2)*

The participant further emphasised that:

*“Those in grades 0–4 adhere to their own schedules. Those under CAPS policy are aware of the number of students they must accept. Teachers, for instance, are entitled to a maximum of fifteen learners. The ratios vary according to the age group. Our “Babeez” classroom is 5:1. Our 1–3-year-old group is 8:1. Our 3–5-year group is 12:1, and our 6-year-old classroom is 14:1” (PD-2)*

Moreover, one attendee from a semi-urban early childhood development center underscored the influence of restricted access to standardized early childhood development programmes on the calibre of instruction in impoverished communities.

She elaborated:

*"You notice that when the children go to the school, there is no basis and the same level of teaching, and some are just teaching they don't follow the curriculum. Some are utilising curriculum, and some are not. Thus, if we can unite. (EPS-2)*

She further added that:

*"When I watch the news, I notice that Black children are suffering in some way. They can devise a plan to assist us in claiming that this is the curriculum because we get it from the DBE while others do not." (EPS-2)*

The district office participant offered her perspective on her visits to various ECD centres and her experiences implementing ECD programmes:

*"We do not have this one's own quota for a class; they would say twenty or less, but they don't know, and they are looking after the young ones. They each have different programmes, and while one may be saying, "We start by giving the food," the other may be stating, "It will have its own way." Even the programmes themselves may clearly differ." (PD-1)*

The participant also mentioned the difficulties they are encountering in monitoring ECD centres because of a lack of established programmes in place:

*"As an official, you have no right or wrong in this situation since you lack any evidence. For example, the younger children clearly require more care than the older ones do, therefore how are they taken care of? When you*

*learn that there is a youngster who may just be six months old, how and when do they feed them?" (PD-1)*

The participant stated that the well-being of children is impacted by the absence of organized, standardized programmes and qualified ECDs, who are professionals experienced in caring for young children:

*"Do they have a way of knowing if the child is sick because they don't talk?" and "How will they take care of them, will they be able to recognize them, and how often do they change their diapers?" (PED-2), and moreover, "Nobody knows you know, is a serious challenge in terms of that one; even if they introduce it, who is going to take care of all those things? That is why I say the quote about a class starting with it—perhaps a class should have five children so that one can take care of them." They must be provided bottles since after there are numerous, how are they going to care for them? (PED-1)*

The participant added:

*"How do you as a practitioner decide which child is okay and needs more medication, which child is not eating today, and so on? It has a lot of health-related difficulties. Practitioners need to be trained by someone with extensive expertise and experience." (PED-2)*

One participant in the focus group talks provided evidence in favour of this viewpoint by stating that they were unable to attend ECD programmes.

She said:

*"We are not included in the DBE's workshops; we are responsible for funding our own development, and DSD offers little assistance in contrast to DBE." (EPR-2)*

In support of the programme followed at the semi-urban ECD centre, a daily schedule is depicted in Figure 4.4.

| START | END   | ACTIVITY                              |
|-------|-------|---------------------------------------|
| 08:00 | 08:10 | Arrival                               |
| 08:10 | 08:30 | Greeting & Routine activities         |
| 08:30 | 09:00 | Life Skills: Theme discussion         |
| 09:00 | 09:30 | Mathematics Activity                  |
| 09:30 | 09:40 | Toilet routine                        |
| 09:40 | 09:55 | Refreshments                          |
| 09:55 | 10:40 | Free play outside, Tidy up            |
| 10:40 | 11:25 | Creative Activity & Tidy up           |
| 11:25 | 11:35 | Toilet routine                        |
| 11:35 | 11:55 | Life skills: Movement / Drama / Music |
| 11:55 | 12:25 | Language Activity                     |
| 12:25 | 12:55 | Story Time                            |
| 12:55 | 13:00 | Departure                             |

Figure 4.4: Depiction of a daily timetable at the semi-urban ECD Centre 3

The daily timetable depicted in Picture 4.4 looks tidy, more structured, and comprehensive for the age group 0 to 4 years.

However, the teacher has titled it a 'programme.' Practitioners follow the prescribed daily timetable to implement the scheduled programmes in their classrooms. It seems to some extent there is quality teaching taking place in the classrooms. However, some words are spelt incorrectly such as '*cry the circle*' instead of using the correct phrase, which is 'colour" the circle and the daily timetable is misunderstood as a programme. This finding shows the quality of learning is compromised which affirms the work of Ebrahim (2014), stating that the level of qualification does not guarantee quality teaching. The centre has funds to buy teaching and learning material from the DSD as explained by the ECD manager participant.



### 4.3.3 CHALLENGES FACED BY ECD STAKEHOLDERS IN IMPROVING THE APPLICATION OF ECD POLICY AT CENTRES (THEME 3)

The third theme focuses on the difficulties faced by participants while putting ECD policies into practice. The participants conveyed their sincere difficulties in putting the ECD policies - which include registration, financial resources, human resources, and programmes - into practice.

#### 4.3.3.1 Funding and financial oversight of ECD centres

Some officials claim that it is challenging to oversee the financing of ECD centres due to the involvement of multiple parties.

A practitioner further explained:

*"The Integrated ECD policy directs us; we are accountable for educating practitioners on NCF policy; DSD provides a stipend, and the government handles payment." (EPU-2)*

The practitioner clarified further by saying that:

*"Private organisations hire and run ECD centres; municipalities do not."* (EPU-2)

One of the participants backed up the opinions by highlighting the difficulties they have managing the ECD funding because there are not enough integrated services.

The participant said:

*"...it becomes challenging for all agencies to assess how funding was spent when granted to ECD centres. Since we do not provide financing, as DBEs, we just examine how the curriculum is implemented; we do not go further to oversee funding because it is not provided by us. (PD-2)*

According to this participant, the DSD appears to oversee and supportive of the semi-urban ECD centre's funding and management.

The individual clarified:

*"They do all the calculations for us, and the money is broken down. This is for food, stipend, stationery, and everything else; they specify how to use every single cent."* (PD-2)

The participant went on to say:

*"We have an arrangement with them, and they divide the money; accordingly, we don't just decide; they break it down into how much is for food, how much is for the gardener, and so on."* (EPS-2)

I included my observations about the ECD centre's management in the field notes to bolster the participant's report. The participant provided an explanation of the documents they had seen.

*"The service Level Agreement is the agreement that we, the school, governing body, and DSD sign and they give us the money for the year. Quarterly report is the money we use to report to Social Development every quarter. Business plan is the agreement between us and the Social Development. The money we claim to know how many children attended school that month is included in our monthly report. The financial year's statement is the auditing statement. Minutes of the AGM; monthly AGM; annual meeting; invoices and receipts all in one file. We use the quarterly report for two quarters after the six-month period is up, and then we put together the six-month report, which we then send to Social Development. Cheque books, the bank's returned cheques, staff contracts, and any other DBE paperwork are kept there. We also make copies of any presents that the children bring and file them."* (EPS-2)

The rural ECD manager's experience differs from the semi-urban managers in the following ways:

*"Parent fundraising and the monthly cash from school fees are used to purchase stationery, outdoor toys, and other necessities. Parents give money, but not consistently. (EPR-1)*

According to the latter participant, parents supply most of the cash for running ECD centres, whereas registered semi-urban ECD centres receive sponsorship from the DSD along with rules for how to use the funds granted. The results validate the theoretical framework proposed by Britto et al. (2011), which posits those variations in funding lead to disparities in the provision of quality early childhood development implementation across various settings and treatments. As a result, the rural areas are primarily impacted and the standards for caregiving and educational materials remain deficient.

Regarding their financial struggles, most participants expressed similar opinions throughout all the group discussions and interviews. They stated that the everyday operations of the ECD centres and their livelihood are impacted by a lack of sustainable income.

*"School fees are paid by parents. The toys are insufficient, the child-teacher ratio must be 1:6 with one assistant, some parents are unemployed, some rely on their grandparents, and teachers are not motivated to stay in the ECD centre due to financial concerns". (EPS-1)*

In a similar vein, the manager of the rural ECD centre described her financial constraints.

She continued, saying:

*"We fundraise ku (from) bazali (parents), ene i-monthly income yabantwana (children's monthly income), we buy toys outdoors and*

*stationary, sometimes parents aba pay regularly (parents don't pay regularly), sometime ngiba ne- problem yokukhokhela staff (sometimes I have a problem of paying the staff), money is not enough."* (EPR-1)

The education district officials explained as follows:

*"Because of poverty, practitioners trained by the Department of Social Development open their own preschools; therefore, the education department has to pay to keep them on staff." We provide training, but it can be challenging to put it into practice. Trained professionals start their own ECD centres.* (PD-1)

The teachers from the two centres in the semi-urban and rural areas who participated in focus groups and interviews discussed the difficulties they had because of their inability to maintain a stable financial situation. They also made note of the difficulties parents face in covering school expenses.

The following information was supplied by these practitioners:

*"We sometimes go two months without receiving our stipend from DSD due to delays in receiving it."* (EPR-2)

One semi-urban-focused group participant added:

*"We have numerous issues if the stipend is not paid since we lack income and the funds to attend job".* (EPS-1)

Participants from the rural focus group offered their subjective experiences and testified to this point of view by sharing:

*"Parents' lack of payment sometimes results in no salaries."* (EPR-2)

One of the participants added:

*"There is not enough staff; for children ages 0 to 2, there should be one teacher for every six children and one assistant; for children ages 2-3, there should be twelve children per teacher and one assistant; however, the DSD stipend doesn't pay the assistant, so they leave."* (GB-1)

One of the practitioners said, expressing her empathy for children:

*"Children come first in our minds before we consider our salary, as parents occasionally fail to provide for their families and there are food shortages"* (EPS-2).

The participants were asked about income ranges describing their salary best; and based on the feedback from both focus groups, participants are not happy with their monthly stipend. Most participants voiced grave concerns about the dearth of long-term funding for ECD practitioners:

*"To train practitioners on NQF Level 4, the DBE pays stipends through the Expanded Public Works programme".* (GB-2)

The official further explained:

*"The Department of Public Works trains practitioners, but because of poverty, they quit and start their own preschools. To keep them on staff, the department must hire them rather than sending them to unpaid pre-schools., high-quality ECD will continue."* (EPS-1)

#### 4.3.3.2 Capabilities and human resources of ECD officials

Most participants, who are officials, expressed their difficulties with the inability to provide practitioner training. Too few authorities work at too many ECD centres. One of the key issues, based on participant experiences, is the retention of ECD practitioners with training.

The participants clarified:

*"District is ill-equipped to carry out policy; one ECD Facilitator I expected to oversee 50 centres...The Department of Public Works trains practitioners, but because of poverty, they quit and start their own preschools. To keep them on staff, the department must hire them rather than sending them to unpaid pre-schools Then high-quality ECD centres will be maintained; nevertheless, municipalities are not keeping an eye on mushrooming centres. (PD-1). In addition: "We provide training, but implementation is challenging." (PD-2) "Trained professionals start their own ECD facilities." (PD-2)*

This problem shows that when the trained practitioners leave their centres to create their own ECD facilities, there cannot be follow-up training, monitoring, or support. Additionally, the lack of additional ECD officials employed by the district office to provide efficient monitoring and assistance for ECD centres demonstrates a lack of concern for these facilities. As a result, it becomes challenging for ECD centres to strengthen the execution of ECD policies for high-quality ECD services.

Participants in the focus group also discussed how the ECD centres lacked parental involvement and support. This was echoed in response to the question.

"What do you believe parents perceive as your role at the centre, in your opinion?"

*"We are not included in DBE workshops; we are responsible for funding our own development, and DSD offers little assistance in contrast to DBE." (GB-2)*

All the practitioners are requesting development funds.

#### 4.3.3.3 Infrastructure: both within and outside the playroom

An ECD Manager's experience working in an under-resourced area was audio-recorded during the interview:

*"Financially we need sponsor, "I will apply to DSD." (EPR-1)*

The infrastructure erected in the backyard was a corrugated iron structure which served as a classroom for the 0 to 3-year-old children of the selected rural area ECD centre -1.

That structure did not reflect a conducive learning environment for quality teaching and learning to take place. The building was substandard; it was not erected on solid ground and posed safety risks for young children and their practitioners. The classroom had inadequate space and ventilation for young children who spend many hours in that environment. The building was extremely hot in summer and cold in winter which posed a health and safety hazard to children as most of them were bottle-fed. There was only one small bed in the building and most children sleep on the floor with mattresses and were exposed to dust and all kinds of infections and diseases.

The play area was dusty and gloomy with few visually stimulating facilities for the holistic development of young children. The eroded play area exposed children to physical injuries and this ECD centre-2 did not have first aid facilities in case of any emergencies.

The ECD manager described the classrooms at the ECD Centre-2 as a sturdy facility constructed by the Department of Public Works, in contrast to the classroom in ECD Centre 3. Compared to the rural centre, the surroundings were favourable for young children's high-quality development and the little children that require high-quality care and development appeared to be in a clean and safe setting. For the safety of the surroundings where children were cared for, there were places under cover from the sun where children could play, and fire extinguishers were clearly visible in the hallways.

The outdoor area at Centre 3 looked colourful and age appropriate. The area has a solid fence around it to ensure the health and safety of young children. The resources for this registered ECD centre were provided by the Department of

Public Works. Access to the provision of resources was inequitable compared to the unregistered centres.

Some of the experiences that were given during the interview with the district office participant align with my findings:

In that centre, I observed one cot, one person sleeping in it, and others were sleeping on the ground on mattresses although it was during the winter season.

*“Do they have to be there?”* (PD-2)

There was just one bed, and most young children slept on the floor, where they were subjected to unhealthy indoor air pollutants including dust.

The brick-and-mortar facility of the DSD-subsidized registered early childhood development centre had few amenities. In the classroom for children aged 0 to 3, there were just three cots. The remaining toddlers were not placed in danger for their health and safety since they slept on individual mattresses on the floor.

The South African Schools Act of 1996 specified basic health and safety standards such as that bathroom routines need to allow for only a few children to use the bathroom at one time, however; the ablution facilities available for young children did not satisfy those standards. In addition, the state of the ECD Centre 1 demonstrated that poor sanitary facilities were available for young children who were particularly vulnerable. These results ran counter to the seventh Millennium Development Goal (MDG), which the South African government adopted to guarantee environmental sustainability, which is also a requirement for all ECD centres (Jamieson et al., 2017; WHO, 2015).

Additionally, it was clear that the rural ECD centre lacked essential amenities like running water. There was just one tap on the property, and children could fill up old bottles with water to drink. At the semi-urban and rural ECD centres, diverse settings and contexts are used to give different ECD services. The results showed



that access to high-quality ECD care is still unequal, primarily affecting young children who are already at risk.

#### 4.3.3.4 Registration with Department of Social development (DSD)

Most participants expressed their opinions regarding the differences in ECD centre registration, particularly in underprivileged areas. Based on the participant's experiences, the majority of ECD centres do not fulfil the prerequisites for DSD registration. The results support the findings of Viviers et al. (2013), who stated that it is challenging to comply with the DSD's strict regulations and criteria for ECD centre registration. One of the participants gave the following explanation:

*"ECD centres are private organizations, and the DSD is in charge of acquiring resources. Only ECD centres that are registered with the DSD receive training, and only centres that have 30 children may be registered."*  
(PD-1)

Two participants backed the idea of registering ECD centres by pointing out that:

*"...the province only monitors and supports those who are registered." (GB-1)*  
*"Ample funding, appropriate training for registering centres, and bringing quotes are needed." (EPS-2)*

Some of the experiences revealed during the interview with a district office participant echoed my findings:

*"In that centre, I observed one cot, one person sleeping in it, and another person not; others were on the ground. A few were on the ground during the winter.... Do they have to be there? (PD-2)*

An explanation by participant 2 (PD-2) was confirmed as here was only one bed... Most young children slept on the floor, where dust and other harmful indoor air pollutants could be found.

Although the structure was composed of brick and mortar, the registered ECD centre at Centre 2 in the semi-urban area, which received funding from the DSD, had very few amenities. The classroom for children ages 0 to 3 had just three beds. The remaining toddlers slept on the floor, which put their health and safety at danger. Furthermore, there was no sign of a separate space for changing diapers. There was a kitchen in the ECD centre where food could be prepared and bottles for toddlers made.

The South African Schools Act of 1996 (RSA, 1996) stipulated fundamental standards for health and safety, which were not met by the subpar restrooms for young children. In addition, it was clear from the state of the facilities at ECD facilities that small children who are susceptible to illness, do not have access to hygienic amenities.

Similarly, the same remote ECD centres lack of basic facilities like running water. The property has only one tap, and children can drink the water stored in old bottles. At semi-urban and rural ECD centres, diverse places and circumstances are used to provide varied ECD services. The findings show that access to high-quality ECD care remains unequal, particularly for vulnerable young children.

#### **4.4 CONCLUSION**

Chapter 4 presented collected data from interviews which were recorded and grouped into categories and themes. Furthermore, the findings were guided by the research questions on how the implementation of ECD policies can be strengthened to improve the quality of care and education of young children. Inadequacy in the implementation of ECD policies for quality care and education of young children in the selected ECD centres was also discussed.

Chapter 5 will provide a summary, the results, the significance, and suggestions for additional research to augment this investigation.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **5.1 INTRODUCTION**

Chapter 4 presented collected data from interviews which were recorded and grouped into categories and themes based on the research questions that guided the investigation, and the theoretical framework that supported the study.

This concluding chapter begins with a summary of the previous chapters followed by the findings. The chapter contains recommendations to ensure a fully trained early childhood teacher workforce with high working standards, as well as to enable the provision of basic infrastructure, in-service training, orientation programmes and diversity management. There are also suggestions for additional research in relevant areas and a description of the study's shortcomings.

The dissertation concludes with a perspective on the research process.

#### **5.2 CHAPTER SUMMARIES**

The four previous chapters are briefly summarized in the next section, with an emphasis on noteworthy discoveries that are pertinent to this investigation.

##### **5.2.1 Chapter 1**

The first chapter provided a general background to this study by describing the components that pertain to the rationale of this research, the research problem, and the subsequent research questions that support this study. It also included important idea summaries, study methodology, ethical considerations, and a preliminary review of pertinent literature. The chapter furthermore included a brief explanation of the theoretical framework, which comprised Schoon's theory and served as a lens through which to interpret the data and literature.

### **5.2.2 Chapter 2**

A review of the literature was done that was relevant to the conceptual and contextual framework that the study objectives were set in. The chapter examined how ECD practitioners' overall performance is impacted by the process of implementing and adhering to the ECD policies and programmes. It was determined that ECD practitioners are better able to manage the demands of the new teaching trends if they have received enough training for the current ECD policy requirements.

The chapter also discussed how important it is for practitioners to be a child's primary source of support throughout their whole development, helping teachers through difficult transitions has grown to be a hot topic in the field of early learning and development. The most crucial characteristics that practitioners must possess to effectively oversee the implementation process were covered in the conclusion of the chapter.

### **5.2.3 Chapter 3**

This chapter explained the research methodology implemented to substantiate the research design and methodological perspectives of the study. Situated in an interpretative paradigm, I adopted a qualitative research approach which made it viable to engage with the research participants. The study was conducted in a real-world setting where I was able to witness young children's experiences attending various ECD centres and the practitioners' engagement in their learning throughout this critical period of preparing for school. The chapter also described the procedures to demarcate the research sites and establish the sampling and data collection methods.

The chapter concluded with an examination of the four criteria that determined the study's trustworthiness, which are credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability - in conjunction with the ethical considerations involved in this study.

#### **5.2.4 Chapter 4**

Chapter 4 focused on the analysis of the empirical data collected from the three participating ECD Centres to find credible answers to the research questions formulated in Chapter 1. The data collected during fieldwork – interviews with practitioners, and brief observations of their interactions with the children were analysed according to each case. The chapter firstly explained how entry was gained to the research sites and then provided biographical data of the participants.

The focal point of this chapter was the data collection and analysis during which key themes and categories were identified to serve as the basis for the interpretation of findings (described below) where the empirical findings based on the literature review, the theoretical and the research questions were interpreted. The data interpreted was presented by utilizing the three themes that emerged during data analysis, which were a) processes of enhancing ECD policies, b) strategies for enhancing the implementation of ECD policies and programmes, and c) challenges faced by stakeholders in improving the application of ECD policy at centres. A careful examination of each theme and the various categories aided the data analysis process. I heavily relied on my field observations and the practitioners' opinions of how policies are implemented. I used genuine quotes from the interviewees to create an engaging and grounded picture of the changeover process. Each of these processes enhanced the value of the information gathered.

### **5.3 OVERVIEW OF KEY LITERATURE FINDINGS**

In this section, I present an overview of the findings that emerged from the literature review.

Qualities of an ECD practitioner

In addition to utilizing innovative teaching strategies, literature sources outline a variety of attributes that educators should possess to assist young children in unpredictable circumstances. For example, competence is a valued trait that can be obtained through professional training for early childhood practitioners. Skilled practitioners may recognize how to broaden their knowledge and enhance their practices, as well as incorporate newly acquired knowledge, skills, and values. They are skilled in assisting children in achieving academic and social success. A strong ambition for a profession in childcare and education is another important characteristic. Children who find themselves in an unfamiliar situation might be made to feel safe and comfortable with the help of ECD practitioners that have a passion for kids, education, and the curriculum.

An enthusiastic and knowledgeable Early Childhood Educator (ECD) practitioner can help foster strong and fulfilling relationships with children by better understanding their emotional states and learning differences. The ability to pass on an adult's love of music and storytelling to youngsters allows them to become role models and sources of knowledge for the younger generation. A research with eight ECD practitioners from the various ECD centres found that other important traits include high energy levels, a sense of humour, persistence, patience, and a love of learning, as well as respect and inventiveness.

Professionals in ECD who have all or most of these qualities will be able to successfully handle the demands of their roles. Some sources claim that practitioners who are eager, committed, and curious will engage with transitioning youngsters positively. Alongside the previously listed characteristics, empathy and emotional constancy are also critical attributes that ECD practitioners should possess. Professionals possessing these attributes can preserve tender connections with children, identify their emotions, and view the world through their eyes. Another powerful attribute that enhances communication and helps a child develop a positive self-concept is when they feel welcomed. The ability to be creative enables professionals to think creatively about what is best for every child. Because practitioners are needed, according to multiple sources, to give

children positive early experiences, consistent and reasonable practitioners will have the character strength to draw youngsters closer to them.

Resolute caregivers give children confidence and deliver high-quality care consistently. Reasonable educators will make sure children advance at their own speed without setting unrealistic expectations for them. The best attributes for practitioners to possess to manage the intense emotions that children have during their first few days of school are fortitude, perseverance, and strength of character. Genuine practitioners are in-the-know and dedicated to experiential education. In an early learning centre, resilient and disciplined practitioners are well-suited to foster a sense of belonging and teamwork among newly arrived youngsters. Children who are raised with those traits will have a greater inclination to adjust and develop independence.

## **5.4 OVERVIEW OF EMPIRICAL FINDINGS**

The study sought to enhance the application of ECD policies and programs that would assist ECD practitioners in supporting transition for children ages 3-5 years, based on data gathered from research participants. To achieve this, I conducted interviews with practitioners, evaluated the classroom setting in which the kids were housed and instructed, and watched teacher-student interactions from the moment they arrived at the schools until they left. The three themes that emerged from the data showed how each participant's views were deeply rooted in their individual histories, dispositions, convictions, attitudes, and values, in addition to how they handled their parents and kids during the period of transition. The following empirical conclusions were drawn from the study after careful participant observation and in-depth data analysis.

### **5.4.1 Findings regarding teacher training**

For children to develop socially, emotionally, physically, and cognitively, a supportive learning environment and ECD professionals with the required training are crucial. If ECD centers want children to thrive in the social, emotional, and

cognitive domains, they must ensure that ECD practitioners have access to the training and continuing assistance they need. Above all, such strategy would enhance educators' expertise and proficiencies. Children undergoing transition benefit from enhanced social-emotional, physical, and cognitive learning when their teachers can refine their standard teaching methods and have the required qualifications. Early childhood educators should be motivated to address the social-emotional, physical, and cognitive requirements of the child through training programmes that provide them with information on the advantages of teaching the whole child.

To ensure that participants in ECD teacher-training programs understand how children's learning and development change over time, a module on child development theories must be included. This type of training will help ECD practitioners understand their vital role in helping the children under their care, which will better prepare them to offer experiences that are appropriate for children going through a transition.

For kids to become confident, make friends, and cherish the people in their lives, they need to be able to develop their social and emotional skills. As a result, routines in early learning centers should support kids in using their social skills, building relationships, cooperating with others, and problem-solving. Children who get compassionate care from practitioners develop emotional self-control. This demonstrates how crucial practitioners are to kids' social-emotional growth. Some of the ECD practitioners who participated in this study tried to engage the kids in a range of social-emotional activities to aid in the transition. For instance, they engaged kids in structured activities that made them feel secure and important.

They were effective in teaching children how to resolve conflicts, communicate preferences, control their emotions, and manage obstacles. They put their understanding to use by taking initiative-taking measures that made the environment conducive to more seamless transfers. By creating a serene refuge



of mental well-being, those practitioners were able to lower the children' stress levels, enabling them to establish emotional stability in their new surroundings.

The teachers' strategy of being on hand to soothe any upset children made it easier for the children to feel welcomed in a setting that was distinct from their homes. Observations from this study show that untrained individuals were unable to provide emotional support to youngsters and were frequently unavailable when the children needed them the most. Children who did not speak the school's prevailing language were excluded from social activities. The children ought to feel at home in a setting that differs from their homes.

Due to linguistic barriers, the kids couldn't build strong relationships with other kids or even trust their teachers, who couldn't do much to support a fearful child in overcoming their fear. By allowing excellent teaching opportunities to pass them by on a regular basis, these educators lost the opportunity to raise the children's competencies throughout the transitional phase. Unexplained absences by practitioners and other unethical behaviours might leave struggling children with unmet emotional needs that could jeopardize their immediate and long-term development in this area. The findings of the study demonstrate that most untrained practitioners lack the academic knowledge required to properly manage classrooms and recognize the developmental stages of children, which prevents them from being able to support children emotionally. However, a significant finding of this study indicates that inexperienced professionals who care deeply and enthusiastically about children's welfare may benefit children by being regularly and emotionally available to them.

The favourable environment of Early Childhood Development (ECD) centers is one of the key established elements for child development. Children who can practice their fine motor skills become stronger and more adept with their hands. Early childhood educators need to be trained in fine motor development and make sure the environment is as friendly as possible to guarantee that kids play, explore, and engage in activities that promote this skill.

To help kids become more resilient and self-assured, ECD experts also need to know how much time kids should spend every day honing their gross motor skills. The development of these skills is linked to children's ability to manage physically demanding jobs that get harder with time. Based on the official curriculum, this study found that trained participants significantly contributed to this industry when they planned outdoor workshops. The kids in the research site had several opportunities to practice their gross motor skills and develop their muscles. However, in other places, practitioners conveniently excluded physical exercises from daily schedules because they did not recognize the value of early physical learning. The practitioners were still uninterested in setting up the play stations even with considerable resources available. The chaos within and outside the buildings kept the kids confined to their classes and immobile. A child's inability to master the physical world impedes his or her healthy physical development.

This study also discovered that the skilled practitioners performed their professional duties with competence and success, enabling children to undergo age-related changes like enhanced memory, reasoning, and concept formulation. They made sure children engaged in developmentally appropriate activities every day to help them get a better knowledge of the world. physical growth. They were able to investigate and comprehend their surroundings as a result. Children who have access to a wide range of materials pick up language, arithmetic, and science topics rapidly. They also engage in imaginative play and make creative use of language. From the time of their arrival until their departure, these children were avidly engaged in a variety of activities, as my observations have shown.

Because participating practitioners prepared lessons and used departmental lesson plans to support cognitive growth, quality predominated in certain of the teaching domains. This study also found that children who only engage in workbook-related activities lack significant opportunities to explore and experiment with physical items, and that colouring-in activities limit children's creativity and self-expression. The comprehensive demands of early childhood

settings can be aided by the presence of trained practitioners, as evidenced by both empirical data and academic sources.

The layout of classrooms and outdoor play areas, as well as the arrangement of all the learning and play resources to ensure children can easily reach them, are critical skills for Early Childhood Educators to possess. It is therefore imperative that the training framework assists practitioners in becoming adept at creating engaging learning environments.

Classrooms need to have clearly defined areas for science, play (item play, pretend play), culture (painting and singing), and learning. Therefore, it's critical to create enough space so that kids can practice a variety of skills in demanding yet secure environments. It is imperative that educators comprehend the importance of teaching environmental preservation and provide an example of this behaviour for their students. The third and last component of the training framework should be an inclusivity-based training programme that aims to improve practitioners' ability to create activities appropriate for kids with special needs and to create inclusive, secure learning environments.

Through the training programme, practitioners will learn how to identify and support children with exceptional needs. The training should discuss the preparation and implementation of strategies to address any developmental delays. Early meeting of a child's requirements will reduce the likelihood of their falling behind. To understand each child's unique social-emotional requirements, practitioners must collaborate closely with parents to find out about their children's interests, preferences, and dislikes.

## **5.5 RECOMMENDATIONS**

The study's main finding, which is based on empirical data and literature, is that hiring inexperienced teachers has a detrimental effect on young children's learning outcomes because it makes it more difficult for them to transition from home to school. By putting the following recommendations into practice, the

Department of Basic Education (DBE), district officials, and schools may ensure that employed practitioners gain the skills and knowledge needed to meet the diverse needs of young transitioning children.

### **5.5.1 Recommendations for the Department of Basic Education**

The DBE, which is the executive authority in charge of regulating legislative matters pertaining to children's education, ought to consider the next two proposals.

#### **5.5.1.1 Deadline for becoming a qualified Grade-R practitioner**

For untrained practitioners already working in schools, the DBE needs to set a new deadline for obtaining a formal certificate. A previous deadline established by the DBE stated that no practitioner will be permitted to teach a Grade-R class after 2019 if their qualification is less than Level 6, which is the equivalent of the National Diploma in Grade-R teaching.

Nonetheless, the DBE continues to employ many ECD practitioners who do not yet possess the necessary certification, and there is no rush to finish ECD training programmes. Little children who are about to start school run the risk of being unsettled and having their wellbeing compromised by the lack of knowledge and skills by unqualified practitioners to provide them with proper instruction. If appropriately implemented, the new deadline ought to encourage professionals to finish their degrees on schedule and give them the tools they need to guarantee that children's needs are satisfied during the transfer.

#### **5.5.1.2 Database to track unqualified ECD practitioners**

To make sure that untrained practitioners are supported while pursuing a qualification and are not permitted to teach in schools or ECD centres, the DBE should compile a list of them. By using this list, the DBE will be able to keep an eye on the practitioners' academic progress and give them chances to take part

in in-service training sessions on diversity management, additional language education, and helping kids adjust to new situations. Schools have been assured by the DBE that the present group of inexperienced teachers would not be removed from the system; rather, they will be granted additional time to complete their degrees while still teaching students in grades R–R.

As a result, while unskilled practitioners are busy obtaining their qualifications, they must receive mandatory basic training as a safety net. In this sense, bridging modules might address subjects including child development, scheduling, routines, teacher-parent collaboration, classroom management, and school physical environment design. Furthermore, officials must conduct follow-up visits to schools to track teachers' advancement in applying new teaching techniques.

### **5.5.2 Recommendations for district ECD Learning Facilitators**

The management of the early childhood education curriculum in terms of policy and legislation falls within the purview of ECD Learning Facilitators. They are expected to plan and oversee training programmes for ECD practitioners and Heads of Departments (HoDs), as well as to distribute educational materials. The district ECD Learning Facilitators are the target of the next two suggestions:

#### **5.5.2.1 Auditing early childhood centres and primary schools**

It is the responsibility of district coordinators to evaluate early childhood centers and schools to ensure that the latter are utilizing all available resources. Without enough direction, inexperienced teachers typically hoard the resources in classrooms and hardly ever use them effectively. Consequently, they must ensure that teachers are trained on how to use the invaluable tools that are supplied to schools, such as resource packs, DBE workbooks, and pre-planned lessons.

When the early childhood facilitators at the district office mediate lesson plans during training sessions, it is advised that they make these resources available. The facilitators should emphasize how important it is for practitioners to follow a

set curriculum. To facilitate children's transitions, district managers ought to set up lesson mediation for ECD practitioners as well as meetings with ECD professionals at the onset of the academic year within their specific clusters.

#### 5.5.2.2 Instructional workshops for department heads

District coordinators should convene regular workshops with HoDs so they can be prepared to mentor and support ECD practitioners. Training can be given through regular seminars and training workshops to help people understand the benefits of play-based learning. HoDs now argue that they are not equipped with the appropriate training to oversee practitioners because overseeing the Foundation Phase is their main responsibility. Heads of Departments (HoDs) should be empowered by district coordinators taking the lead. By doing this, the HoDs can ensure that the practitioners are planning age-appropriate activities that promote the children's physical, social-emotional, and cognitive development and provide ongoing assistance that is customized to meet their needs. HoDs must be able to give practitioners examples of successful programs to ensure that everyone performs at the necessary level. Frequent monitoring is also necessary to ensure that practitioners adhere to the basic rules for curriculum creation and delivery.

#### **5.5.3 Recommendations for educational institutions and ECD centres**

It is important to give the School Management Team (SMT) and ECD center managers the authority to offer children with excellent early education and shape their learning outcomes in the future. The advice that follows is intended for SMTs:

##### 5.5.3.1 Diversity management by ECD centre managers and school management teams

To support practitioners in assisting children with transitions, department heads, ECD centre heads, deputy principals, and school principals must work closely together. South African schools typically accommodate children from diverse

backgrounds; as a result, the children require the aid of accompanying adults to feel accepted in their new environment. This is a difficult subject because some SMTs and ECD centre managers have not received training in this area, limiting their ability to empower personnel. It is recommended that schools and district coordinators hold training sessions for diversity management practitioners to help them fulfill the needs of children from varied cultural and linguistic backgrounds. This is critical to ensuring that all new students receive equal treatment. Schools can also welcome parents who speak a migrant child's home language to help them acclimate to their new school setting.

#### **5.5.4 Recommendations for ECD professionals**

ECD practitioners can use the SMT to design and conduct seamless transitions by setting up all the procedures needed for the execution of ECD programs. These kinds of activities can ease kids' anxieties about going to school.

The two recommendations that follow are meant for practitioners.

##### **5.5.4.1 Establishing a diverse and helpful environment for ECD**

An ECD classroom that is disorganized can make young children feel more anxious. It is imperative for practitioners to provide a stimulating atmosphere that encourages children to participate, interact with others, and sustain relationships.

##### **5.5.4.2 Preparing children in advance for the transition**

Most kids get upset when there are changes in their life. In order for the parents of the children to witness and experience firsthand how conducive the ECD learning environment is for their children, it is advised that HoDs and ECD practitioners work with them to start the transitioning processes by hosting an open day on school property at least three months prior to the start of classes again.

Regarding the best interests of young children, this technique may help all parties involved understand what to anticipate in terms of the ECD learning environment, curriculum, and programs, as well as the human resource capabilities to conduct ECD programs, etc. Children and parents will get the chance to interact with ECD practitioners and voice any concerns they may have during a well-organized open day. They will also be able to become familiar with the ECD setting.

### **5.5.5 Recommendations for parent figures**

It is important to understand that parents go through stress while their kids transition to school. When preparing their kids for school, they also need staunch support from the educational institutions. This advice is intended for parents of children going through a transition.

#### **5.5.5.1 Educating parents about school practices**

Parents must be given valuable information by ECD practitioners regarding the impending transitions their children will experience. Proactive strategies that are well-coordinated, such as parent and child workshops and demonstrations, are recommended. To help parents get their kids ready for the new experience at home, practitioners may set up informational meetings. Parents can obtain copies of the school's policies, guidelines, and daily lesson plans during these meetings.

## **5.6 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH**

The findings of the research are notable and provide valuable information regarding the needs and experiences of children during transitions, but they also draw attention to the elements that are crucial to an ECD practitioner's continuous professional development (CPD) framework. The findings of the study are notable and provide valuable information regarding the needs and experiences of children during transitions, but they also draw attention to the elements that are crucial to an ECD practitioner's continuous professional development (CPD) framework. During the study, a few pieces of evidence that provided insight into the



experiences of implementing ECD programmes became known, and further research is still needed in those areas of the study. Future investigations could potentially confirm or build upon the results of this study, offering a deeper understanding of children's experiences and practitioners' facilitation of transitions. Further investigation will benefit this research as well.

Here are a few areas for more research:

- (a) Strategies that facilitate parents' comfort level in choosing a suitable ECD centre for their children;
- (b) A follow-up research study with newly qualified ECD practitioners to determine how they incorporate newly learned pedagogical knowledge, abilities, and attitudes into their classrooms and activities;
- (c) A research study on plausible strategies to assist inexperienced practitioners, conducted in conjunction with district coordinators and early childhood officials from the DBE;
- (d) Analysing practical strategies for assisting ECD practitioners from a variety of backgrounds with the implementation of ECD programmes.

## **5.7 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

Even though the study was successfully completed, there were a few issues, some of which are listed below.

- (a) South Africa is divided into nine provinces, each of which symbolizes a unique geographic environment and cultural group/s. Adding data from additional provinces to the study would have allowed for a fuller picture of how ECD policies and programmes are implemented across South Africa.
- (b) I was eager to start fieldwork and had planned to start gathering data during the first quarter of the school's reopening to have a precise picture of what

was happening there. As per the guidelines set forth by the Provincial Department of Education, research authorization in schools could not be granted unless an ethical clearance certificate was obtained beforehand. To obtain an ethical clearance certificate took longer than expected.

- (c) The school days made conducting interviews difficult. Interviews were routinely postponed by practitioners owing to fatigue and scheduling conflicts. They finally decided to do the interviews early on a Saturday. The researcher was under stress due to the protracted ambiguity during this period.

## **5.8 CONCLUDING REMARKS**

This study concentrated on a critical component of early childhood development: the successful execution of ECD policies and programmes, which necessitates the commitment and necessary expertise of those in charge of them. A review of the literature on the application of policies in industrialized nations indicates that concepts included in transition frameworks, teacher empowerment programmes, and educational guidelines, all of which support the implementation's success. In order to effectively interact with frameworks, policies, and programmes during a functioning shift, practitioners must draw on their educational skills, life experiences, and views.

More South African children now have access to early childhood care, but despite a slew of new laws, regulations, curriculum reviews, and acts, the quality of care provided to children and the way most inexperienced ECD practitioners approach their work remain questionable, particularly in terms of smoothing transitions. Because of my study, I was able to observe various approaches to implementation in selected schools and ECD centres and discovered that untrained practitioners lack the abilities required to implement successful ECD policy and programmes.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix A (MDE)

MARCH 2023

The Head of Education: Mpumalanga Province  
Ms. L Moyane  
Private Bag X11341  
**NELSPRUIT**  
1200

#### REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

Under the guidance of Prof. E Jansen van Vuuren, I am presently working on my dissertation for a Master's degree in Education at the University of Mpumalanga, with a focus on early childhood development. My focus area of study is ENHANCING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION PROGRAMMES IN SELECTED SCHOOLS IN THE GERT SIBANDE DISTRICT OF MPUMALANGA PROVINCE

In order to help Grade-R teachers and Early Childhood Curriculum (ECC) practitioners execute the ECC, the study aims to identify implementation barriers and suggest plausible solutions.

I have a particular interest in ECD practitioners and educators who work with young children, ages 0 to 4. It is critical to comprehend the perspectives held by ECD practitioners about how the programmes are being implemented.

I seek permission to carry out research in ECD centres situated Gert Sibande District of Mpumalanga province. A convenient selection of ten participants will be made from the ECD centres.

The ECD centres that were chosen are the following:

- Thub'elihle Primary School
- Siyathuthuka Primary School
- Vul'amehlo Daycare Centre

The sampling will be guided by the following standards.

- ECD practitioners who work with children between the ages of 0 and 4 are required to participate.
- At the time of the study, participants must have worked for a minimum of two years in any type of ECD centre, either private, public, or rural.
- To be eligible, participants must work in the Gert Sibande District Municipality.

- It is required of participants that they are also able to read and understand English.

In order to better understand how the participants feel about the way the ECD programmes are implemented and to gather information that can help me find the answers to my research questions, I would like to interview the participants. Since the ECD centres are the most convenient site for practitioners, the interviews will take place in those centres. If practitioners agree to take part, I will ask them to respond to a series of opinion-based questions in a semi-structured interview session. There are therefore no right or wrong replies, according to this. For every interview, the interview procedure will not last more than 45 minutes. In addition, I'll request authorization to watch and document the practitioners' non-verbal indications during the interview sessions.

This study is carried out in accordance with the rules established by the University of Mpumalanga's Code of Ethics for Research. The researcher will guarantee that all study participants will be ethically protected during the investigation, carrying out ethical responsibilities in the process. This entails making certain that no one is harmed while participating.

Practitioners will be asked to engage voluntarily, and since they will be provided codes to use during the research project to make sure their names are not utilized, no participant identity will be revealed. Confidentiality and anonymity are thus guaranteed. Every detail will be kept private, and the researcher alone will manage the data gathered for this investigation. The participant's privacy and dignity will be upheld at all times during this process. The participant may discontinue participation in the research study at any point without incurring any fees. A letter noting that each participant gives informed permission and acknowledges their rights and expectations as participants will be given to each participant to sign

#### **PROPOSED PROCEDURE FOR DATA COLLECTION**

| <b>Date</b>    | <b>Procedure</b>                                     | <b>Duration</b>          |
|----------------|------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Week 1         | Meeting participants                                 | 1 hour                   |
| Week 2- week 3 | Scheduled interview with ECD Practitioners/Educators | 45 minutes per interview |

Should there be any need for additional information about this study, my supervisor can be contacted as follows:

Prof. E Jansen van Vuuren  
University of Mpumalanga  
Faculty of Education  
Bheki Mfundo Drive  
**SIYABUSWA**  
0472  
Email: [Eurika.jvuuren@ump.ac.za](mailto:Eurika.jvuuren@ump.ac.za)

I trust that my request to conduct the study will be considered favourably.

Yours sincerely

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Ms Sonto Vilane (Student No. 220608768)

## **Appendix B (PRINCIPAL)**

### **PERMISSION TO CONDUCT A RESEARCH STUDY IN YOUR ECD CENTRE**

I am Sonto Vilane. Under the guidance of Professor E Jansen van Vuuren, I am presently working on my dissertation for a Master's degree in Education at the University of Mpumalanga, with a focus on Early Childhood Development. IMPROVED EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION PROGRAMMES IN SELECTED SCHOOLS IN THE GERT SIBANDE DISTRICT OF MPUMALANGA PROVINCE is my area of study.

The study aims to uncover obstacles in the Early Childhood Curriculum (ECC) implementation process and suggest potential solutions to help ECD practitioners and Grade R teachers overcome these obstacles.

The ECD practitioner(s) from your ECD center may be included in this study with your consent. Based on predetermined criteria, which include the following, teachers from your ECD center will be chosen:

- Teachers of young children, ages 0 to 4, who work with ECD practitioners must be participants.
- At least two years of employment in any type of ECD center—private, public, or rural—must be completed by participants at the commencement of the study.
- Employees of Gert Sibande District Municipality must be participating.
- Reading and understanding English are prerequisites for participation.

You can use the information in this letter to decide whether or not you would like the ECD practitioner(s) from your ECD center to participate in the study. Remain assured that their involvement in the study is entirely voluntary, and they are free to leave at any time without facing any repercussions. Participants will be identified by pseudonyms; the identity of practitioners will remain confidential. I guarantee that every piece of personal data will be kept private.

Before or during the study, you can use the information below to get in touch with my supervisor or me if you have any queries.

I look forward to receiving a positive response to my invitation.

Yours faithfully

**Researcher:** Sonto Vilane.

Email to: [slvilane@gmail.com](mailto:slvilane@gmail.com) Cell: 082 6961528

**Supervisor:** Prof E Jansen van Vuuren

Email to: [Eurika.jvvuuren@ump.ac.za](mailto:Eurika.jvvuuren@ump.ac.za)

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Should you agree to my request, may you kindly sign the attached consent form.

-----  
**Letter of Consent**

By signing this consent form, you grant me permission to conduct research at your centre and attest that you fully understand the nature, purpose, and procedures that will be followed during the study. You will receive a copy of this consent letter.

1. I consent to my ECD centre's ECD practitioners taking part in the aforementioned research study and in-person semi-structured interviews.
2. I give the researcher permission to do research and gather information in my ECD centre, including through non-participatory observation, interviews, and field notes.
3. I give the researcher permission to conduct a study and gather information at my ECD centre, including through interviews, field notes, and non-participatory observation.
4. I am aware that the person conducting the study will follow the following guidelines for ethical research:
  - a. voluntary involvement, meaning that professionals from my ECD centre are free to engage or not at any time;
  - b. informed consent, meaning that I made the decision to permit participation from practitioners from my ECD centre after reviewing the researcher's information;
  - c. privacy, or the anonymity and secrecy of ECD centres and involvement of the participating ECD practitioners of those centres.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Principal /ECD Centre Head/

Date:



**September 2023**

Dear Sir/Madam

**REQUEST TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH PROJECT**

I am Sonto Vilane, and currently working under Prof. E Jansen van Vuuren's supervision on my dissertation for a Master's degree in Education at the University of Mpumalanga, with a focus on Early Childhood Development. My research topic is **ENHANCING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION PROGRAMMES IN SPECIFIC SCHOOLS IN THE GERT SIBANDE DISTRICT OF THE PROVINCE OF MPUMALANGA.**

You are cordially invited to take part in this research endeavor. If you choose to participate, kindly allow me to explain the parameters and obligations of your commitment. As an experienced Early Childhood Educator (ECD) who has worked with children ages 0 to 4 for at least two years, I would want to interview you in order to gather the data I need for this research study. To facilitate the interview and observation processes, I have included a copy of the semi-structured interview schedule with this letter.

This study aims to hear your voice as an ECD practitioner because you are the ones on the "ground," not to criticize your center or yourself. Rather, it is intended to offer recommendations to policymakers, professionals, and experts to help close the gaps in the ECD sector as far as the implementation of its ECD programmes is concerned.

You are free to decide whether or not to engage in this research project, and if you do, you are free to leave the study at any time. Please be assured that all information gathered for this study will be treated with utmost confidentiality. No one else will have access to the unprocessed information obtained during the interview sessions. Furthermore, neither your name as a participant nor the name of your ECD centre will be disclosed or allowed to be identified in any manner throughout the research procedure or in the final research report.

Data transcripts will be made available to you so that you and the other participants can verify the veracity and accuracy of the material before drawing conclusions from the data findings. At the conclusion of the project, you will receive a copy of the study report that contains the conclusions and suggestions



for the execution of ECD programmes at ECD centres. This research study offers you a special chance to participate in the investigation and enhancement of the ECD sector in South Africa.

With the intention of enhancing the implementation of ECD sector programmes, I cordially encourage you to take part in this study. Please grant me permission to use you in this research. Should you choose to participate in the project, kindly complete the consent form found at the conclusion of this email.

Should you require any explanation before, during, or after the study, please do not hesitate to call either my supervisor or me at the numbers provided. I am hopeful that my invitation will be accepted.

Yours sincerely

### CONSENT FORM

#### **Voluntary participation in Master's degree research project – University of Mpumalanga**

I, \_\_\_\_\_, the ECD practitioner/educator of \_\_\_\_\_ ECD centre, situated at \_\_\_\_\_, agree to participate in this research project. I understand that my participation in this research is totally voluntary.

I affirm that I understand the aim, purpose, and methods of data collection of this study and that I am at liberty to withdraw my participation at any stage of the research project - as explained to me by Ms Sonto Vilane, the student researcher.

Participant's name:

Signature:

Date:

## **INTERVIEW PROCESS**

### **Semi-structured face-to-face interview**

#### **Purpose and instruction**

As I mentioned before, I am conducting research to enhance the way ECD programmes are implemented. It is important to note that the purpose of this interview is to get your thoughts and experiences regarding the implementation of the ECD programmes. The information gathered will only be utilized for research purposes, and your name will not be disclosed to third parties. I plan to publish the facts in my dissertation and/or future works. Before we begin, are there any questions you would like to ask? Can I record the interview on audio? I'm going to use a recording device to capture the session and then transcribe it.

#### **Interview questions**

1. How would you characterize the environment in which you work as an ECD practitioner or teacher?
2. As an ECD Practitioner, what level of education do you have to consider yourself an expert professional in your field? Elaborate.
3. Which of the following income ranges describe your salary best?
  - 3.1 From R1000 to R1500
  - 3.2 From R1500 and above
4. As an ECD practitioner /educator, what are the day-to-day tasks you are required to perform and how much time is spent for each of those tasks?
5. What do you believe parents perceive as your role at the centre, in your opinion?
6. What kind of direct assistance are you anticipating from the government?
7. Have you read the new ECD framework, or have you been exposed to it in any way? If yes, in your opinion, does it benefit your career?
8. Do you think that there is any ambiguity among ECD practitioners/ educators because of the new policy?

9. What obstacles, in your opinion, can prevent the ECD centres from meeting government requirements in terms of offering a government-approved daily learning programmes?