MIXED METHOD STUDY EXPLORING THE CHALLENGES OF AND POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS FOR UNDERPERFORMING GRADE R LEARNERS IN ONE SCHOOL IN NAMAKGALE DISTRICT IN LIMPOPO

by

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DECLARATION OF TAKING OWNERSHIP AND AUTHORSHIP

I, Sepelemane Richard Nkgapele, student no: 222238623, want to declare that this dissertation with the title “A mixed methods study exploring the challenges of and possible solutions for underperforming Grade R learners in the province of Limpopo, is my own piece of work which was not submitted to any higher learning institution (Universities) by either me or anybody else, either by assignment or in examination form. The quotes and references used were referenced.

31/01/2024

Sepelemane Richard Nkgapele Date

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this entire document to my late mother, Mmaphli Meriam Nkgapele, grandmother Ereminah Mampe Phokungwane (Modamara), who raised me from the age of five when my mother passed on; my siblings Magobala, Tebele, and my friend Matome Maponya and Mahlantle Sathekge, for their unfathomable support, especially during my sickness. I am truly honoured to share my life with you.

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ABSTRACT

Problem: Many Grade R learners in Limpopo are unprepared when they start their formal schooling because they did not have the chance to explore their abilities regarding skills, values and attitudes and, therefore, do not meet the requisites required of Grade 1 learners. The lack of required abilities hampers their progress in Grade 1.

Research question: What are the challenges and some possible solutions for underperforming Grade R learners in the Namakgale district in Limpopo Province?

Objectives: The following objectives were pursued: to discover the issues or the factors that make Grade R learners underperform, to determine what strategies Grade R teachers are currently employing to assist these struggling learners, and lastly, to explore some strategies that will be useful to assist and develop these Grade R learners. Considering this background, the main purpose of this study was to search for or explore the challenges and provide a workable solution for underperforming Grade R learners in a primary school.

Methods: The researcher used mixed methods as a design, using qualitative and quantitative methods to gain insight into the research problem. Interviews and questionnaires were the main instruments used for collecting data for the study. The study population comprised Grade R learners, teachers, the Head of Department (HOD), the Deputy Principal, and the principal. Qualitative data was obtained from two Grade R teachers, one HOD, one deputy principal, and one principal. The quantitative data was obtained from the questionnaires administered to 20 Grade R learners, 2 Grade R teachers, and the School Management Team.

Key results: The study achieved the purpose it was meant for, namely, to explore the challenges and possible solutions for underperforming Grade R learners. This study has opened an area for further research by other scholars. Since the study was only confined to a primary school in Mopani East District, in Namakgale Circuit, a further suggestion would be to conduct the same study in other primary schools and circuits to establish whether the findings can be replicated there.

Conclusion: Finally, the objective of this study was met, and the research questions were answered. The results indicate that underachieving Grade R learners have their own specific needs that need attention, and these are the ones that are causing learners not to achieve optimally. The main factors contributing to underachievement can be linked to poor background status, where a lack of parental involvement contributes to learners' underachievement.

KEYWORDS: Underachievement; Grade R learners; Early childhood development; Teaching and Learning; Needs; Challenges; Parental Involvement; Support; Teachers.

ABBREVIATIONS USED

CAPS	:	Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement
DBE	:	Department of Basic Education
DoE	:	Department of Education
DoSD	:	Department of Social Development
ECD	:	Early Childhood Development
IE	:	Inclusive Education
EWP 5	:	Education White Paper 5 on Early Childhood Development
EWP 6	:	Education White Paper 6 on Special Needs Education: Building an Inclusive Education and Training
EELC	:	Equal Education Law Centre
ECE	:	Early Childhood Education
LOLT	:	Language of Learning and Teaching
HOD	:	Head of Department
MSED	:	Metro South Education District
NCS	:	National Curriculum Statement
NCESS	:	National Committee on Education Support Services
NCSNET	:	National Commission on Special Needs Education and Training
NIP	:	National Integrated Plan
SASA	:	South African Schools Act
SED	:	Scottish Education Department
SMT	:	Senior Management Team
UNESCO	:	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	:	United Nations Children's Fund
WCED	:	Western Cape Education Department
LED	:	Limpopo Education Department
SACE	:	South African Council of Educators

TABLE OF CONTENT

PAGE No

Contents

MIXED METHOD STUDY EXPLORING THE CHALLENGES AND POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS FOR UNDERPERFORMING GRADE R LEARNERS IN ONE SCHOOL IN NAMAKGALE DISTRICT IN LIMPOPO

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The study explored the needs and challenges of underperforming Grade R learners in a school in the Namakgale District of the Limpopo Province.

As there is not necessarily a specific method for how young learners should be developed in their homes and communities before entering school, Rossi and Stuart (2007:139) make us aware of the fact that “many learners are at a disadvantage when they enter school, since they have not had the latitude to develop skills, values and attitudes that are expected of learners in the first grade.” The school is situated in a rural district where unemployment is a challenge, and this causes poverty, negatively impacting living circumstances. Negative living circumstances, in turn, worsen the high rate of drug abuse. Most residents of Mashishimale village, South Africa, where the school is situated, are unemployed parents who rely on the South African Security Agency (SASSA) to maintain their families. Because of these socio-economic conditions, schools face children with barriers to schooling, providing teaching challenges. Links (2009:12) adds to the debate by saying that when you have a school with learners from different cultural groups and clans, you will find that a variation of barriers to learning will exist.

Grade R is regarded as the initial year of the Foundation Phase and lays the foundation for learning later in the foundation phase. However, these foundations (Landsberg, 2005:80) need to include the teaching of support systems, such as parents or guardians in the place where the child lives.

Therefore, the uplifting of support systems forms part of the research background focused on exploring the needs and challenges of underperforming Grade R learners

in rural schools. What motivated the researcher to do this research was when he realized that learners in the rural circuit of Namakgale are not well developed in terms of early childhood development and are, therefore, not doing well and are underachieving.

Grade R learners in the Namakgale area are vulnerable because their parents or early childhood development practitioners do not adequately monitor their education. The Limpopo Premier recently acknowledged the seriousness of the neglect in some early childhood contexts in his opening address at the Education Indaba, hosted by the Provincial Government Pijoos (2021:7, where he said, “One of the government's key mandates is to review the state of education in the province and focus on early childhood development.”

1.1.1 Pilot Study

To improve validity, a pilot study was conducted before the main study. This action is aligned with the research by Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007:341), indicating that everything included in a questionnaire should be piloted. A pilot has several functions to increase the questionnaire's reliability, validity, and practicability. According to Teddlie and Tashakkori (2009:203), a pilot study is undertaken to certify the quality of upcoming data collection procedures since it is a small-scale planning of the entire study. Therefore, in preparation for the actual study, the researcher used a pilot study to test the selected procedures and identify possible problems in the data collection protocols.

1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Identifying the needs and challenges of underachieving Grade R learners in South Africa has become an issue of urgency in most schools. In addition, there is a high need for a suitable learning and teaching strategy for diverse learners in our schools. Identifying gaps as early as possible in our learners will help bring the definition of ECE, as described in the Education White Paper 5 (EWP 5) document, to fruition.

According to the Department of Education (2001b:9), Early childhood development (ECD) refers to a comprehensive approach to policies and programmes for children from birth to nine years of age with the active participation of their parents and

caregivers. It aims to protect the child's rights to develop their full cognitive, emotional, social, and physical potential.

Underperforming Grade R learners are often badly behaved in many of our schools in Limpopo Education Department, where the Equal Education Law Centre (EELC) conducted a study in 2019 and 2020 to assess their progress. The assessment's key determination was to ensure that the gaps are regularly identified in the development and learning process. After identifying the gaps, the school must be notified to ensure that the affected learners get the needed support to improve their performance. Teachers usually know which learners need serious support. The assessment results of the EELC point out that the learners are not prepared for Grade 1 or formal schooling. The negative outcomes of these assessments added to the urge of the researcher to explore the specific challenges of underperforming Grade R learners, as experienced in a primary school in the Namakgale District and suggest possible solutions.

1.3 AIM AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This study aimed to explore the challenges and provide workable solutions for underperforming Grade R learners in one of the primary schools in the Namakgale circuit.

The study pursued the following research objectives:

- To discover the issues that cause Grade R learners to underperform in their class.
- To ascertain what type of strategies teachers currently employ in their classes to assist this underperforming learner.
- To look for likely strategies that can be implemented to support these underperforming learners in Grade R.

1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Some research questions have been crafted to help deal with the problem we are facing.:

- Name the challenges and some possible solutions for underperforming Grade R learners in the Namakgale district in Limpopo Province. Sub-questions:
- What can be considered as the main causes for Grade R learners underperforming?
- How are Grade R teachers currently assisting these underperforming learners in Grade R?
- Are there other possible strategies that could be used to support underperforming Grade R learners in Namakgale Circuit?

1.5 DESCRIPTION OF THE KEY CONCEPTS IN THE STUDY.

Grade R refers to preparatory schooling for a child reaching the age of six in the current year and is compulsory in South Africa before entering Grade 1 in a Primary School the following year (CAPS 2011).

Needs refers to requiring something because it is essential to have (Maslow, 1943)

Underperformance: According to Coople & Bredekamp(2009:2), it can be a situation where learners are not performing well in their learning environment, like the learners whose parents are poor.

Teachers Qualifications: According to DHET (2011:13), all teachers who want to teach Grade R -12 must have at least the REQV 13 qualification, which refers to the three-year teaching diploma offered at former education colleges.

Early Childhood Development: as referred to in White Paper 5 (2001), early childhood development is an umbrella term that emphasizes the development processes of a child from birth until 9 with the support of legal guardians or parents.

Parent involvement concerns the participation of parents in learning activities during their children's schooling (Van Wyk & Lemmer, 2009: 13-14).

Barriers to learning as defined by EWP 6 (DoE, 2001a: 7), these relate to challenges and difficulties caused by various external and internal factors.

Support: In the context of this study, support, according to the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) (2001:71), indicates forms of assistance that can contribute to learning.

The literature review provides insight into the general discourse on underperformance in Grade-R, focusing on answering the research questions.

1.6 LITERATURE REVIEW

This section focuses on what is found in the literature about the challenges that Grade R learners face in their holistic development. Factors responsible for underperformance amongst Grade R learners include barriers to learning, underqualified teachers, limited teaching resources, and a lack of SMT support and guidance. The literature further mentions strategies currently used by Grade R practitioners and possible solutions to the dilemma of underperforming learners.

1.6.1 Barriers to learning.

When it comes to the barriers to learning, many issues arise that affect children negatively. Erradu and Weeks (2013:4) have indicated that when there are learning difficulties, the learners will be disadvantaged when it comes to the issue of academic progress. In agreement with Erradu and Weeks, the DBE (2013:71) has indicated that teachers must identify the well-being and development of the child.

Abongdia, Foncha, and Dakada (2015:4) highlight those barriers to learning, which can manifest in various forms, such as displaying delays in motor skills and language development. In the same vein, Erradu and Weeks (2013:4) have highlighted that some barriers to learning in the Foundation Phase in South Africa are caused by insufficient classroom curriculum implementation.

1.6.2 Underqualified teachers

As Taner and Engin-Demir (2011:93) and Chediel (2013:15) mention, education and professional training for teachers positively impact teaching and learning. This notion of the importance of training is supported by research, which was conducted by the International Labour Office in Geneva, which highlighted that teachers in disadvantaged schools are deprived of quality training (ILO, 2012:37). Furthermore,

the International Labour Organization (2012:45) indicated that teachers who are teaching ECD are often employed on a contract basis as they do not have the correct professional qualifications or even limited or no professional training. Regarding our neighboring country, Zimbabwe, Mangwaya et al. (2013:8) concur that untrained or underqualified teachers are employed as ECD teachers in rural schools. The situation in South Africa is very similar since Grade R teachers are appointed without proper qualifications (Excell, 2011:6; Mohapi, 2014:4). Fortunately, the DBE (2019) has now started formally considering qualifications for Grade R teachers which were indicated as far back as 1998. The Employment of Educators Act 76 of 1998 now requires a three-year qualification for one to be appointed as an educator. Table 1.1 summarizes the variances in qualifications required for Grade R, as well as for Grade 1-3 teachers.

Levels	**Qualifications needed and other requirements**	**Province**
Grade R	NCV Level 4 ECD Certificate Higher Certificate SACE	Limpopo North West Eastern Cape
Grade 1-3	NQF Level 4 Higher Certificate National Diploma in ECDE SACE	Western Cape Gauteng

Table 1.1: Qualifications needed.

The findings show the difference in standards experienced in all provinces, which could have impacted learner performance negatively.

1.6.3 Limited teaching resources

Teaching resources can have a wide interpretation; in this case, the focus is on adequacy, relevancy, upskilled teachers, and physical facilities.

1.6.3.1 Adequacy

Sinyei et al. (2012:2) indicate that resource materials must be diverse enough to offer some alteration and diversity to be of use. In addition to this, there must be enough materials for all teachers to implement an effective curriculum. Materials should include the following: paint, beads, and balls (Atmore,2012:6).

1.6.3.2 Relevancy

There are many relevant learning and teaching resources, including videos, PowerPoint presentations, workbooks, worksheets, folders and files, chairs, tables and pencils, and each learner should ideally have their own to avoid the struggle of sharing resources.

According to Sinyei et al. (2012:5), the quality of Grade R teaching and learning was negatively affected in Zimbabwe because of the lack of planning in both districts and the Department of Education to provide the necessary resources. Research in Zimbabwe has indicated a high rate of vandalism of Grade R materials by the higher grades. This will result in a shortage of materials in the school (Krishnaratne et al., 2013:41). The South African situation could be similar.

1.6.3.3 Upskilled teachers

Teaching and learning are changing continuously due to the increased use of technology. This means that teachers, especially Grade R teachers, must be trained to keep up with the changes. Training these teachers will improve the achievement of Grade R learners and simultaneously provide teachers with a renewed interest in teaching Grade R.

Contrasts in the use of resources are found internationally, as can be seen in semi-urban schools in Philadelphia, India. It was found that their teachers have received massive training when using the new technological materials, including learners' abilities and needs. Again, Mangwaya, Blignant, and Pillay (2013:3) had to agree that in Zimbabwe, Grade R teachers and learners do not have material, and even their classrooms are not in good condition.

1.6.3.4 Physical facilities

All Grade R learners must be involved in physical activities in their classes, whether outside or inside. It is the responsibility of teachers to set up appropriate areas where activities that will develop and improve the fundamental motor skills needed for successful general development can be done.

The need for suitable resources and physical facilities to support learning is pointed out in the policy document of the DBE (2013). With ample physical and material resources, underachieving learners will be better accommodated and have a better chance to

catch up with developmental delays.

Many South African pre-primary classrooms have less-than-perfect conditions, dilapidated buildings, unsuitable furnishings, and unsuitable spaces with inadequate ventilation, affecting teaching and learning. The insufficient upkeep of buildings makes attending school challenging, especially during bad weather conditions; some learners are still getting their education under the trees. Atmore (2012:19) agrees with the notion and confirms that infrastructure challenges in South African schools will also affect teaching and learning.

1.6.4 Lack of SMT support and guidance

1.6.4.1 Lack of SMT support and guidance in Zimbabwe

School Management Teams in Zimbabwe identified teacher supervision as a suitable type of support for ECD teachers. Teacher supervision improves the communication on curriculum aspects among the School Management Team and ECD teachers. Research has revealed inadequate support for ECD teachers in Zimbabwe (Taole & Mohapi, 2013:5).

1.6.4.2 Lack of SMT support and guidance in South Africa

The former Minister of Education, Kader Asmal (DoE, 2001:4), acknowledged that building inclusive education is not an easy task since what will be required is persistence, commitment, coordination, support, monitoring, evaluation, follow-up, and leadership. Although Asmal's acknowledgement happened many years ago, it is still relevant today. Furthermore, it is common practice for institutions to promote employees with the best results, but sometimes, the best salesman does not make the best manager. As we know, leadership in schools is very important. Teacher support will not become a reality when leadership is lacking. Mohapi (2014:4) affirms the lack of support from School Management Teams to Grade R teachers.

Wessels (2011:63), in his research, shows the importance of support, especially during changes.

According to a statement by Meyer, Van der Vyver and Westhuizen (2014:61) related to their study about caring school leadership in S.A., they indicated that teachers do not get support. Excell and Linington (2012:7) point the finger at a lack of support for SMTs with limited knowledge and understanding of Grade R's special requirements.

1.6.5 Strategies currently used to assist underperforming learners and their teachers.

Several teaching strategies and techniques (play, song, rhyme, etc.) have useful qualities that can help our underachieving Grade R learners to be more alert, develop memory capacity, get signals easily, and join the learning process easily as well (Miranda, 2004:49).

1.6.5.1 Strategies-Based Learning as a teaching strategy

Play is described as activities involved during early childhood (2 – 5) and adolescence. Play is also the foundation of learning for young children (Miranda, 2004:66). This strategy helps learners improve their learning since it is a free and voluntary activity and a source of joy. This means learners can benefit by engaging in activities for enjoyment and recreation rather than serious activities with no fun element. Play can be considered a child's activity and provides the opportunities integral to healthy development and learning.

1.6.5.2 Song and rhyme

Music in the African tradition, especially amongst the elderly, is even more important for children since music is a way of communicating feelings and is also used in cultural contexts to convey happiness, sadness, and life lessons. The use of song, for example, has been demonstrated to facilitate the development of literacy skills in young children (Berk, 2009:55). Berk's statement is also supported by Van Vuuren (2022), who avers that children can learn several pre-literacy skills through music, such as vocabulary and rhythm, which will eventually enhance fluent reading, whilst the playful nature of music brings about positive psychological effects.

The research done by Berk (2009:55) of teachers who were trained in music skills shows that those learners were doing well while also being more interactive and showing much

improvement in Grade R achievement.

1.6.6 Other Possible solutions

Quality classrooms require well-trained teachers, and therefore, intervention programmes, teacher collaboration, and conducive environments can be of aid in raising the quality of teaching and learning in our ECD in South Africa, especially in rural schools.

1.6.6.1 Intervention Programmes

Adding to the use of intervention programmes as a strategy to help teachers of underachieving learners is a study by Ertesvag (2011:1), who researched teacher collaboration and its implications for professional development. Intervention programmes and teacher collaboration, coupled with conducive environments, could solve some of the challenges faced by Grade R teachers.

1.6.6.2 Teacher Collaboration

Collaborative working could help to shift the focus from merely pushing children through to the next grade to focusing on the learners' development. The idea of collaboration, not only between professionals but between professionals and parents, to improve education needs to be explored. However, these interventions need to consider the context of the community they will serve.

Contexts include the environment, which may include the natural environment, physical environment, and social environment. Children learn through participation in developmentally advanced environments that are more cognitively, linguistically, and socially stimulating (Odom and Wolery, 2003: 168).

Brownell, Adams, Sindelar, and Waldron (2006: 169) agree that specialized education and professional collaboration are powerful tools for helping our teachers serve students, especially those with ill health, as a challenge.

1.6.6.3 Conducive Environment

A conducive classroom environment is one in which learners feel comfortable, sharing their thoughts, taking risks, asking questions, and confronting challenges in their learning. Teachers can create this type of environment by presenting clear classroom expectations in their Grade R classrooms, providing opportunities to improve social

skills, building relationships with their learners, and offering relevant content. Therefore, Grade R learners can become more active participants in the learning process, creating a more productive learning environment.

A conducive environment, however, goes beyond the layout and facilities of the classroom. The literature suggests that learners become more engaged within a supportive learning environment when teachers respect them and appreciate their responses (Mottet, Martin, and Myers, 2004:116).

1.6.6.4 Well-trained teachers

The role of the teacher has rapidly shifted over the last decades from someone transferring knowledge to someone guiding students. This means teachers are expected to adopt a different view of their role and a different answer to the question, "Who am I as a teacher?" Therefore, we are now witnessing a surge of interest in the question of how teachers think about themselves and how they undergo the substantial personal transformations they pass through as they become teachers. Well-trained Grade R teachers will make sure that Grade R learners achieve optimally.

Barends & Nel 2017:12 mentioned one of the barriers as being that ECD pre-service teachers are not given enough exposure to the Grade R classroom during their practice teaching. Barends & Nel (2017) emphasize the importance of these pre-service teachers knowing how to prepare appropriate lessons and ensuring that learning is well presented to the Grade R learners, especially those with learning barriers.

1.7 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

A theoretical framework provides an overview of the study and arranges the research in a specific discipline (Henning, Van Rensburg & Smit, 2004). Landsberg (2005:9) defines theory as a set of ideas, statements and concepts ordered in such a way that it talks about the world, us, or an aspect of reality.

The Ecological Systems Theory of Urie Bronfenbrenner and Evan (2000: 115-125) was used as a framework for this study because it helps provide a holistic view of influences impacting children.

1.7.1 Ecological Systems Theory

The Ecological Systems Theory (EST), also known as human ecology, is an ecological systems framework established in1979 by Urie Bronfenbrenner (Härkönen,2007:14). Harkonen notes that this theory was influenced by Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory and Lewin's behaviorism theory. Bronfenbrenner's research focused on the impact of social interaction on child development, believing that a person's development was influenced by everything in the surrounding environment and social interactions within it. EST emphasizes that children are shaped by their interaction with others and their context. Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory has five complex layers, called systems, commonly used in research. These systems are the micro, meso, exo, macro and chrono systems. Initially, the ecological theory was mostly used in psychological research. However, the use of the theory has spread to other fields, such as law, business, management, teaching and learning, and education.

The basic systems most relevant to the development of the Grade R learner and thus suitable for this study are the microsystem and mesosystem. The full systems model can be seen in Figure 1 below:

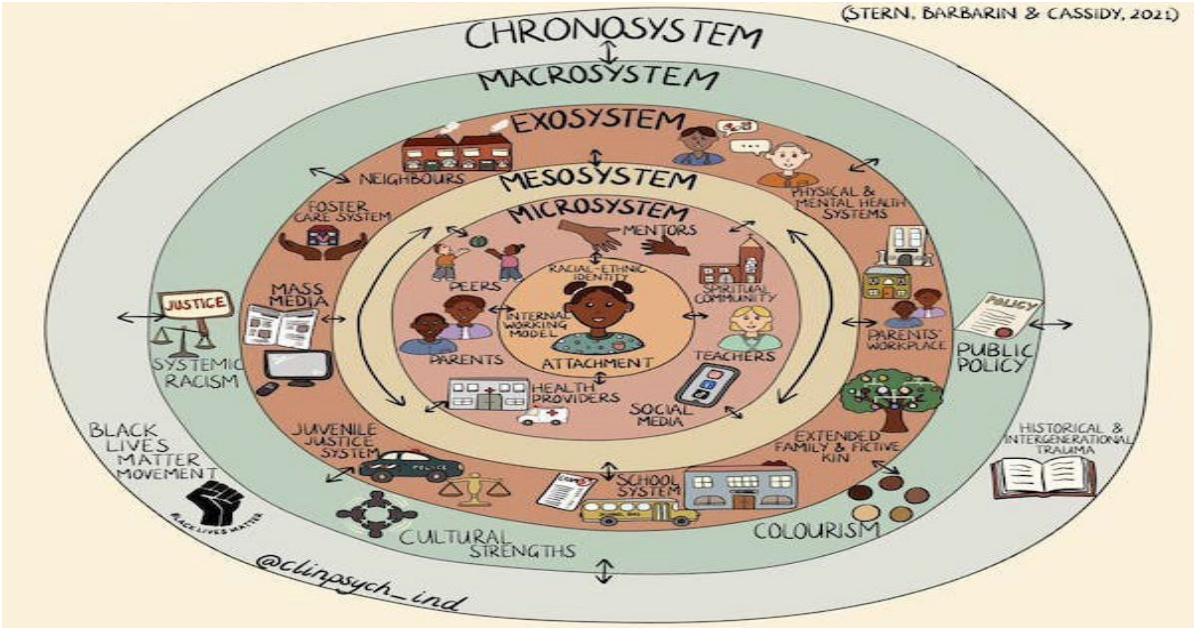

Figure 1. Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Model, as depicted in Stern, Barbarin, and Cassidy (2021)

1.8 Research Methodology

According to Creswell (2009:18), research methodology refers to the different techniques, methods, and procedures used in implementing research design**.** This study used mixed methods - qualitative and quantitative. Mixed methods research has gained popularity within social research in the past 20-25 years (Creswell et al. 2003:212). Creswell (2012:123) emphasizes that mixed method studies provide breadth and depth of understanding and corroboration. In this study, mixed methods involved more than just collecting and analyzing both forms of data; it also strengthened the study since combining these methods offers us the best of both worlds (Creswell & Clark, 2017:13).

Quantitative research is a type of research in which the researcher chooses what to study, asks specific narrow questions, collects countable data from many participants, analyses numbers using statistics and conducts the inquiry in an unbiased, objective manner. The data was collected from learners' performance tests and personal information questionnaires (with closed-ended questions or open-ended questions) and transferred to quantitative data. This type of data is called hard data (Creswell, 2012).

According to Teddlie and Tashakkori (2009:6) and Neuman (2007:7), qualitative research can be defined as descriptive and associated with gathering, analyzing, interpreting, and presenting narrative information. The qualitative data-collecting methods used were interviews, questionnaires, content analysis and focus groups (Creswell, 2012).

1.8.1 Research Design

According to Maree (2010:293), research design can be seen as a plan to determine the nature of the relationship between variables. According to McMillan and Schumacher (2010:31), a research design describes the events for conducting the study, including when, from whom, and under what conditions the data will be obtained. The purpose is to specify a plan for generating empirical evidence that will be used to answer the research questions.

1.8.2 Data collection

Qualitative research is a style of research in which the researcher relies on participants' views, asks broad general questions, collects data consisting of rich meaning from participants, and describes and analyses the words for themes. The data collection methodologies used for qualitative data were mostly interviews, whilst quantitative data was gained using questionnaires (Creswell, 2012). The table 1.2 below summarizes the tools that were used to collect data.

Table 1.2 below provides a summary of the tools that were used for data collection.

Sub-question	**Respondents**	**Data collection tool/s**
1. Name the current factors that are causing Grade R learners in the Namakgale district in Limpopo Province to underperform?	Grade R teachers	In-depth interviews Questionnaires
2. Give the strategies used by Grade R teachers presently employed to assist these learners.	Grade-R teachers	In-depth interviews Literature Questionnaires
2. Name other likely strategies that could be used as support to these learners.	Grade-R teachers	In-depth interviews Literature Questionnaires
4. Biographical information	Grade R learners through parents	Questionnaires

Table 1.2 Data collection tools

Maree (2007:263) summarizes mixed methods research as a procedure for collecting, analyzing, and mixing quantitative and qualitative data at some stage of the research process within a single study to understand a research problem more completely.

1.8.3 Research Paradigm

According to Maree (2010:47), the definition of the term ‘paradigm’ can be seen as a set of assumptions or beliefs about fundamental aspects of reality which gives rise to a particular world view. Furthermore, it addresses fundamental assumptions taken on faith, such as beliefs about the nature of reality, the relationship between knower and known and assumptions about methodologies. An interpretive paradigm is therefore concerned with understanding the world as it is from the subjective experiences of individuals. When considering the notions of Maree (2010:88), this paradigm is ideal for this study because it was used to investigate individuals' perceptions around the challenges of underachieving Grade R learners, using interviews, , and document analysis as data collection methods. The researcher was aware that it would be the individuals’ interpretations and would accept everyone’s perceptions as valid.

1.8.4 Research Site

The study was conducted in only one primary school in an impoverished area of the Limpopo Province’s Namakgale District, part of the Namakgale Circuit. The school receives funds from the Department of Education, and the learners of that school are not performing optimally. The specific school was chosen because of its vicinity, which is close to the researcher’s residence, and because the researcher was aware of learners' underperformance.

1.8.5 Sampling and Participants

Creswell (2003:220) emphasizes the following statements concerning mixed method procedures - “recognize that quantitative data often involve random sampling so that each individual has an equal probability of being selected and the sample can be generalized to the larger population. In qualitative data collection, purposeful sampling is used so that individuals are selected because they have experienced the central phenomenon.” In this study, random and purposeful sampling were the methods of choice.

1.9 DATA COLLECTION STRATEGY

Interviews and questionnaires, the two most common research methods outlined by Ary et al. (2006:474), were used to gather participant data. Following a phenomenological perspective, the researcher aimed to understand the participants' viewpoints.

1.9.1 Interviews

Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2007:349) define interviews as flexible tools for data collection, enabling multi-sensory channels to be used: verbal, non-verbal, spoken, and heard. They further indicate that an interview is not an ordinary, everyday conversation but a constructed rather than naturally occurring situation. These characteristics render it different from an everyday conversation; therefore, the researcher must set up and abide by the different rules of the game in an interview. The researcher planned to use face-to-face structured interviews with Grade R teachers and the SMT.

1.9.2 Questionnaires

A questionnaire is a set of structured questions that enable the participants to answer them according to their experiences and opinions. It is a data-collecting instrument where participants directly supply their answers to a set of questions (Van den Aardweg & Van den Aardweg, 1998:190). In this case, the researcher designed a structured questionnaire that was administered to purposefully select Grade R learners, two teachers, and the school management team.

1.10 VALIDITY AND TRUSTWORTHINESS

As detailed in this section, various measures were taken to ensure that the research is sound.

1.10.1 Validity

According to Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007:133), validity is an important key to effective research and is required for quantitative and qualitative research. The researcher ensured validity and reliability by following the guidelines mentioned above, confirming that the methodology was sound and that all the questionnaires, interviews, and studies of literature and documents were fully aligned with the research questions. Furthermore, the researcher made sure that he had an agreement with the participants regarding the questions that were asked.

1.10.2 Trustworthiness

The main point of trustworthiness is to launch the credibility of the research. The study used both qualitative (interviews) and quantitative (questionnaires) systems or approaches, and the combination of these methods is referred to as triangulation, which is regarded as a validation. This research study gathers data from different participants, including principals, heads of department, ECD teachers and learners' parents, as suggested by Maree (2010:80). The researcher strived to adhere to the principles of trustworthiness throughout the research. The trustworthiness of the data addresses the issues of credibility, dependability, and authenticity.

1.11 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Research cannot simply be conducted by anyone and anywhere. According to the Helsinki Declaration of 1972, it is imperative to obtain clearance from an ethics committee when human (or animal) subjects are involved in any kind of research of an empirical nature.

Strydom (2002:63) has indicated that "anyone involved in research needs to be aware of the general agreement about what is proper and improper in scientific research". It is essential that throughout the research process, the researcher follows and abides by ethical guidelines. The researcher also ensured that the participants had a clear understanding regarding the confidentiality of the results and findings of the study, along with how the data would be stored (Burns, 2000:45). To comply with the ethical fulfilment of conducting a research study, permission was sought to conduct research from the Faculty of Education of the University of Mpumalanga's research and ethics committees as well as from the Limpopo Department of Education.

All participants' information and responses shared during the study were kept private by using pseudonyms, whilst research data will be safely stored on password-protected devices for five years, according to the ethics policy of the university.

All the participants were treated with respect and were informed about what was expected from them along with their participatory rights, e.g., if they wanted to withdraw from participating, they were not bound to explain the reasons to the researcher.

1.12 OUTLINE OF THE STUDY

Chapter 1 presents the background and introduction to the study.

Chapter 2 presents the literature review.

Chapter 3 follows with the research design and methodology.

Chapter 4 consists of the data presentation and analysis.

Chapter 5 presents an overview, major findings, conclusion, and study recommendations.

1.13 CONCLUDING REMARKS

Chapter one introduced and provided a background to the research study, which included all the main aspects of the study. Chapter 2 provides the theoretical framework and literature review underpinning the study.

CHAPTER 2

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter focused on the orientation and frameworks of the study. It detailed the background of the research problem statement and the study's purpose, aim, and objective. Chapter two focuses on the theoretical framework and literature review, which revolve around underperforming grade R learners in early childhood education. Central to the review are psychologists' developmental theories, which enhance understanding of the phenomenon under investigation.

2.2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

A theoretical framework is a set of concepts, definitions, and propositions forming a structured view of a phenomenon. It includes theories, models, and frameworks that provide a foundation of prior knowledge. Furthermore, theory is defined as a framework that orders and, in other ways, makes the connections between the current known information and the new information. (Donald, Lazarus, & Lolwana, 2002: 389). Woollard provides another view by Maree (2010), as cited in Gray & MacBlain (2012), namely that a theory is an unproven work.

Maree and Van der Westhuizen (2009:17) have indicated that a researcher must have a theoretical framework to locate his or her research using existing research strategies. These researchers added that sometimes theories are not fixed and constantly developed as the researchers develop. This is why Urie Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory is ideal for this research study. The reason is that it covers human development (Bronfenbrenner, 1995:88).

Urie Bronfenbrenner's ecological model of human development suggests that for someone to understand an individual, one must make sure that he/she understands and considers every aspect of their influences and experiences upon everyone (Beckley, 2012). In this research, as a researcher, I have found it beneficial to consider and use Bronfenbrenner's ecological system theory. The reason is that it makes a

significant contribution and connects with the individual learner's development, where the child is holistically developed.

2.3 LIFE SKILLS EDUCATION AND BRONFENBRENNER'S ECOLOGICAL SYSTEMS THEORY AS A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Bronfenbrenner (1977) suggested that the child's environment is a nested structure arrangement, each contained within the next. He organized them according to how much impact they have on a child. This is because the five systems are interrelated, and the influence of one system on a child's development depends on its relationship with the other. This is noted in Bronfenbrenner's initial ecological theory (1979), which centers on the interchange between children's development and the layered relationships or systems that define their environment and influence their development. The ecological system had four layers, and later, they were increased by one to five main layers: namely, the microsystem, the mesosystem, the exosystem, the macrosystem, and the chronosystem. These systems are mutual in terms of ecological human development (Bronfenbrenner, 1995:188)

The five ecological systems can be considered as a representation that reflects on an individual's ecological development. As indicated above, the development of the fifth level is called chronosystem because individuals change every time and some age (Bronfenbrenner, 1995; Conway, 2007:7). It should be kept in mind that these layers or systems are interdependent.

2.3.1 Social services and health (Microsystem)

Bronfenbrenner defines a microsystem as one closest to the child's everyday life. The microsystem includes people, institutions, and services the child directly interacts with in his/her immediate environment. Examples are parents, siblings, and other family members; school (including teachers, other staff, and peers); places of worship, health services, neighborhood or refugee camps, play schemes or projects; and (for some children and young people) places of work (Bronfenbrenner, 1995:227; 2005; Johnson, 2014:182-189).

2.3.2 Family and Learning (Mesosystem)

According to Bronfenbrenner, this system is about how people in the different microsystems around the child interact and relate. Examples are a child's parents attending a school event, the leader of a child's place of worship carrying out an event within the child's neighborhood or school, or a teacher visiting the child's home to find out why they cannot come to school on time. How these different microsystems around the child interact directly influences the child's learning and wellbeing. It refers to the number and quality of linkages (Bronfenbrenner, 1995:227; 2005:5; Tatum, 2009:55).

2.3.3 Extended families and neighbors (Exosystem)

According to Strayhorn (2010:178), an exosystem is a system that includes the broader community in which the child lives. It also includes everything, from extended family members, parents' workplaces, neighbors, family friends, mass media, health, education and social welfare services, political systems and policies. The child does not necessarily have any direct relationship with this system. However, because the people in the other systems closer to the child are affected by the exosystem, it affects the child, too.

On a national level, the South African education system is responsible for policy development and implementation. Policies that reflect the context of the country are developed, such as Curriculum Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS), EWP 5, and EWP 6. On the other hand, the implementation and support of these policies take place at provincial and district levels. Although Grade R learners are not actively involved as participants in these policies, they can be directly influenced by what happens in these settings.

2.3.4 Cultural society (Macrosystem)

Bronfenbrenner (2005:81) defines the macro-system as a system that covers things going on at a higher societal level and how these influence the other systems around the child. It includes ideologies, values, attitudes, laws, and customs of a particular culture or subculture. For people who have been displaced, these factors fundamentally shape how people are treated and responded to in host countries.

2.3.5 Environmental changes (Chronosystem)

Bronfenbrenner, on the chronosystem, argues that humans are constantly changing. Strayhorn (2010:179) concurs and adds that this system refers to how people experience things over their lifetime. It includes major life changes, such as being displaced from one place to another and other usual events, such as marriage (and divorce) and the birth of a baby (Bronfenbrenner, 1995:619-647).

The sphere of Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems influence is illustrated below in figure 2. This graphic includes the chronosystem, which was added later.

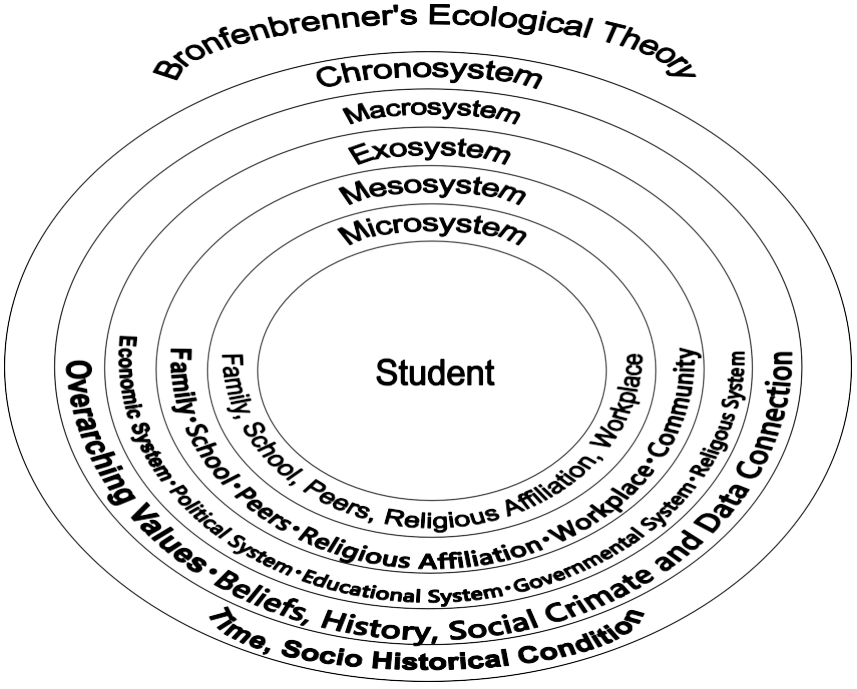

Figure 2. Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems adapted from Allen, K.A., Vella-Brodrick, D. and Waters, L. (2016) with the addition of the chronosystem.

2.4 LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review aims to help explore the needs and challenges of Grade R learners to attain optimal development and possible solutions to address underperformance. The research questions and sub-questions were utilized as an organizational element for the literature.

The research question is: What are the challenges and possible solutions for underperforming Grade R learners in the Namakgale district in Limpopo Province?

The sub-questions are:

- What can be considered as the main causes for Grade R learners underperforming?
- How are Grade R teachers currently assisting these underperforming learners in Grade R?
- Are there any other possible strategies that could be used to support underperforming Grade R learners in Namakgale Circuit?

Before exploring the factors surrounding early childhood education, it is important to understand who the grade R learner is, what the important social development theories are, and what the policies that support the education of young learners entail.

2.4.1. The Grade R learners' development (ages 4 – turning 5 by the 30th of June)

The domains of development are also applicable to the Grade R learner, and the development is situated in Bronfenbrenner's systems. Grade R must maintain its own "unique characteristics based on how children in this age group (4-5 years) learn and should not be a "watered down Grade 1 class" (Department of Basic Education [DBE], 2011:17).

Ensuring a child is ready for school is more than getting them accepted at a preschool or primary school at age 6 or 7. Age is only one of the factors that are involved in determining if a child is ready for school. Interestingly, the same stages and milestones have remained throughout many years. Parents or guardians should ensure that children are school-ready by ensuring they have attained the developmental milestones (physical, mental, emotional, moral, and social). This is based on a wide range of research, including the Department of Basic Education's Annual National Assessment reports on students' mathematics and literacy performance from Grade 1 to 9 (DBE,2012b; 2013;2014; 2015; 2019).

2.4.1.1 Physical development

According to Maslow (1943), the most essential human needs are those that keep us alive, such as food, water, shelter, and air. Without this basic survival level, a person cannot be expected to do much in the way of higher thinking or achievement. Again, Maslow (1943) emphasizes that the Grade R child should be able to do some physical

activity, such as running, walking, and ball catching, and be well-nourished in a space where they feel safe.

2.4.1.2 Mental development

Mental development is an important aspect of growth, embracing various mental abilities. It begins at birth, and as the child develops over time, his/her mental reactions also change. These reactions are initially simple but lead to complex mental activities as time progresses. The factors that affect mental development include maturation, learning, and education (Piaget, 1963:346).

2.4.1.3 Emotional development

The child must be able to control their emotions and be independent, confident, and adept at adapting to being separated from their current caregiver. Crying for the first few days or weeks when starting Grade R or Grade 1 is a common sign of adjusting (Piaget, 1963:344). Grade R learners must have a sense of self when it comes to adjusting to a new situation, demonstrating appropriate trust in adults, respecting, and caring for the classroom environment and materials, and following classroom rules.

2.4.1.4 Moral development

Moral development is a system of beliefs about what is right and good compared to what is wrong or bad. Moral development refers to changes in moral beliefs as a person grows older and gains maturity (Narvaez, 2010:162). Lennick and Kiel (2005:7) define moral development in grade R learners as applying ethical principles to goals, values, and actions. It is the ability to know right from wrong and behave ethically.

2.4.1.5 Social development

Social development is about how a child interacts with others and their environment. Children should be able to interact, exchange, and share toys with other children and quickly join and fit in with a new group. A contradiction develops as the child develops within the social situation of development. Whereas the child's needs were being satisfied until now, through the existing situation, due to the child's development, the child becomes aware of new needs, which presuppose the child occupying a new role and a corresponding change in the social situation (Vygotsky, 1934: 198).

2.4.2 Theoretical background knowledge expected of teachers.

Whilst it suffices for parents to know the basic levels of early childhood development, the teacher needs to have an augmented insight into the main developmental theories to ensure appropriate teaching. Table 2 below summarizes the desired knowledge for teachers regarding the developmental levels in early childhood to ensure they stay focused during their teaching.

Theory	Emotional	Social	Physical	Cognitive	Moral
Bandura (1965)	Knowledge and understanding of self-efficacy	Motivation, Observation, Modelling, Motor reproduction, Retention	Observation, Behavior, Behavioral change, Imitation and Modelling	Attitude, Emotions, Behavior, and Observation	Developing a moral self, Conventional Morality, Pre, and Post Conventional Morality
Bruner (1959)	Problem-solving, Critical reflection, Vocabulary	Enactive, Iconic symbolic and language	Hands-on, Action, Transformation into language, Justice, and Moral responsibility	Enactive Iconic Symbolic	Knowledge, Visual summarization

	Creating Linguistic environment				
Piaget (1963)	Active learning: Interact with objects. Use of language Learn other people's ideas. Own ideas	Energies and activities, Maturation and Children's thinking	Constructivism, Sensorimotor, Preoperational, Concrete operational and Formal operational	Active, rediscovery and reconstruction of knowledge Preoperational Sensorimotor Concrete Operational Formal Operation	Moral judgement and punishment tended to change: Heteronomous, Morality, and Autonomous, Cooperation, Moral responsibility, and Justice
Vygotsky (1934)	Input from others Language and culture Socio-cultural experience	Sociocultural, collaboration, growth and development, Zone of Proximal Development	Social and cultural experience, Social Interaction and Constructivism	Zone of Proximal Development Co-construct knowledge Learning of children has a massive impact. Attention Sensation	Interdependence, Social Interaction, Sociocultural and Speech and thinking

Maslow (1943)	Growth Relatedness existence	Physical needs, social belongings, Moral development, Emotional development, and Mental development	Need oxygen, food, activities, sleep, water, shelter, and safety	Growth Relatedness Existence	Self-actualization responsibilities, autonomy, appreciation, creativity, and acceptance of imperfection

Table 2. Children's developmental levels

Some notions by each of the main theorists in Table 2 above, namely Bandura, Bruner, Piaget, Vygotsky, and Maslow, are important and should be considered by the Foundation Phase teachers, especially in Grade R.

2.4.2.1 Bandura

Bandura (1965) has indicated that learning can occur without a behavior change; behaviorists say that learning must be represented by a permanent change in behavior. He pointed out again the elements, including behavioral factors, environmental factors, and personal factors, that strictly involve the Grade R teachers. These teachers will assist with the development of these Grade R learners.

2.4.2.2 Bruner

Bruner believed that development does not consist of discrete stages but is a continuous process. He also believes that language is a cause and not a consequence of learning. He further believes that more knowledgeable people play a major role in the cognitive development of a learner and that one could speed up the learning process. Teachers will need to be on alert. Brewer (2007) goes further and expresses the belief voiced by Bruner, which emphasizes the importance of teachers knowing the expected developmental levels of children.

Bruner views the way Grade R learners are being assisted with their learning in their ECD centers as helping them develop their thinking and learning abilities. Piaget continues by alerting readers to the fact that children systematically move through several phases. This means that the teachers must not only support the children but also understand the stages of cognitive development.

2.4.2.3 Piaget

Piaget (1936) believes that children always reflect on their experiences to gain new knowledge more than anything; he again believes that the different stages of his theory were effectively stairs or building blocks. According to Piaget (1936), as children have different experiences, they build on prior knowledge and their ideas. Piaget (1952) believes that children's intelligence differs from adults in quality rather than quantity. This means that children's reason differs from adults, and they see the world differently. Similarly, it was recognized by Bronfenbrenner's (1995:619- 647) microsystem theory. In Piaget's preoperational stage, he emphasized that a child continues to use mental

representations, such as symbolic thought and language (children). Children develop memory and imagination, learn to imitate, and engage in make-believe or pretend play.

As Piaget further emphasized, children in this stage are egocentric, meaning they have little awareness of others and think everything is connected to themselves. They cannot grasp the idea that others can think differently.

The main goal at this stage is symbolic thought. For example, a child imagines they are a character in a book or pretends a stick is a magic wand.

2.4.2.4 Vygotsky Theory

According to Vygotsky (1978), important learning by the child occurs through social interaction with a skillful teacher. The teacher may model behaviors and provide verbal instructions for the child. Vygotsky(ibid) refers to this as collaborative dialogue. The child seeks to absorb the actions or instructions provided by the tutor (often the parent or teacher) and then internalizes the information, using it to guide or regulate their performance.

Shaffer (1996) gives the example of a young girl given her first jigsaw. When alone, she performs badly in attempting to solve the puzzle. According to Vygotsky, social collaboration involving cooperative or joint dialogue promotes cognitive development.

Therefore, to comprehend Vygotsky's theories on cognitive development, one must identify two of the main principles of Vygotsky's work: The More Knowledgeable Other (MKO), such as the father in the situation described above, and the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) what the girl could achieve with her father's assistance as detailed in Figure 3.

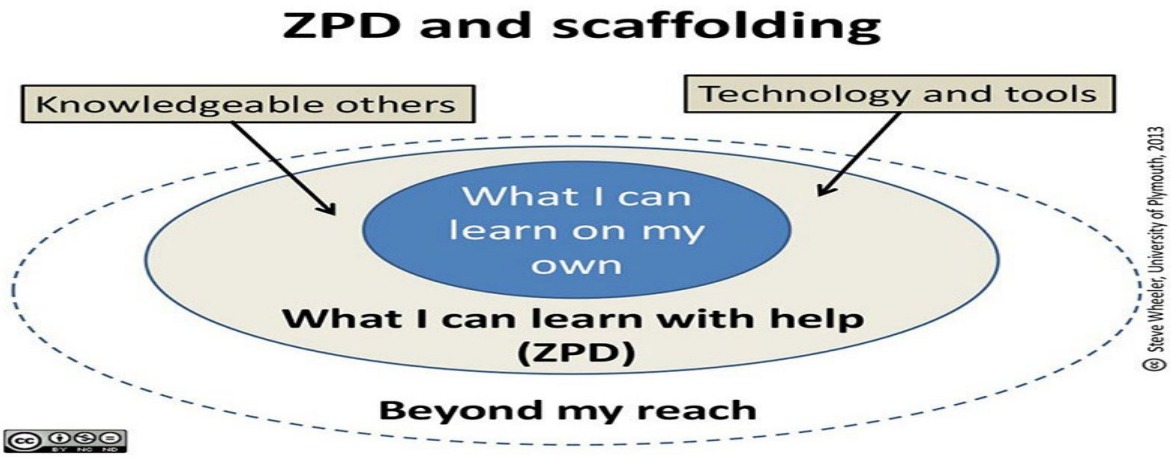

Figure 3: Adapted from: Csikszent Mihalyi (1991) and Killen (2009)

2.4.2.5 Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory

Maslow's theory presents his hierarchy of needs in a pyramid shape (Figure 4), with the basic needs at the bottom and the high-level, intangible needs at the top. A person can only move on to address the higher-level needs when their basic needs are adequately fulfilled. In the early childhood context, Maslow's theory thus focuses on the children's needs.

Figure 4. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

Hopper (2021). Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Explained. Retrieved from https://www.thoughtco.com/maslows-hierarchy-of-needs-4582571.

Maslow (1954) anticipated that human beings possess two sets of needs. His five-stage model can be separated into deficiency needs and growth needs. The first four levels, starting at the bottom of the pyramid (see Figure 4 are often referred to as deficiency needs (D-needs), and the top level is known as growth or being needs (B-B-needs).

Physiological needs:

In the early childhood context, children must be well-nourished, have a safe place to live, and be healthy so that their physiological needs can be met.

Safety needs:

Maslow (1943) indicated that among the lower-level needs is safety, which includes protection from violence and theft, emotional stability and well-being, health, security, and financial security. ECD learners must be protected and be safe all the time – in their home environment as well as at school.

Love and belonging needs:

The social needs on the third level of Maslow's hierarchy relate to human interaction and are the last of the so-called lower needs. Among these needs are friendships and family bonds both with biological family (parents, siblings, children) and chosen family (spouses and partners). ECD learners must, therefore, feel supported by their parents or guardians, who must take an active role in bringing them to school, fetching them and providing positive interaction, such as through play.

Esteem:

Our esteem needs involve the desire to feel good about ourselves. According to Maslow, esteem needs include two components. The first involves having self-confidence and feeling good about oneself. The second component involves feeling valued by others; that is, feeling that others have recognized our achievements and contributions. When people's esteem needs are met, they feel confident and see their contributions and achievements as valuable and important.

Self-actualization:

Self-actualization refers to feeling fulfilled or living up to our potential. One unique feature of self-actualization is that it looks different for everyone. For one person, self-actualization might involve helping others; for another, it might involve achievements in an artistic or creative field. Essentially, self-actualization means feeling that we are doing what we believe we are meant to do. According to Maslow, achieving self-actualization is relatively rare, and his examples of famous self-actualized individuals include Abraham Lincoln, Albert Einstein, and Mother Teresa.

2.4.3 Early Childhood Education programmes and policies

Several programmes and policies guide early childhood development and education in South Africa. Therefore, having a solid understanding of these regulatory documents can assist early childhood educators in meeting the required expectations of the government and parents during their teaching.

According to White Paper Education 5, “Early childhood development (ECD)” refers to the physical, psychological, cognitive, and social development that a child experiences between birth and school-going age. Different scientific studies show that early childhood development plays a key role in determining whether a child will reach his or her full potential. The events that happen during the early years of childhood have a lasting impact and will affect a child’s growth and development throughout his or her life.

A wide range of programmes and policies exist for children from birth to six years of age. The White Paper seeks to protect the rights of children to develop their full cognitive, emotional, social, and physical potential.

The government instated early childhood care and education sector laws, policies, and programmes to start the Reception Year (Grade R) and make it an integral section of the foundation phase. The responsibility of the provision of the ECD programme has been shifted from the Department of Social Development to the Department of Basic Education in 2022.

Access to education, even at this early age, is a shift in the right direction; however, it is only through excellence in early childhood education that children will have the foundation to successfully complete their school studies and not fall out of the system on the way to Grade 12. Due to the high birth rate, concerted efforts have been made

to expand the education system through establishing more preschools and schools, especially in the ECD sector.

According to the South African Census (2022) population count results released on 10 October 2023, 3 million children aged 0-4 years have participated in Early Childhood Development (ECD) programmes, with the Western Cape at 65,5% and Gauteng at 66%, showing the highest percentage of children attending ECD facilities. Furthermore, the figures for the other provinces showed that the Northern Cape (56,7%) and North West (52,4%) were more likely not to participate in ECD programmes than their counterparts in other provinces.

The South African 2022 census results further indicate that 3,4 million children aged 0–4 years attended ECD programmes in 2022, of which 2,5 million attended a crèche/Educare Centre or pre-school/nursery school/Grade 00/Grade 000/Grade R. Interestingly, 570 000 (27%) children stayed at home with elderly carers or day mothers, meaning that the necessary elements of development might not have been addressed.

While more than 3 million Black African children attended ECD programmes, seven out of ten (72,3%) attended ECD facilities, with 60,7% attending a crèche/educare Centre and 11,6% attending pre-school/nursery school/Grade 00/Grade 000/Grade R. White children attain mostly higher results at school than their African counterparts. The difference might be attributed to fewer African children attending appropriate early childhood education. Among white children, 83,4% attended ECD facilities, with one-third (32,5%) attending pre-school/nursery school/Grade 00/Grade 000/Grade R and the remainder attending a crèche/Educare Centre (50,9%). Nearly 17,0% of Black African children stayed with day mothers or elderly carers. The use of day mothers and grandmothers for childcare was also high among Indians/Asians (19,6%). As far as the so-called coloured children are concerned, close to 19,0% participated in home/community playgroups. Results showed that there were slight differences between sexes regarding early childhood education. These statistics provide a clearer picture of how parents deal with their children’s early childhood education.

Several policies impact Grade R, and they need to be examined. This is because those policies are not fully aligned with the high increase rate of the Grade R programmes in the country (South Africa). For example, the programmes have limited quality, especially in schools that serve poorer communities. The policies do not consider the courses that train the ECD teachers. The policies are quiet about the qualification of the ECD or Grade R teachers. No programme is aligned with ECD pedagogical practice.

2.4.3.1 Education White Paper 5

The reason for the development of the policy on early childhood learning was that pre-schools needed to be implemented across the country. White Paper 5 (2001) policy must be implemented for five-year-olds in the preschool Reception Year (Grade R). The policy's rationale is to provide all learners with ten years of compulsory school education, including one for early childhood education, namely, the Reception Year. Grade R access is envisaged to be available at reception year programmes within a public primary school system, reception year programmes within community-based sites, and independent provision of reception year programmes.

Census 2022 alerts us to the fact that of the South African children aged 0-4 years who are supposed to be in Early Childhood Development (ECD) programmes, about two-fifths (39,8%) were not attending any ECD programmes. More than half of the children in the Northern Cape (56,7%) and North West (52,4%) were not attending any ECD facilities. This non-attendance is also noteworthy in Eastern Cape, KwaZulu-Natal, and Mpumalanga, where approximately two out of five children do not attend ECD programmes. The situation is better in the Western Cape, where a 30,4% non-attendance of ECD programmes is prevalent, and Gauteng lagging slightly behind with 33,6% non-attendance,

In 2022, children aged 0-4 years predominantly attended creches or childcare centers (36%). Children from the Western Cape obtained the highest attendance figures in this case, Free State and Gauteng (44,1%, 44,1% and 40,8% respectively). The lowest attendance scores (28%) of creches and educare centers were associated with children in the North West.

Pre-school/nursery school/Grade 00/Grade 000/Grade R attendance among 0–4-year-olds was only 7,3% nationally. Interestingly, Limpopo and Eastern Cape, mainly rural areas, showed the highest attendance percentage of these facilities (8,6% and

9% respectively). In Limpopo and Eastern Cape, roughly one out of ten (10%) children were left in the care of day mothers or elderly carers, and 6% stayed at home or attended a community playgroup. KwaZulu-Natal had a higher percentage (12%) of children cared for by day mothers or elderly carers. Similarly, 9% of Western Cape children attended community playgroups or stayed home.

There were some achievements, with Education White Paper 5 being a guiding document for addressing some previous imbalances in early childhood care.

- It helped expand ECD provision, which means it corrected the imbalances in provision, ensuring equitable access and improving the quality and delivery of ECD programmes.
- A national system of provision of the Reception Year (Grade R) was established for children aged five years that combines a larger public and smaller independent competent.

However, the quality of early learning programmes has not yet improved.

2.4.3.2 Education White Paper 6

Education White Paper 6 was developed from a need to include all learners, regardless of abilities, in the education system by removing barriers that caused the exclusion of learners needing extra support. This inclusivity entails the well-being of all children and increased learner diversity. It furthermore places a responsibility on education systems globally to identify and suitably address learning barriers. This fundamental principle of Inclusive Education (IE) is supported by UNESCO (1994). An important objective of IE is to grant learners experiencing barriers to learning a fair chance to success, regardless of challenges such as inequality and poverty. The IE policy calls for respecting human rights and a conducive, caring and safe learning environment for all children, especially those with barriers. The Education White Paper 6, Special Needs Education (EWP 6): Building an Inclusive Education and Training System, was published by the DoE in 2001. This policy was issued four years after the combined and final reports of the National Commission on Special Needs in Education and Training (NCSNET) and the National Commission for Education Support Services (NCESS). White Paper 6 describes inclusive education and training systems as having the following attributes:

- Acknowledges that all children and youths can learn and that all youths need

support.

- Allows education structures, systems and learning methodologies to meet the needs of all learners.
- Acknowledges and respects differences in learners, whether due to age, gender, ethnicity, language, class, disability, HIV, or other infectious disease.
- It is wider than formal schooling and acknowledges that learning also occurs at home, in the community and formal and informal settings and structures.
- Changes attitudes, behavior, teaching methods, curricula, and environment to unite the needs of all learners.
- Maximizes the participation of all learners in the culture and the curriculum of educational institutions and uncovers and minimizes barriers to learning. (DoE, 2001a: 6-7)

Education White Paper 6 furthermore focuses on inclusive education by acknowledging that barriers are not limited to certain individuals; any child can experience some barrier somewhere in their schooling career. “Different learning needs may arise because of:

- Negative attitudes to and stereotyping of difference.
- An inflexible curriculum.
- Inappropriate languages or languages of learning and teaching.
- Inappropriate communication.
- Inaccessible and unsafe built environments.
- Inappropriate and inadequate support services.
- Inadequate policies and legislation.
- The non-recognition and non-involvement of parents.
- Inadequately and inappropriately trained education managers and educators” (DOE, 2001a:7).

Education White Paper 6 defines inclusion as how learner diversity and inclusion are recognized, respected, and supported. It also advocates for the support of all stakeholders, the learners and teachers in this context, whose needs must be met through the system. Teaching and learning remain the document's focus, and it includes the importance of developing effective teaching strategies to benefit the learners. Furthermore, the policy concentrates on identifying and minimizing hurdles in the system that might hamper the implementation of strategies to meet the full range of

learning needs and support in the classroom (DoE, 2001a).

2.4.3.3 Language policy

Departmental officials and educators cannot make this decision on behalf of a parent or guardian. The Language in Education policy (1997) emanated from the South African Schools Act, and according to this policy, parents have the right to choose the language of learning and teaching (LoLT). This section of the policy can be problematic because some parents choose to have their children schooled in another language other than their mother tongue, and "most common barriers associated with language and communication is that learners are often forced to communicate and learn in a language which they do not usually use at home and are not competent to learn effectively" (DoE, 2005:11). According to the Basic Education Law Amendment Policy 2.4, Clause 4 (2017:3) the Head of Department must assist schools to use the correct procedures to be able to offer more than one language of instruction, after the context has been considered and in consultation with parents.

2.4.3.4 Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS)

The National Curriculum Statement Grades R – 12 (NCS) is the guiding policy on school curriculum and assessment. To ensure improved implementation of this policy, a modified curriculum, the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS), came into effect in January 2012 for all school subjects (DoE, 2011:4). The policy is a better-structured learning programme which provides more time for literacy and numeracy, whilst having departmental workbooks to assist with learning content as an important feature.

The CAPS curriculum aims to ensure that children acquire applicable knowledge that is of value to them in their lives. The CAPS furthermore assists in providing all children, regardless of race, gender, socio-economic background, intellectual ability, and physical skills, with the knowledge, skills, and values needed for self-realization and necessary for self-fulfillment so that they can play a significant role as citizens of South Africa (DoE, 2011). A further requirement of the CAPS is that inclusivity must be a central part of the school's organizational planning process. For this specific reason, teachers' understanding of barriers and complexities associated with these barriers is essential to plan for the inclusion of diverse learners.

Despite the various policies and programmes to ensure quality education in early childhood, many factors remain that cause Grade R learners to underperform.

2.4.4 What are the factors responsible for Grade R learners' underperformance?

The Western Cape government (2011) refers to the vibrancy of the ECD sector but at the same time acknowledges the complex challenges faced in ECD, e.g., lack of monitoring and support, poor infrastructure (unconducive classrooms and lack of outdoor materials), lack of inadequate teacher training and supervision, insufficient resource materials, low socio-economic background, lack of numeracy and reading pre-skills and also environmental factors.

2.4.4.1 Lack of Monitoring and Support

In the DBE (2014: 8) document on inclusive education, it is indicated that every Grade R learner and Grade R teacher needs support and to be monitored so that learning can be taken seriously, which suggests that the support and monitoring probably must come from outside. Support is not only focused on physical support; it should also include support through learning materials so that they can achieve optimally.

After the approval of White Paper 6, the Department of Education developed the National Strategy on Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support (SIAS) (Department of Basic Education, 2014b:9). The purpose of SIAS is to be a framework for the "standardization of the procedures to identify, assess and provide programmes for all learners who require additional support to enhance their participation and inclusion in school." SIAS is also there to improve access to quality education for

children with a variety of challenges, including children who fail due to unfavourable home circumstances, language issues, disabilities, early school leavers, starting school very late, etc. The SIAS policy is closely aligned with the Integrated School Health Policy to strengthen the system and identify and intervene timeously when children are experiencing difficulties. All aspects of support are introduced in the SIAS, such as providing clear guidelines on enrolling learners in special schools and settings, which also acknowledge the central role parents and teachers play (Education White Paper 6:7).

2.4.4.2 Poor Infrastructure

Poor infrastructure makes learners feel negative about their schools. This is often aggravated by storm and flood damage experienced in rural areas due to neglected town infrastructure and stormwater drains that lack capacity. Poor infrastructure includes small classrooms which are overcrowded and not conducive to teaching and learning. Blackmore et al. (2011) indicated strong evidence from around the globe about the benefits of smaller classes, including improving academic achievement. They have suggested reducing class sizes in Grade R and changing the teaching practice towards more child-centered education, which is only truly possible in classes of 15-20 learners.

2.4.4.3 Teacher Training

The training level of teachers is key to the quality attainment of learning at schools, including ensuring the readiness of Grade R learners. To achieve excellence, learners must receive quality education through teachers applying different teaching skills, having knowledge of the curriculum, and having access to relevant resources. These teachers must be well-equipped to be able to deal with the diverse learners in their classes (Cook, Klein, and Chen, 2011:380)

Teachers who are teaching young children should also be aware of the natural abilities of children and be able to utilize these as building blocks for preparing them for formal schooling. Feeney, Galper and Seefeldt (2009:88) emphasize the importance of Grade R teachers receiving specialized training in early childhood education since teachers with more educational knowledge can interpret learners' actions from a developmental perspective.

Wium, Makgatho, and Louw (2015:31) warn that in-service Grade R teachers should not only depend on the training offered by DoE but also take ownership of their knowledge development through further studies and intensive reading of subject-related materials. Teachers who possess appropriate knowledge of Grade R teaching will also better understand the curriculum and be able to interpret it adequately. Unfortunately, the greater majority of Grade R teachers do not have suitable qualifications.

2.4.4.4 Unavailability of resource materials

According to Modisaotsile (2012:4), Learning and Teaching Support Materials (LTSMs) generally augment teaching and understanding of the subject content. In other words, resources bring a wider picture of what is taught and help learners directly link with the world around them. However, the resources must be suitable. Suitability, as seen by Atmore et al. (2012:44) and Chikutuma and Mawere (2013:18), includes that resources must be age-appropriate, be enough for the whole class, be attractive and in the correct language, be durable and ultimately be safe. The absence of proper materials and resources will negatively impact learners' performance.

Lingam and Lingam (2013:1) argue that teachers need the correct LTSMs to align with their planning; otherwise, success cannot be expected. Krishnaratne et al. (2013:39) add that providing learning materials, such as children's books, posters, flip charts, and chalkboards, not only supports teachers in planning lessons but also encourages learners to learn. The preceding resources must be considered as very basic since technological aids are not included. The use of technology in current learning is mostly shelved since it is unavailable in most ECD contexts. In this study's context, resources were mostly lacking or insufficient, broken, or unsuitable.

2.4.4.5 Socio-economic background

The socio-economic background of a child reaches further than just poverty and a dysfunctional family; it includes aspects "such as abuse, crime, violence in the neighborhood and at home, gangsters, lack of basic amenities such as water, electricity, proper housing and toilets, gender issues in cultural groups and society, and

home language that differs from the language of teaching and learning (Nel, Nel & Hugo, 2013:15)."

According to the DoE (2002, p.131), there is an alignment between the level of education and the socio-economic conditions in communities. The following are some barriers created by socio-economic factors: "Late enrolment at school, poor self-image, lack of exposure to numeracy concepts, poor oral language development due to a lack of communication, interaction and learning opportunities. (DoE, 2005:14)." Most of the barriers mentioned in this section describe the state of the community of this study.

2.4.4.6 Numeracy and Reading

Gerber et al. (2010:261) specified that early childhood and toddlerhood are the developmental states when children develop at their fastest rate, and these are also when early literacy and numeracy skills create a foundation for future reading and mathematical skill development. In communities like the one where the research took place, children are often not taught important pre-numeracy and pre-literacy skills due to a lack of knowledge usually emanating from uneducated parents and untrained caregivers.

2.4.4.7 Classroom Environment Factors

The classroom environment is often determined by the infrastructure mentioned earlier. Regardless of background, culture, customs or beliefs, children thrive in a classroom that allows them to explore, play and feel safe. Children who feel comfortable and sheltered in the classroom tend to have heightened needs to explore materials that help them generate new ideas and "deepen their understanding of their surroundings " (Olds, 2001: 47)."

The classroom environment should be warm, inviting, and exciting. According to Bruce (2006:112), as cited in Beckley (2012:182), "children use their senses to learn about materials, and they learn from feedback from their movements about them (kinaesthetic learning)." This type of learning is best achieved in an inviting classroom environment characterized by a clean classroom full of posters and a classroom with a place for the children to play.

2.4.4.8 Grade R Pacesetting (planning) for Teaching and Learning

Teaching and learning must be based on the CAPS policy content recommended for the three learning areas of mathematics, life skills and language. Soma (2011:28) shows the importance of good planning for Grade R activities to meet learners' cognitive, emotional, physical, and social needs in preparation for formal schooling. However, this can only materialize if teachers are familiar with the content and didactics needed for successful teaching and learning.

Planning for learners' daily activities should start with teachers adhering to the prescribed timetable (DBE, 2011:20; Mahan, 2015:26). A further step in the planning process would be to include the required CAPS content, which supports the skills and knowledge to be learnt. Finally, a remedial plan to support learners who might not understand the new concepts (Reche, Bundi, Riungu & Mbugua, 2012:4). With the situation of Grade R teachers not necessarily qualified, the important aspect of proper planning is often overlooked.

2.4.4.9 Learner Absenteeism

Learner absenteeism as a habitual pattern of absence from obligation or school can be viewed as an indicator of poor academic performance, which is rooted in the socio-economic circumstances of a learner (Malcolm et al., 2003:44).

Since the pandemic affected the world in 2020, many learners have dropped out of school. In addition, many learners have become habitual absconders, resulting in dropping out of school. Disturbingly, some of these learners with a high absenteeism rate were Grade R learners. This negative situation is also prevalent in the context of the study.

2.4.5 How can teachers be supported?

Teachers can be supported by ensuring parents, stakeholders, and health professionals offer support.

2.4.5.1 Stakeholders and Health Professionals

Health professionals play an essential role in the SIAS process and the school. Only when all these stakeholders get on board can successful collaboration and support occur to ensure positive outcomes for young children. These health professionals include, but are not limited to, psychologists, speech therapists, social workers, and

occupational therapists (DoE, 2008:16).

2.4.5.2 Parental Involvement

Japanese American parents take their parenting role very seriously and say, “The primary role of parent is one of teacher” (Hieshima and Schneider in Okagaki, 2010:13). Translated, this statement refers to the importance of a parent as the child’s first teacher. This is not the case in South African rural areas, where many parents regard teaching as only the teacher's duty. However, according to NCSNET and NCESS (1997), parental involvement and family support are important facets of a young child's education. The role of parents is to be involved in planning school policies, and most importantly, they must ensure they assist their young children in learning informally through play when in the home space. In total agreement, Okagaki (2010:18) believes that when parents understand education, they may be in a position to help their children’s academic performance to a certain degree. Okagaki (2010:18) also acknowledges that collaboration between parents and teachers positively impacts children’s development and learning in early childhood contexts.

2.4.5.3 Teachers’ Qualifications

Teaching in ECD is demanding and requires specialist skills, and therefore, teachers in Grade R must be adequately trained to ensure that learners are well prepared to cope with the work that will be required of them in Grade 1 (UNICEF, 2000:6; Govindasamy, 2010: 24). Being an effective teacher requires wide-ranging knowledge about the learning processes of young children (UNICEF, 2000:15) and also to form part of what Ailwood (2003) refers to as “a positive microsystem.” Where teachers lack the knowledge mentioned above, especially in terms of the developmental levels of children, quality ECD programmes will not exist.

Teachers’ education is aligned to the outcomes of education, meaning that well-trained teachers will deliver quality teaching to ECD children (Espinosa, 2002:8). A study done in Britain (Walker, 2008:10) that focused on good quality teaching showed that “children who had highly qualified teachers also had high educational and social outcomes whereas those whose teachers were paraprofessionals showed low educational and social outcomes.” When teachers have a positive attitude, their service delivery is positively impacted, which aligns with Bronfenbrenner’s ecological theory. Many researchers concur that a highly qualified teaching corps is essential for successful ECD programmes that will ultimately result in better outcomes

for learners in Grade R (Pence,2004:7; Myers, 2004:8; Ryan, Whitebook, Kipnis & Sakai, 2011:28). The importance of ensuring that teachers' qualifications are upgraded through part-time diplomas and degrees and augmented with other in-service training cannot be underestimated.

2.4.6 What strategies are Grade R practitioners currently employ to assist underperforming learners?

Each practitioner uses different strategies to assist underperforming learners (Campbell 1997; Kirova & Bhargava 2002; Sheffield & Cruikshank 2000). The following strategies are some that are currently being used to help underperforming learners:

- Wait time.
- Multisensory instruction
- Modelling
- Graphic organisers
- One-on-one and small-group instruction

2.4.6.1 Wait Time

"Wait time" is sometimes referred to as think time. This technique requires waiting a few seconds after asking a question or saying something to the learners. It provides learners with time to process the questions and formulate a response. This method is an alternative to calling on the first students who raise their hands to provide the answers.

2.4.6.2 Multisensory Learning Strategies

Multisensory learning can be regarded as one of the best strategies for learner engagement, making it important for teachers to understand the workings of a child's mind (Shams & Seitz, 2008: 411). Multisensory instruction, also known as VAKT (Visual-Auditory-Kinaesthetic-Tactile), is a way of teaching that engages more than one sense at a time. A teacher might help children learn information using touch, movement, sight, and hearing and the importance of multisensory skills are also connected to the attainment of literacy skills (Blomert & Froyen, 2010:195-204) because reading incorporates written words which must be translated into letter sounds for comprehension.

It is thus clear that multisensory learning, whether a teacher is using it as a classroom instruction or remedial assignment, can help all learners develop or strengthen their

literacy skills. When learners struggle with reading, teachers must look at the book together with the learners and start talking about the titles, headings, and illustrations. Teachers will explain the keywording and main ideas as part of multisensory learning. Doing so will help the learners understand what they are reading.

2.4.6.3 Modelling

Children learn best through doing rather than through just listening. There is a strategy called “I Do, We Do, You Do” to teach skills. The teacher shows learners how to do something (“I do”), e.g., folding a paper hat. Then, the teacher does it with the learners, modelling the process step by step (” We do”). Then, the teacher will ask the children to try to fold their own boat without assistance (“You do”).

2.4.6.4 Graphic organizers

Graphic organizers are visual tools that show information or the connection between ideas. Teachers also help children organize what they have learned or what they must do using graphic organizers. Teachers employ these tools to “scaffold” or offer support around the learning process for battling learners. Some examples of graphic organizers are the Venn diagram, concept map, T-chart, idea web and KWL-chart. The researcher shares these ideas based on experience gained during the years of teaching.

Venn Diagram

The Venn diagram is a handy graphic organizer with two circles that interlock. This is useful when differences and similarities want to be indicated. Students can then discuss or write details about how the topics are different in the outer parts of the circles and how they are the same in the overlapping section of the circles.

Venn diagrams can, for instance, be used to teach differentiation by comparing two items. They would then compare the two items and indicate similarities and differences. Figure 5 is an example of a Venn diagram showing how children can practice advanced sorting with Venn diagrams.

Figure 5 Venn diagram: Showing how children can practice sorting skills
https://za.pinterest.com/pin/796011302903480881/

Concept Map

Concept maps are graphic organizers that look like web pages with arrows connecting each circle, block, or picture. This is a visual way to assist learners in learning about certain concepts with their sub-concepts.

These maps can be used successfully in Grade R classrooms. These concept maps also provide young children with pre-literacy skills since pictures are provided with the vocabulary, as seen in the concept map in Figure 6.

Figure 6. Relationship between the tree and the colour of the leaves

T-Chart

T-charts are used as graphic organizers when making comparisons. This type of graphic organizer is useful for different topics and helps organize the characteristics of different objects. For example, teachers can use a T-chart to show the differences between the two types of homes our forefathers lived in. Figure 7 provides an example of such a T-chart.

Rondavel		**Wattle and daub house**
		

Figure 7. Composite Building Method Used for Making Walls and Buildings

An idea web, sometimes called a spider web, is a graphic organizer used for brainstorming and helping learners organize their ideas. Some idea websites are composed of circles and assist learners in getting ideas together about a certain topic. For example, a topic is written in the middle circle, and learners, with the help of their teachers, then write or use pictures instead of writing – especially in Grade R, which is placed in smaller circles around the middle circle. Figure 8 demonstrates how pets can be looked after or taken care of. The topic, in this instance, is about pet care and the different aspects linked to it.

Figure 8. Pet Ownership and Pet Health Care

KWL Chart

A KWL chart is another popular graphic organizer, especially in the elementary classroom. This visual learning tool consists of three questions, each in its own column ('What I Know', 'What I want to know', and 'What I have learned'). This is a great graphic organizer for activating prior knowledge. In the Grade R context, the teacher can do the chart on the board and write, with the learners providing the information for each column. This three-step process is great for developing a sense of purpose and helps learners become more engaged in their learning topic.

2.4.6.5 One-on-one and Small Group Teaching Strategy

According to Killen (2010:193), there is enough evidence that teaching and learning in a small group effectively develops communication skills, critical thinking, teamwork ability, decision-making capacity, and knowledge retention. They have also indicated that a small group teaching method is an effective approach adopted by different schools with expected learning outcomes. It can be concluded that small group teaching strategies are easier to implement; they prepare different types of learners and are easy to integrate.

The principal reason for using this teaching strategy is that, for some desired outcomes, it offers greater opportunities for learners to learn than would be possible in whole-class teaching (Killen, 2010:192).

2.4.7 What are other possible strategies that could be used as support to these learners?

Suitable teaching strategies used by Grade R teachers have a significant influence on the quality of learning in the ECD phase since they enhance the mastery of pre-literacy and pre-numeracy skills, thereby providing a positive influence on the quality of learning (UNICEF, 2000:7; Excell & Linington, 2011:11). Teaching strategies and the choice of teaching content influence the quality ECD learning either positively or negatively (Myers, 2004:8). Since numerous researchers have shown to the importance of play for learning, it is essential to let children learn through play, which leads to holistic development, especially in goal-directed ECD centers (Johansson & Pramling-Samuelsson, 2006:50).

Early Literacy mastery

Complex talents are not innate in children from birth. Due to the developmental approach, learners are ready to acquire the rich skills necessary for their future literacy proficiency. The two main objectives of early literacy instruction mastery level are enhancing overall reading success and laying a solid foundation for future learning across all subject areas. Complex talents are not innate in children from birth. Learners are ready to go on the journey of acquiring the rich skills necessary for their future literacy proficiency because of the developmental approach. The two main objectives of early literacy teaching mastery level are enhancing overall literacy achievement and laying a solid basis for future learning in all subject areas.

Early numeracy mastery

The term "early numeracy" describes the mathematics and numeracy instruction given to young children in the nursery, preschool, and reception/foundation stages. Children learn the fundamentals of mathematics to lay the foundation for success in later years. Early on, young infants are instructed to comprehend the numbers up to ten thoroughly and the patterns and connections among them. They will also learn to recognize measurements, space, and shapes. The term "early numeracy" describes the mathematics and numeracy instruction given to young children in the nursery,

preschool, and reception/foundation stages. In order to lay the foundation for success in later years, children learn the fundamentals of mathematics.

Holistic development

Holistic development is a complete educational strategy that aims to develop physical, intellectual, emotional, cognitive, and social abilities in children with the active engagement and support of the community and parents. It seeks to enhance these skills in the early stages of life, which will prepare the children to meet the challenges and difficulties of daily life in the future. These skills also appear crucial not only for success in professional life but also for developing a strong and balanced personality. A holistic approach recognizes that all children, particularly those facing extreme adversity, require a range of knowledge, skills, experiences, and core values to enable them to engage as productive and ethical citizens and reach their potential. Holistic development is attained through various activities implemented into daily routines, such as reading to learners, doing enjoyable and playful tasks, and making learning fun through quality learning time.

- **Implementing learning into daily activities**

  Mathematics, languages, and social skills can all be incorporated into regular tasks and activities,

- **Reading to the learners**

  Read to and with the learners as often as you can. Have books available that they may access during free play.

- **Building on what your learners enjoy**

  Pay attention to what your learners are interested in and use it as a foundation for teaching.

- **Having fun together with quality learning time**

Set a quality time to interact with your learners in a fun and personalized manner.

2.4.7.1 Songs and Rhyme Teaching Strategies

Is it an integral part of an African child's daily living, through cultural and religious activities and during work? Music is, therefore, an ideal vehicle for quality learning. In line with Bronfenbrenner's Ecological theory, the early childhood education community believes it fosters children's learning and development when children's play

features song as a component. Even from birth, music can be viewed as an intuitive form of communication between mother and child (Miranda, 2004:59). Furthermore, the use of song, for example, has been demonstrated to facilitate the development of literacy skills in young children (Berk, 2009:55). Berk's statement is also supported by Van Vuuren (2022) who avers that children can learn several pre-literacy skills through music such as vocabulary and rhythm, which will eventually assist fluent reading, whilst the playful nature of music brings about positive psychological effects.

A research study by De Veries (2006:268) revealed that teachers who were exposed to music training skills and thus used music in their teaching could see increased engagement and socialization and overall improvement in learners' Grade R achievement.

2.4.7.2 The Project Method of Teaching Strategies

Modern-day education aims to provide learners with the necessary skills to function effectively when they begin their journey into the world of work (Rahman et al., 2012:110). One of the most efficient strategies to develop these skills is using project-based teaching strategies. Project-based teaching strategies provide learners with a natural and rich learning environment and the opportunity to explore their world whilst developing reflective and meaningful learning (Rahman et al., 2012:110). Children actively use the knowledge gained through project-based learning when constructing meaning through exploration, interpretation, criticism, and creation (Miranda, 2004:47).

2.4.7.3 Co-operative Learning as a teaching strategy

During the birth of OBE in South Africa, the most effective teaching strategies for Grade R learners were cooperative learning, fieldwork, and inclusive teaching (Van Heerden, 2008:28). Killen (2010:215) defines cooperative learning as working together to achieve shared goals therefore, co-operative learning is an instructional technique in which learners work together in a small group to help one another to achieve a common goal.

The social cohesion perspective attempts to explain the effects of cooperative learning on achievement by suggesting that “learners will help one another to learn because they care about one another and want one another to succeed” Lord (2001:34)

Felder and Brent (1994:7) argue strongly for mixed groups because “weaker learners gain from seeing how better students study and approach problems, and the stronger learners gain a deeper understanding of the subject by teaching it to others.” Stahl (1997:14) further suggests that mixed groups should be mixed on multiple levels, “first based on academic abilities and then on the basis of ethnic background, race, gender, etc.”

2.4.7.4 Role Play as a Teaching Strategy

Role-play also contains a fun element and can boast several broad reasons for its use. Firstly, role-play stimulates social interaction, which has an important effect on learners’ existing beliefs and assists them with their understanding (Piaget,1972). Secondly, the use of role-play is also supported by neo-Vygotskians, who aver that “effective learning takes place when teachers challenge learners with problems that are beyond their existing level of experience and facilitate the process of finding the solution to such problems” (Vincent & Shepherd, 1998:2).

2.5 CONCLUDING REMARKS

The chapter focused on Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theory as a theoretical framework. It furthermore presented a background to the development of a Grade R learner, other theories in Early Childhood Development, Early Childhood Education programmes and policies that provide insight into what a Grade R learner is and what is required of a Grade R teacher. This was followed by the ways a Grade R teacher can be supported, current teaching strategies used to support underperforming Grade R learners and possible strategies that could be used to support these learners.

Chapter three presents an overview of methods and procedures employed to answer the research question, with its aligned sub-questions, focusing on investigating the challenges and workable solutions of underperforming Grade R learners.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

In chapter 2, the literature review and theoretical framework provided a solid framework for the research, which is important because it is through well-framed research that people understand the world better (Bertram and Christiansen, 2014:7). This chapter focused on Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems theory, as a theoretical framework, and provided a background to the development of a Grade R learner. It further discussed other theories in Early Childhood Development, Early Childhood Education programs, and policies that provide insight into the early childhood education context. This was followed by ways of supporting Grade R teachers, strategies to support underperforming Grade R learners and possible alternative strategies.

According to White (2005:93), the researcher needs to select a suitable research method or method that will allow him/her to conduct the research in a way that will allow the researcher to find answers to the research problem. This chapter thus covers the research design and the study's methodology, which is considered appropriate and aligned with mixed methodology, including sampling, population, data collection, data analysis, and ethical considerations. It also provides an in-depth understanding of how this study was conducted.

Bronfenbrenner's eco-systemic theoretical approach recognizes the dynamic interaction of various systems that impact learners' development of a Grade R learner. This chapter defines the research paradigm, design, and methodology, as well as the sampling of the participants. It also provides a detailed description of the data collection processes and ethical considerations relevant to the study.

3.2 RESEARCH DESIGN

As discussed in the following section, several important aspects are intertwined in a study's research design.

3.2.1 What is research design?

Research design is a strategy that is drawn up to organize research and make it practicable. Creswell (2009:107) defines the research design as “a strategic guideline and instrument to be followed in addressing the research problem.” De Vos (2001:105), Maree (2010:70), and Mouton (1996:107) concur that research design is a blueprint for conducting research. Interestingly, Durrheim (2004:29) provides a different perspective, where he does not see research design as a framework or guideline but rather as a bridge between the research questions and the implementation of the research strategy. “A plan of how the researcher will systematically gather and analyses the data that is needed to answer the study question" is what Bertram and Christiansen (2014: 40) define as a research design. For the present study, the researcher focused on Creswell’s (2009:107) definition, which views a research design as a strategic guideline with its instruments.

3.2.2 Research Design Reflected in Research Question

According to Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2018:73), research questions can be answered based on the evidence and warrants found during the research, enabling the reader to check how the research question has been analyzed and answered. In simpler terms, research design constitutes data collection, measurement, and analysis so the reader can check how the research question has been answered. Thus, the research design is a master plan of how and where data will be collected and analyzed to answer the research question. McMillan and Schumacher (2010:66) concur by saying that “research design is a blueprint for selecting subjects, research site (where) and data collection procedures (how) to answer the research questions.” The chosen design to guide the present study is presented in 3.2.4.

3.2.3 The Goal of Research Design

McMillan and Schumacher (2010) underline that research design is the main attribute that encourages the strategic thinking process and contemplation throughout the study, which calls for constant reflection and review of decisions and approaches. The research design for the present study was the mixed methods design model.

3.2.4 My research design:

Two research design approaches, qualitative and quantitative, were used in the present study.

3.2.4.1 Qualitative research design

Qualitative research design is a procedure of explanatory inquiry in which researchers interpret what they see, hear, and understand (Creswell,2009:176). Besides looking at meanings, qualitative research design also focuses on the features and description of people and contexts (Leedy & Ormrod, 2013:89). This design furthermore focuses on answering “how” and “why” questions through the utilization of open-ended questions, which help participants to and helps the subjects to state their views unambiguously. This study used qualitative methods to generate a large volume of quality data from a limited number of research participants.

3.2.4.2 Quantitative research design

Quantitative research design is an approach that is used to answer questions about “relationships among measured variables, to explain, forecast, and monitor phenomena (Leedy & Ormrod, 2013:94).” The quantitative research design is used to quantify matters and answers to questions of ‘how many’ and ‘how often’ through the course of the research study. Quantitative data is presented in statistical format using statistics, graphs, charts, and numbers. The quantitative part of this study generated data using self-administered questionnaires, which the researcher distributed personally to the participants.

3.2.4.3 Research Paradigm

Paradigms may be defined as “models, perspectives or conceptual frameworks that help us to organize our thoughts, beliefs, views and practices into a logical whole and consequently inform our research design” (Basit, 2010:14). A paradigm is "a lens

through which people view the world, which determines the goal of inquiry," according to Mutula (2016:35). It is essentially a collection of guidelines for the research in this context regarding how the issue being studied ought to be approached and comprehended.

This study was conducted within an interpretative paradigm, defined by Maree (2010:20) as “a view of social science, a lens through which to examine the practice of research.” It focuses “on smaller numbers and in-depth analysis of human behavior and perceptions, acknowledging differences as well as similarities” (Basit, 2010:14). Furthermore, it interprets social reality as viewed by the research participants. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2018:283) state that “the interpretative paradigm begins with the individual who sets out to understand his or her interpretations of the world, in which he or she is embedded.” For Henning et al. (2004:20), the interpretative paradigm is a shared process informed by teachers working in the context and inspected by others – such as the researcher. It is thus important for the researcher to look at different places and different situations to understand the phenomenon under scrutiny.

Brink provides the following criteria for quality in interpretive research, van der Walt and van Rensburg (2012: 25)

- “Trustworthiness is strengthened by detailed descriptions of data.
- Data must be authentic and reflect the experiences of respondents.
- The researcher must be able to show how they have analyzed data and come to conclusions.
- Findings cannot be generalized to all contexts but can be transferred to a different context.
- The subjectivity of the researcher in the process is accepted.”

3.3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This section on research methodology explains the following important facets: definitions, research criteria, mixed methodology (including quantitative and qualitative), population, sampling, setting, and data collection tools, amongst others.

3.3.1 Definition of the Research Methodology

According to Goundar (2012:12), research methodology is a way to solve the research problem systematically. O'Leary (2004:85) defines research methodology as a framework associated with a particular set of paradigmatic assumptions used to conduct our research. Creswell (2009:18) takes it further and refers to methodology as the use of the different techniques, methods and procedures used during the implementation of the research design or the research methods used. The use of mixed methodologies, such as in this study, is described by Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2018:285) as "combining methodologies [which] may be appropriate for the research in hand". Numerous scholars agree that research methodologies explain and provide definitions for the kind of problems that are worthwhile to investigate. Research methodologies furthermore assist in framing a problem so that it can be investigated using specific designs whilst providing knowledge on how to develop appropriate means of collecting data (Schwardt, 2007:189). Considering the value of different research methodologies, this study used the mixed methods methodological approach to answer the research questions satisfactorily.

3.3.2 Research Criteria

Allan and Randy (2005:84) provide criteria that should be present in one's research methodology: Firstly, the methodology should be the most appropriate to achieve the research objectives.

3.3.3 What is a mixed methodology?

Mixed methodology combines qualitative and quantitative research approaches for breadth and depth of understanding and corroboration (Creswell 2010:123). Mixed methodology is defined by Creswell (2012:118) as involving collecting both qualitative and quantitative data to ensure a better understanding of a phenomenon and answer the research questions.

This combination of methods, to observe something from several angles or to acquire multiple measures of the same phenomena by applying different research measures, is defined as triangulation (Creswell 2012:122). Triangulation is a phenomenon that comprises the collection and analysis of data from various sources (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014) and is defined by McMillan (2012) as the comparison of findings that were made using different techniques.

Using mixed methodology also means that the advantages of both quantitative and qualitative methods are obtained (De Vos 2002:51).

3.3.4 Qualitative research methodology

Qualitative research methodology is the inquiry process of understanding social or human phenomena (De Vos, 2005:242; Creswell, 1998:85). It answers questions obtained in natural settings and is concerned with finding answers such as why, how and in what way, through interaction and observation of participants (Hancock, 2002:2; Creswell, 2009:16)

The qualitative data for the present study was collected using interviews. “An interview is a method of data collection, information or opinion gathering that specifically involves asking a series of questions. Most commonly, interviews are conducted on a face-to-face basis, and they take various forms. Interviews can range from naturalistic, casual, unstructured, in-depth in-person interviews and conversations, to very structured formats, with answers from a prescribed list in a questionnaire or standardized interview schedule (Jupp, 2006:157 and Creswell, 2009:181).”

Interviewing “provides access to the context of people’s behavior and thereby provides a way for researchers to understand the meaning of that behavior” (Seidman, 2006: 10). McMillan (2012) defines the interview as a form of data collection whereby questions are asked orally and subjects’ responses recorded, either verbatim or summarized. Face-to-face interviews with Grade R learners’ parents were conducted, and voice recording was used for their responses. The researcher opted to use different questionnaires for the ECD teachers and learners because it was the most appropriate method to obtain answers to the real experiences felt by the participants.

In the present study, interviews were also held with a principal (in-depth face-to-face interview), deputy principal (in-depth face-to-face interview), head of department (in-depth face-to-face interview), and ECD Teachers (in-depth face-to-face interview).

3.3.5 Quantitative Research Methodology

The quantitative approach was used to “answer questions about relationships among measured variables, to explain, forecasting, and monitoring phenomena (Leedy & Ormrod, 2013:94)”.

Quantitative data was obtained through questionnaires to establish the circumstances

and, in some cases, participants' views about Grade R performance, teachers, and SMTs. A questionnaire is described as a set of carefully designed questions presented to a group of people to collect data about the researcher's topic of interest (Jupp, 2006:252; Hesse-Biber, 2010:102).

Creswell, Plano, Clark, Gutmann, and Hanson (2003) classified mixed methods design into two major types: sequential and concurrent. Sequential design includes the elements of both longitudinal and cross-sectional research design. However, in the current study, the concurrent nested design was used.

3.3.6 Mixed method research types

The term 'concurrent' implies that qualitative and quantitative data were collected simultaneously (McAuley et al., 2006). In concurrent nested studies, such as in this specific study, one of the methods (qualitative or quantitative) dominates, while the other is embedded or nested in it. The purpose of nested questions is to focus on a question different from the dominant one, which is to seek information from different levels (Creswell, 2003:211).

3.3.7 Population

Polit & Hungler (1999:37) define a population as a group of elements or cases, whether individuals or objects, which conform to specific criteria and from which the researcher intends to generate the research results. Collectively, the group of participants from whom data are collected is referred to as the sample.

The target population in the case of this study were the principal, deputy principal, head of the department, grade R teachers, and grade R learners in the school.

3.3.7.1 Gender issues in ECD schools

A study by Taylor and Spaull (2015: 1-19) found several disturbing factors, including the fact that a child's gender will impact the child's access to learning, including access to numeracy and literacy. For example, in their study, Taylor and Spaull (2015: 1-19) showed that in "relatively poor East African countries (Mozambique, Malawi, Uganda, Zambia), girls typically have lower access to learning than boys." Fortunately, South Africa has made great progress towards improving gender equality in education, as indicated in the 2015 Millennium Development Goals (MDG) report, where gender

parity has been reached in education. Therefore, gender issues were not regarded as important for this study.

3.3.8 Sampling

Maree (2010:172) alerts us to the fact that it is usually impossible to include an entire population in a study since there are two main restrictions, namely time and cost. Consequently, a researcher must use sampling in most surveys, especially where the population studied is large. Tavakoli (2012:561) defines a "sample as the number of participants who are selected from the population and from whom data are collected."

Two sampling procedures were used in the present study: purposive and simple random sampling. Purposive sampling was decided to select participants who could contribute to qualitative data because they had the relevant knowledge (Ross, 2005:7; Ogula, 2005:106). Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007:114) suggest that when using purposive sampling, researchers should handpick the cases to be included in the sample based on their judgement of their typicality or possession of the characteristics being sought.

Simple random sampling was used to collect the quantitative data. Simple random sampling is a method of selecting a sample from the population so that the researcher can select every person (Leedy & Ormrod, 2013:201). The sampling methods and aligned data types for the present study are summarized in table A below.

Participants	**Sampling method**	**Data type**
Children	Random	Quantitative
Teachers	Purposive	Qualitative and Quantitative
Head of Department	Purposive	Qualitative and Quantitative
Deputy Principal	Purposive	Qualitative and Quantitative
Principals	Purposive	Qualitative and Quantitative

Table A. Alignment of sampling methods and data types.

The sample for the present study consisted of 1 principal, 1 deputy principal, 1 head of department, and 2 grade R teachers, who participated in the interviews and completed questionnaires (Annexure E, F and G). Annexure G was used to collect the

biographical information of twenty learners aged between 4 and 5 years who were given a questionnaire to complete with the assistance of their parents, as the learners were still minors. The school only had two Grade R classes. Grade R teachers used the same staff room, and each one of them had their own space or classroom; they were sharing a staff room.

3.3.9 Setting

This study collected data at a well-known primary school in Mashishimale village in Namakgale Circuit, situated in the Mopani District in Limpopo Province of South Africa. The location was easily accessible to the researcher, and the class was in Grade R. Only the researcher and the participants were present during data collection, making ensuring confidentiality easier. Data was collected during the day and during break time to avoid disturbing the school activities.

3.3.10 Data Collection Procedures

Ethical practices were ensured by obtaining permission from the University of Mpumalanga before approaching the Limpopo Education Department for permission to conduct the study. This was followed by gaining permission from the school principal, teachers, and parents and assent from the learners. Letters of consent explained in detail the purpose of the research and the role of the researcher and participants during the investigation. Grade R teachers were briefed about the need to use a dictaphone and allowed to accept or refuse. The interviews were held on the school premises during breaks and after school in the classroom used for teaching. The researcher handed out the questionnaires to the children to present to their parents, teachers and SMT participants. To ensure that data collection was strictly confidential, the researcher always adopted a positive stance to maintain a good relationship.
The researcher used two of the most common research methods (Ary et al., 2006:474): questionnaires and interviews.

3.4 RESEARCH DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENTS

Data collection is one of the most important aspects of research since it provides the information that enables the researcher to understand the phenomenon being studied. The choice of data collection strategies is vital in the research process since making unsuitable choices can result in skewed analyses and faulty interpretations by the researcher. Pandey and Pandey (2015:57) describe data-collecting tools or techniques as devices that guide the researcher in collecting data and aid in evaluation. However, Pandey (ibid) also warns that data collection tools vary in complexity, interpretation, design, and administration, which can impact the validity of a study.

For this study, the data-collection tools used were interviews, questionnaires, , the taking of field notes, and recordings. A pilot study was carried out to evaluate the interview questions, which proved valuable in assisting the researcher in modifying questions that did not yield anticipated responses. The data sought in the altered question concerned the teachers' qualifications and the impact of qualifications on the way teachers were teaching the learners or delivering services.

3.4.1 Interview

An interview is a goal-directed attempt by an interviewer to obtain reliable, valid measures in the form of verbal responses from one or more interviewees (Van den Aardweg & Van den Aardweg, 1998:120). In the present study, 2 Grade R teachers, 1 Head of Department, and 1 Principal were interviewed, whilst questionnaires were administered to 20 learners.

The interviews were used to obtain data for answering the following research questions and sub-questions:

- Name the challenges and possible solutions for underperforming Grade R learners in Namakgale district in Limpopo Province.

Sub-questions

- What can be considered as the main causes for Grade R learners underperforming?

- How are Grade R teachers currently assisting these underperforming learners in Grade R?
- What other strategies could be used to support underperforming Grade R learners in Namakgale Circuit?

  Participants were interviewed face-to-face and, where not possible, by telephone.

3.4.2 Questionnaires (Annexture F)

Questionnaires are sets of structured questions that enable participants to answer questions according to their experience and opinion. Van den Aardweg & Van den Aardweg (1998:190) refer to questionnaires as data-collection instruments that require participants to provide their own answers to a set of questions. In the present study, the researcher designed a structured questionnaire administered to randomly selected learners in Grade R (through their parents), teachers, and the SMT. The questionnaire was designed to gather information about attitudes, knowledge of ECD education, and biographical data. The teachers were also given a questionnaire to complete.

3.5 TRIANGULATION OF DATA

Creswell (2009:4) sees triangulation as an approach to inquiry that combines quantitative and qualitative forms. The researcher based this research on the assumption that "collecting diverse data best provides an understanding of the research problem."

"This approach is useful when neither the qualitative nor quantitative approach by itself is adequate for best understanding the research problem, or if the strength of both qualitative and quantitative research can provide the best understanding (Creswell, 2009:16)." In the present study triangulation was achieved by conducting interviews, administering questionnaires, and analyzing the performance of learners in Grade R. The principal and teachers were interviewed. Learners answered questionnaires to ensure that the data was collected from interviews and questionnaires.

3.6 PILOT STUDY

A pilot study is a smaller version of the proposed study, and it is conducted to refine the methodology, help to identify possible problems in the proposed study and allow the researcher to revise the method and instrument before the actual study is conducted (De Vos, Strydom, Fouche & Deport, 2005:54).

McMillan and Schumacher (2010:195) argue that a pilot study helps the researcher iron out some procedural challenges before attempting the real study. In other words, the pilot study assists in reducing the number of unforeseen challenges due to the researcher having the opportunity to redesign and revise parts of the research instruments to avoid difficulties revealed by the miniature study. In support of McMillan and Schumacher's notions, Creswell (2006:9) notes that the pilot study allows the researcher to discover ideas, approaches, and clues that he or she may not have foreseen before conducting the pilot study. Such ideas and clues increase the chances of getting findings aligned with the objectives of the main study (Creswell, 2006:10). Pilot studies, in addition, also permit a systematic check of logical procedures, giving the researcher a chance to evaluate the usefulness of the data. This enables the researcher "to make alterations in the data collection process so that the data in the main study can be analyzed more efficiently (Spratt et al., 2004:12)."

The researcher carried out the interviews in the pilot study, and respondents were allowed to comment on the research instruments. Before presenting the interview items in the main study, these comments were considered when making modifications. The instruments were finalized and produced. Examples of changed interview questions that were not well-understood were the following for the principal: "To what extent are the feeding scheme programmes helpful to the children?". After the pilot, it was changed to "To what extent does the provincial province help the school in feeding scheme programmes?" For the head of the department, it was the following: "To what extent does your ECD teacher show professionalism when dealing with your ECD children?" This question was changed to the following: "What is your ECD teacher's qualification?" and a follow-up question was added: "What is the impact of your ECD teacher's qualification on service delivery?

3.7 TRUSTWORTHINESS

The term validity refers to the accuracy of the research findings. Guba in Rule and John (2011:107) “offered the concept of trustworthiness as an alternative to reliability and validity”. Guba further indicates that the “trustworthiness of qualitative studies is achieved by giving attention to the study’s transferability, credibility, dependability and confirmability” (Rule & John, 2011:107). In the current study, trustworthiness was assured through credibility, which evaluates whether the research findings represent a “credible, transferable, dependable, and confirmable” conceptual interpretation of the data drawn from the participants’ original data (Attride-Stirling, 2001:10).

3.7.1 Credibility

To address credibility, the researcher employed two research instruments for triangulation purposes, thus complementing one instrument's weaknesses with another. Member checking was also done to ensure the trustworthiness of the study (Denzin & Lincoln. 2005:80). This was done as soon as all the recorded data had been transcribed and analyzed but before it was in its final form to allow for corrections. During member checking, each of the research participants reviewed a summary of the results of the inquiry. Credibility in qualitative research is defined as the extent to which the data and data analysis are believable and trusted. Credibility is analogous to internal validity; that is how research findings match reality. However, according to the philosophy underlying qualitative research, the reality is relative to the meaning that people construct within social contexts (Shenton, 2004:71).

In the present study, the researcher also piloted the interview schedule to ensure alignment between the questions, objectives, and responses.

To ensure honesty in participants, and before conducting the interviews in the main study, the researcher explained to participants that their participation must be voluntary and that they are free to quit at any time during the interview without prejudice. The researcher pledged to respect confidentiality and anonymity and ensured participants that there were no wrong or right responses to questions.

3.7.2 Transferability

Transferability is the step in “which the findings of this inquiry can apply or transfer beyond the bounds of the study” (Anderson, 2004:310). According to Holloway and Wheeler (2002:255), transferability is the notion that the research project can be appropriate to related studies. The information gained in the context of this study will be relevant in other contexts and for other researchers who assume research entails utilizing concepts that other researchers originally developed. Transferability is like generalizability.

3.7.3 Conformability

Polit et al. (2001:315) contend that “confirmability is the neutrality or objectivity of data.” The issue of confirmability aims to ensure that the characteristics of data are dependable. This implies that research discoveries result from the research, not the researcher’s expectations and preconceptions. Holloway and Wheeler (2002:225) argue that the inquiry audit can be used to trace the data to their sources. Conformability is a measure of how well the inquiry’s findings are supported by the data collected (Anderson, 2007: 2).

3.7.4 Dependability

Polit et al. (2001:315) indicate that dependability is data stability over time and conditions. Dependability can be likened to reliability in quantitative studies. Lincoln and Guba (1985:161) indicated that “the dependable study should be accurate and consistent.” According to Merriam (1998:205), dependability refers to the extent to which research findings can be replicated with similar subjects in a similar context.

3.8 VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY OF THE STUDY

Validity is sometimes referred to as the accuracy or truthfulness of the data, whilst reliability is aligned to consistency. Polit et al. (2001:32) believe the validity and reliability of a study are maintainable in research despite qualitative researchers using various procedures to do so. Using various procedures to collect data produces stronger results than single procedures and is a requirement for quantitative research validity (Patton, 2002:140 & Christians, 2005: 148. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2005:10), validity is addressed through “honesty, depth, participants' approach, the extent of triangulation, and the objectivity of the researcher.” In the current study,

validity was assured by focusing on credibility.

McMillan and Schumacher (2010:90) argue that validity refers to the extent to which inferences made based on numerical scores are appropriate, meaningful, and useful to the sample. It also checks whether the instruments provide an adequate sample of items representing that concept (De Vos et al., 2005:160).

In addition, validity also refers to "the extent to which the research instrument measures what it is intended to measure" (Leedy & Ormrod, 2013:28). Bernard (2011:41) asserts that "validity refers to the accuracy and trustworthiness in terms of the instrument used for research, the data itself, as well as the findings." For instance, the instruments used for collecting data must be appropriate for gathering data for learners who can answer the research questions and measure a particular concept. The questions asked should, therefore, address the objectives of the study. The current study's questions were structured and organized to minimize misunderstanding and eliminate ambiguity. In addition, both construct and content validity were used to check the measurement emanating from questionnaires and interview questions.

Lawshe (1975:563) maintains that content validity concerns how well a specific research instrument measures what it aims to measure. The present researcher achieved this by ensuring the questions were the same for all participants.

3.8.1 Validity of the Study

According to McMillan & Schumacher (2010:90), validity refers to the extent to which inferences made based on numerical scores are appropriate, meaningful, and useful to the sample. Validity also checks whether the instruments provide an adequate sample of items representing that concept (De Vos et al., 2005:160).

Validity also refers to the extent to which the research instrument measures what it is intended to measure (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010:28). Bernard (2011:41) asserts that validity refers to the accuracy and trustworthiness in terms of the instrument used for research, the data itself, as well as the findings, for instance, the instruments used for collecting data, must be appropriate for gathering data for learners that were able to answer the research questions and measure a particular concept. The questions asked should, therefore, address the objectives of the study. The current study questions were structured and organized to minimize misunderstanding and eliminate ambiguity.

Furthermore, both construct and content validity were used to check the measurement emanating from questionnaires and interview questions.

3.8.1.1 The difference between construct and content validity

Sjoberg & Bergerson (2022:25) argue that construct validity is the appropriateness of inferences made because of observation or measurement (often test scores), specifically, whether a test can reasonably be considered to reflect the intended construct.

According to Lawshe (1975:563), content validity concerns how well a specific research instrument measures what it aims to measure. The present researcher achieved this by ensuring that every participant was asked the same questions.

3.8.2 Reliability of the Study

De Vos (2005:160), as well as Creswell (2010:91), define the reliability of a measurement procedure as the ability or consistency of the measurement, and this means that if the same variable is measured under the same conditions, a reliable measurement procedure will produce identical measurements. In other words, it refers to a measuring instrument's ability to yield consistent numerical results each time it is applied.

To ensure the reliability of the data collected in this study, the content of the questionnaires and interviews underwent verification from an independent body (a colleague) who is knowledgeable about ECD education to ascertain the degree to which the contents of the interview were in harmony with the intended purpose.

3.9 RESEARCH ETHICS

Research cannot simply be conducted by anyone and anywhere. According to the Helsinki Declaration of 1972, it is imperative to obtain clearance from an ethics committee when human (or animal) subjects are involved in any kind of research of an empirical nature.

Strydom (2002:63) adds that "[a]nyone involved in research needs to be aware of the general agreement about what is proper and improper in scientific research". It is essential that throughout the research process, the researcher follows and abides by

ethical guidelines. Burns (2000:45) adds that both the researcher and participant must clearly understand the confidentiality of the results and findings of the study.

In the present research, all participants' information and responses shared were kept private because the results were presented anonymously to protect the participants' identities. Where audio recordings were used, passwords were created.

Participants remained anonymous and were treated with respect. Each participant signed a consent form (adults) or assent form (children), which explained the study's purpose and their rights, such as withdrawal from participation, should they wish to do so, without being compelled to explain. The researcher complied with the ethical principles of the ethical committee of the University Post Graduate Research Committee of the University of Mpumalanga (see Annexure I)

3.10 DATA ANALYSIS

Data analysis in a research project involves summarizing the mass of data collected and presenting the results in a way that communicates the most key features. In qualitative research design, the researcher is also interested in the big picture (Hancock 2002:16). Data analysis is the process of reducing accumulated data to a manageable size, developing summaries, looking at patterns, and performing statistical analysis (Tavakoli, 2012:144). Two types of data were analyzed: namely, qualitative and quantitative data. Qualitative data was analyzed using the thematic analysis approach, and therefore, thematic coding was used. On the other hand, quantitative data was analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) Version 22.

3.11 CONCLUSION

This chapter described the methodology used in the study, the purpose of the study, the rationale for the methodology, the research site, the human subjects reviewed, the setting for the study, a brief description of the participants, the method for gathering and analyzing data and finally the trustworthiness and ethical considerations.

In the next chapter, the results of this study, from the use of systematic data collection and analysis, are discussed. Chapter 4 includes more detailed information about the

participants and the common categories and themes that were identified through data analysis. These themes and categories answer the research questions that guided the study while presenting an analysis of the collected data.

CHAPTER 4

DATA ANALYSIS AND PRESENTATION

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This mixed-method study sought to investigate the challenges and possible solutions for underperforming Grade R learners in Limpopo. The research methodology was reviewed in chapter three. The current chapter outlines the data analysis and interpretation. Qualitative data was collected from the Grade R teachers, the head of the department, the deputy principal, and the principal. On the other hand, quantitative data was collected from 20 Grade R learners, 2 teachers and SMT who responded to the questionnaires (annexures E, F and G). Section 3.3.8 outlines the way questionnaires were administered. This study aimed to explore the challenges and possible solutions for underperforming Grade R learners of a primary school. The findings are presented verbatim in this chapter.

The chapter starts with the biographical information of learner participants (quantitative data). This will be followed by the qualitative data for the research questions,

- Name the challenges and possible solutions for underperforming Grade R learners in Namakgale district in Limpopo Province.
- What can be considered as the main courses for Grade R learners underperforming?
- How are Grade R teachers currently assisting these underperforming learners in Grade R?
- Are there any other possible strategies that could be used to support underperforming Grade R learners in Namakgale Circuit?

4.2 ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF QUANTITATIVE DATA.

The learners' questionnaires were utilized to obtain the biographical details of each child. The questionnaires were administered by their parents (each parent was present, as the learners were minors) in their classroom, as there was only one class for Grade R in the school where the study was conducted. Each parent was responsible for his or her own child. The 20 learners were selected according to their age group of 4-5 years. Section 3.3.8 outlines how the learners were selected.

4.2.1 Biographical Information.

The biographical profiles of learners, which include gender, age, and home language, are presented in this section. Table 4.1 presents the gender composition of the learners.

4.2.1.1 The gender of the respondents

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	8	40
Female	12	60
Total	20	100

Table 4.1: Gender

The above Table 4.1 shows that 60% (12) of Grade R learners were female, while 40% (8) were male. The data of the questionnaire completed by the parents is summarized in Table 4.4.

4.2.1.2 The age group of the respondents

According to the South African Department of Education (Department of Basic Education [DBE], 2011:17), the recommended age for learners in Grade R is at least four years old and turning five by the 30$^{th\ of}$ June. Table 4.2 provides a summary of the age groups for participant selection.

Age Group	Frequency	Percentage
3	2	10
4	6	30
5	12	60
Total	20	100

Table 4.2: Age Group

As presented above in Table 4.2, 60% (12) of these learners are aged 6 years; 30% (6) learners are aged 4, while 10% (2) are aged 3. This can be regarded as problematic because -as the literature indicates- Grade R must maintain its own "unique characteristics, based on how children in this age group (4-5 years) learn" and should not be a "watered down Grade 1 class" (Department of Basic Education [DBE], 2011:17). This means that 60% are of the correct age, 10% are below the recommended age and 30% either meet the requirements or are below the required age. Another set of literature deals with the development of motor skills. Children in the age group 3 - 5 years have greater gross motor skills; for example, they can walk, kick, and throw and have improved fine motor skills, but they still need help from their teachers.

4.2.1.3 The home language of the respondents

UNESCO highlighted the importance of the native language in the child's early education as far back as 1953. For South Africa, which has a situation where non-EHL speakers teach English Home Language (EHL) to learners who are not EHL speakers from as early as the foundation phase, quality learning cannot occur. Language is a major issue that must be investigated, particularly considering the overwhelming body of research demonstrating the value of teaching young students in their native tongues. As Table 4.4 shows, parents prefer to have their children taught in their home language, as these skills are transferable to a new language that will be taught in the next grades and strengthen the children's understanding of language use.

Language	Frequency	Percentage
Sepedi	13	65
Xitsonga	7	35
Total	20	100

Table 4.3 presents a summary of the home language situation at the school.

Table 4.3 shows that most learners who speak Sepedi constitute 65% (13) of the total respondents. There were also 35% (7) of learners who reported being Xitsonga speakers. The school is situated in an area where the dominant language is Sepedi. Learners are taught in Sepedi because the school is Sepedi-oriented. Although there are Xitsonga schools nearby, Vatsonga parents prefer to send their children to the closest school despite the language of teaching and learning. The researcher interacted with those parents regarding the fact that their children cannot read fluently, even in their home language, Sepedi. During the researcher's session with those parents (Grade R learners' parents), they all suggested that they prefer English for their children's education, meaning when they go to Grade 1. This shows that teaching in Sepedi makes parents unhappy, as they want their children to start learning English as early as Grade R.

Table 4.4 below illustrates the biographical data of the parent participants and the ages of the Grade R children. Each participant was allocated a pseudonym for reporting purposes and to ensure anonymity. The order is based on the participant who answered the questionnaire first and then progressed to the last.

Break times refer to when the learners are going to eat or during breakfast and lunch—the break time helped the participants to pave the way for resting. Learners cannot always be seated in the classroom for the entire day. As we all know, some teachers are not friendly to the learners. Therefore, a question on friendliness was included.

Crèche attendance helped the researcher observe that if a child attends crèche, they will understand many educational facets faster than someone who did not attend a crèche. This will curb the issue of underperformance. Most learners who have not attended a crèche do not perform satisfactorily in their classes. The table below summarizes the parent's and children's biographical responses.4

Participant	Parent Age	Parent Gender	Home Language	Child Age	Friendliness of Teachers	Crèche Attendance	Break Times	English/Mother Tongue
P1	30	Female	Sepedi	3	Yes	No	3	Sepedi
P2	28	Female	Sepedi	4	Yes	Yes	4	Sepedi
P3	36	Female	Sepedi	3	Yes	No	4	Sepedi
P4	31	Female	Sepedi	5	Yes	Yes	3	Sepedi
P5	32	Female	Sepedi	5	Yes	Yes	3	Sepedi
P6	35	Male	Xitsonga	5	Yes	Yes	3	Sepedi
P7	27	Male	Sepedi	5	Yes	Yes	3	Sepedi
P8	25	Female	Xitsonga	4	Yes	Yes	3	Sepedi
P9	24	Female	Xitsonga	4	Yes	Yes	3	Sepedi
P10	37	Female	Sepedi	4	Yes	Yes	3	Sepedi
P11	40	Male	Xitsonga	5	Yes	Yes	3	Sepedi
P12	24	Male	Xitsonga	5	Yes	Yes	3	Sepedi
P13	38	Female	Xitsonga	5	Yes	Yes	4	Sepedi
P14	29	Male	Xitsonga	4	Yes	Yes	4	Sepedi
P15	33	Female	Sepedi	5	Yes	Yes	3	Sepedi
P16	24	Female	Sepedi	5	Yes	Yes	3	Sepedi
P17	37	Female	Sepedi	4	Yes	Yes	3	Sepedi
P18	38	Male	Sepedi	5	Yes	Yes	3	Sepedi
P19	35	Female	Sepedi	5	Yes	Yes	3	Sepedi

P20	39	Female	Sepedi	5	Yes	Yes	3	Sepedi

Table 4.4 summary of Biographical data of the parents

The participants for the interviews were practitioners (teachers) for Grade R classes in the selected ECD school. The school was chosen to provide insight regarding the school's curriculum content.

Table 4.5 below illustrates the biographical data of the teacher-participants, their teaching qualifications, and the number of years they had been teaching Grade R. Each teacher-participant was allocated a pseudonym for confidentiality purposes. The researcher needed to determine teachers' qualifications so that all stakeholders knew that well-trained teachers teach their children. Knowing the qualifications, they can trust the teachers, as parents do not trust teachers younger than 25 years, as they are considered too young by the community to look after Grade R learners. Experience also counts significantly for the teachers, as they can handle different learners in the classroom. Interestingly, both teachers were qualified FET teachers albeit with reasonable experience in Grade R teaching.

Participant	**Gender**	**Age**	**Qualification(s)**	**Number of years of teaching experience in Grade R**
Teacher 1	Female	35	Secondary Teachers Diploma, B.Ed. Further Education and Training Phase, UNISA	13
Teacher 2	Female	29	Teachers Diploma, B.Ed. Further Education and Training Phase, UNISA	7

Table 4.5: Biographical data of the teacher-participants

The School Management Team (Head of Department, Deputy Principal and Principal) were given the same questionnaires to complete as other participants.

Table 4.6 below presents the gender distribution of the school management team that completed the questionnaire. Of the three members, 2 (67%) were male and 1 (33%) were female.

Gender	**Frequency**	**Percentage**
Male	2	67
Female	1	33
Total	3	100

Table 4.6: Gender distribution for School Management Team (HOD, DP, P)

Table 4.7 below presents the age distribution of the school management team who completed the questionnaire.

Age range	**Frequency**	**Percentage**
41-49	1	33
50-59	2	67
Total	3	100

Table 4.7: Age distribution for School Management Team (HOD, DP, P)

It shows that 33% are in the 41-49 age range, while 67% are in the 50-59 age range. This age distribution shows that the management team can be experienced as they neared retirement age.

Table 4.8 below indicates the qualifications that the school management team members hold.

Qualification	**HOD**	**DP**	**P**
Three years teacher diploma FP or SP or FET	✓	✓	✓

Four-year teachers diploma FP, SP or FET	✓	✓	✓
B. Ed			✓
B. A			✓
B.Ed. Honours			✓
Post			✓

Table 4.8: Qualifications for School Management Team (HOD, DP, P)

Qualification	**Frequency**	**Percentage**
Teachers Diploma, bachelor's degree, Others	3	100
B.Ed., B. Ed Honors, BA Honors	3	100
Master's Degree	1	33.3
Total	3	100

Table 4.9: Teaching Experience for School Management Team (HOD, DP, P)M

The table 4.10 below shows that all participants (100 %) hold Teacher's Diplomas plus a bachelor's degree or other qualification, which may be a Further Diploma in Education. All (100 %) hold either a Bachelor of Education degree or a Bachelor of Education Honors degree or a Bachelor of Arts Honors degree, in addition to the teachers' diploma, while 33.3% hold, in addition to the above qualifications, a master's degree in education. From these details, the school management team are suitably qualified to be successful managers. Table 4.10 below shows that 33 % of the school management team have more than 6 years of teaching experience, while 67 % have more than 16 years' of teaching experience. Based on this information, it can be inferred that the management team has adequate experience in the field of teaching. Nevertheless, teaching experience does not necessarily equate to good management skills.

Experience	Frequency	Percentage
6-15	1	33
16 years and more	2	67
Total	3	100

Gender	**Frequency**	**Percentage**
Female	2	100

Male	0	0
Total	2	100

Table 4.10: Gender distribution for Grade R Teachers

Table 4.10 presents the gender distribution of Grade R teachers. It shows that all (100% of) the teachers are female.

This gender distribution is aligned with the traditional thought that the foundation phase teachers should be female, as both teachers happen to be female. Gender prejudice and stereotyping loom large when it comes to reasons for the small number of men in childhood education settings, including that teaching young children is “a woman’s job” (Drury 2008:314). In addition, primary school teaching is perceived as an “unattractive” profession for men – “boring, hassle causing, stressful or requiring too much patience” (Drury 2008:314).

Petersen (2014:11) indicates that despite advances in education systems in many parts of the world, FP education appears to be devilled by stereotyped and traditional gender roles, including the perception that education at this level is still a women’s work. Males must start getting involved in FP, and the practice of saying FP teaching is for women must be discontinued. This view is discussed in Petersen’s (2014) article, titled. The ‘good', the ‘bad' and the ‘ugly'? Views on male teachers in foundation phase education (South African Journal of Education, 34(1), 1-13).

Table 4.11 below table presents the age distribution of Grade R teachers.

Age	Frequency	Percentage
20-30	1	50
30-40	1	50
Total	2	100

Table 4.11: Age distribution for Grade R Teachers

One teacher is in her twenties, while the second is in her thirties. This means they would have qualified recently enough to be up to date with the latest teaching styles and techniques. Unfortunately, only one teacher is qualified in FET and, despite being young and presumably energetic, might not have the didactic skills required of a Grade R teacher, which differs considerably from the skills of an FET teacher.

Table 4.12 below shows the learner's parent's age grouping.

Age	Frequency	Percentage
20-29	7	35
30-39	12	60
40-49	1	5
Total	20	100

Table 4.12 Parents' Age Grouping

This table shows that among the 20 parents who completed the questionnaires on behalf of their children, 7 (35%) are in the age range 20-29, 12 (60%) are in the 30-39 range, and only 1 (5%) is in the 40-49 range.

4.3 QUALITATIVE DATA PRESENTATION ON INTERVIEWS

Qualitative data was centred around the main research question: What are the challenges and possible solutions for underachievement among Grade R learners in Namakgale district in Limpopo Province?

The main questions for interviews of all the participants, except the learners, were based on the research question and sub-questions and were the following:

1. What do you understand by 'challenges in Grade R?'
2. Which factors affect the challenges in Grade R?
3. How can you be supported to overcome these challenges in Grade R?
4. What strategies are followed to ensure that Grade R teachers are helping learners with their challenges?
5. What is your ECD teacher's qualification? (Principal)
6. What is the impact of your ECD teacher's qualification on service delivery?
7. Is there anything that was not asked that you would like the researcher to know?

The following codes were provided to study participants to ensure anonymity.

T1- ECD Teacher 1

T2- ECD Teacher 2

HoD- Head of Department

DP- Deputy Principal

P- Principal

The following section provides the data organized around the research questions gathered from the participants.

4.4 QUESTION 1: WHAT DO YOU UNDERSTAND BY THE UNDERPERFORMANCE CHALLENGES IN GRADE R?

T1: I understand that challenges in Grade R materials are major things or factors that affect the teaching and learning of young children in the classroom and outside the classroom, e.g., unconducive classrooms for Grade R, lack of outdoor materials, lack of toilets, lack of security, resource materials, numeracy and reading, lack of monitoring and support. Many Grade R learners are still developing their language skills, particularly in terms of vocabulary and sentence structure. As a teacher, I need to use different strategies to support this language development, and I must ensure effective communication with my learners.

Teacher 1 mentioned the most challenges, including unconducive classrooms, lack of outdoor materials, lack of toilets, lack of security, resource materials, and lack of monitoring and support. The Findings from the literature indicate that the physical environment is important for conducive learning, and lack of resources is one of the factors highlighted in the policy (DBE 2001).

T2: In my opinion, the challenges in Grade R, or the pre-primary stage of education, vary, depending on the specific context and region. However, some common challenges that students may face include parental involvement, as there is a weak partnership with parents or guardians. However, challenges may arise in engaging parents who may have limited time, resources, or understanding of their role in their child's education.

Teacher 2 stressed that challenges occur when the parents are not involved in their children's learning - she again mentioned the issue of strong relationships between parents/guardians and the children.

The literature findings indicate that the parent's primary role is that of a teacher (Okagaki, 2010:13). According to NCSNET and NCES (1997), parental involvement and family support are essential in the learner's education. Landsberg (2005:84) indicates that when parents and teachers work together in early childhood settings, the impact on the child's development and learning multiplies.

HoD: In my opinion, the challenges are when the learners are not doing well, and I can say that these learners are not doing well in numeracy, counting, and reading.

The head of the department indicated that numeracy, counting, and reading are the most important aspects that she can describe as challenges in Grade R.

The literature shows that early childhood and toddlerhood is the developmental stage when children develop at their fastest rate, and it is also when early

literacy and numeracy skills create a foundation for future reading and mathematical skill development (Gerber et al., 2010:261).

DP: In my opinion, the challenges in Grade R are that some learners are not emotionally and intellectually ready to be in that grade because they haven't been involved in the nursery school level, e.g., pre-school, Grade RR, etc.

The deputy principal indicated that most learners in Grade R have not attended all the support phases to improve development, e.g., Grade RR and preschool. They have just started Grade R.

The literature indicates that the foundation phase is part of early childhood development and must be attended by children from birth to nine years (DoE,1995:33). Therefore, lack of participation in earlier education opportunities might have a negative effect.

P: In my opinion, as the principal, the challenge in Grade R is the issue of teachers' qualifications. Teachers do not have the relevant qualifications to teach Grade R. The teachers I have are qualified in Further Education and Training. Therefore, without qualified teachers, I will continue to have poor Grade R results.

The principal indicated that the main challenge in Grade R is his ECD teachers' qualifications.

The literature states that Grade R teachers should not only depend on the training offered by DoE, but they should also develop their knowledge through studying and reading books relevant to their teaching field. In addition, teachers with Grade R teaching skills can differentiate and interpret the curriculum correctly (Van Rensburg, 2015:119. Cook, Klein, and Chen (2011:380) indicated that teachers in Grade R must be well-trained.

Participants' challenges	**T1**	**T2**	**HOD**	**DP**	**P**
Ineffective physical classroom space	✓				

Lack of outdoor materials	✓				
Lack of toilets	✓				
Lack of security	✓				
Lack of resource materials	✓				
Numeracy and literacy	✓		✓		
Monitoring	✓				
Support	✓				
Language ability	✓				
Parental involvement		✓			
Parental understanding		✓			
Parental resources		✓			
Emotional development				✓	
Intellectual development				✓	
Not attending ECD				✓	
Teachers' qualifications					✓

Table 4.13: Summary of data for Question 1

4.5 QUESTION 2: WHICH FACTORS AFFECT LEARNERS' UNDERPERFORMANCE IN GRADE R?

T1: In my opinion, there are a lot of factors that affect the Grade R learners; some of those factors are learning factors (referring to facilities and time), physical factors, mental factors, emotional and social factors, lastly is classroom environment factors—lastly lack of physical activities and interaction with children of the same age.

Both teachers indicated the issue of the classroom environment in their statements and other factors that can be linked to the classroom environmental factor, such as learning materials.

The literature stresses that regardless of culture, beliefs, and customs, children enjoy learning in a classroom that gives them ample opportunities to play, feel happy, and be secure. When children feel comfortable and secure in their classroom environment, they tend to explore materials that help them generate new ideas that deepen their understanding of their surroundings (Olds, 2001:47).

T2: According to me, there are a lot of factors that affect this Grade R learners, I'm going to mention few of them, which are: Socio-economic status of the parents, teacher training, parental involvement, and classroom environment. Those are the few that I can mention. As I have mentioned with classroom environment, physical environment within the classroom, such as noise levels, lack of appropriate learning materials, can impact learners' attention span, engagement, and overall learning experience.

Teacher 2 indicated that the socio-economic situation is the main factor that affects Grade R learners' performance.

The literature indicates that socioeconomic background includes aspects such as severe poverty, which directly hamper the progress of Grade R learners (Nel, Nel & Hugo, 2013:15).

HoD: Another factor is that the teachers are not following the pacesetter (teaching schedule or year planner or not planning at all)

The Head of Department indicated that teachers do not plan before class. They go there unprepared.

The literature indicates that planning for Grade R learners' activities should aim to develop learners' cognitive, emotional, and social abilities and prepare them for formal schooling (Soma,2012:28). It further indicates that – when planning learners' activities- teachers need to adhere to the timetable that indicates the daily activities. Furthermore, teachers need to ensure that they orient themselves to the content of a daily schedule to ensure that all activities are completed (DBE, 2011b:20; ECDBE, 2012:5; Mahan, 2015:26).

DP: In this school, another factor is the lack of teaching resources, which forms part of the challenges in Grade R. Some of these learners cannot read or spell some of the work.

The deputy principal indicated that there are no teaching resources for the teachers, so they always struggle when they face Grade R learners.

Literature findings by Lingam and Lingam (2013:1) indicate that teacher planning alone cannot enhance teaching and learning unless LTSM is provided. In addition, Krishnaratne et al. (2013:39) highlighted the provision of learning materials, such as children's books, posters, flip charts, and chalkboards, as well as support for teachers in planning lessons and encouraging learners to learn. Therefore, the absence of suitable learning materials negatively impacts the children's development.

P: In my opinion, some learners are passive and always fail to pay attention to their teachers. Absenteeism is another factor. They do not come to school due to lack of food, transportation, rain, and just not being interested in coming to school.

The principal cited the issue of learner absenteeism as a factor contributing to Grade R learners' underperformance.

The literature indicates that learner absenteeism as a habitual pattern of absence from obligation or school can be viewed as an indicator of poor academic achievement, which is rooted in the socioeconomic circumstances of the learner (Malcolm et al., 2003:44). Table 4.17 provides a summary of factors mentioned by the participants regarding question 2.

Factors providing challenges	**T1**	**T2**	**HOD**	**DP**	**P**
Learning factor	✓				
Physical factor	✓	✓			
Mental factor	✓				
Emotional factor	✓				
Social factor	✓				
Classroom environment	✓	✓			
Socio-economic status		✓			
Teachers' training		✓			
Parental involvement		✓			
Appropriate learning materials		✓			

Teachers not planning			✓		
Absenteeism					✓
Teaching resources				✓	

Table 4.14: Summary of data for Question 2

4.6 QUESTION 3: HOW CAN YOU BE SUPPORTED TO ERADICATE UNDERPERFORMANCE CHALLENGES?

T1: The way I can be supported is by involving parents and some stakeholders, such as social workers, health professionals. By simply doing that, I think that support would be massive. Parents may support me by means of reading to their children, talk with them about things in their environment, listening and responding to them as they learn to communicate.

Teacher 1 indicated that for her to be supported, the parents must be involved in their children's studies, with stakeholders such as health professionals.

The literature indicated that health professionals play a vital role in the SIAS process and the school when necessary. This requires the support of health professionals, such as psychologists, speech therapists, social workers, and occupational therapists (DoE,2008:16). Okagaki (2010:13) also indicated that the parent's primary role is that of a teacher. According to NCSNET and NLCSS (1997), parental involvement and family support are essential in the learner's education.

T2: Training will be appropriate for me, and this training must be in the way that I can be shown or how to teach Grade R learners and how to handle them in my classroom since I was trained to teach in Further Education. The training in pedagogical teaching strategies for Grade R learners.

Teacher 2 indicated that training would be essential to enhance her skills and help her become a better teacher.

The literature indicates that the training level of teachers is the key to attaining successful school, learning, and readiness for Grade R. Feeney et al. (2009:89) stressed that teachers with more educational knowledge will be able to interpret learners' actions from a developmental perspective. Teachers must be developed in the school by the Head of Department and ECD advisors (Serrao, 2009:6). Table 4.17 summarises responses to question 3.

Support needs	**T1**	**T2**	**HOD**	**DP**	**P**
Parents Involvement	✓				
Stakeholder Involvement	✓				
Training		✓			

Table 4.15 Question 3 response summary

4.7 QUESTION 4: WHICH STRATEGIES CAN BE USED TO ENSURE THAT GRADE R TEACHERS ARE HELPING LEARNERS WITH THEIR UNDERPERFORMANCE CHALLENGES?

HoD: I think the first strategy that can be followed to help teachers is co-operative learning strategies because this strategy will ensure that Grade R are performing the way we want as the learners will work cooperatively in their classrooms.

The head of the department indicated that the school could adopt two strategies: cooperative learning and multisensory teaching. The HoD stated that these strategies will positively impact the school.

The literature indicates that a cooperative learning strategy is a strategy where learners work together to achieve shared goals (Killen,2010:215). Again, the literature indicates that during the birth of OBE in the South African education system, the most effective teaching strategies for the Grade R learners were cooperative learning, fieldwork and inclusive teaching (Van Heerden, 2008:28).

Multisensory learning is one of the most effective learner engagement strategies. Therefore, teachers should be trained to understand how the mind works (Shams & Seitz, 2008: 411). Multisensory instruction, also known as VAKT (Visual-Auditory-Kinaesthetic-Tactile), is a way of teaching that engages more than one sense at a time. A teacher might help children by assisting them in learning information using touch, movement, sight, and hearing (Mercer & Mercer, 1993; Murphy,1977).

DP: I think that there are a lot of strategies that can help teachers to make sure that our Grade R learners are achieving. The strategy that I see that we are lacking behind is songs and rhyme teaching strategy. If we can have this strategy, our learners will sometimes have time whereby they will be singing and they will always think of attending classes.

The deputy principal indicated that he believes using songs and rhymes as a teaching strategy will positively affect learning, and learners would be motivated to attend school.

The literature indicates that song is an integral part of children's lives and quality learning (Young, 2003:48). From birth, music is an intuitive form of communication between mother and child (Miranda, 2004:59).

P: As a Principal, I will be happy if our teachers can use the project method teaching strategies as learners will be given some projects to do, and we will be the same as the learners from Montessori Nursery Schools as they are always having some projects to do.

The principal indicated that he prefers the Project Teaching Strategy, where learners are given some projects to do. He further mentioned some aspects of the Montessori Nursery schools, which are regarded as very successful. These schools use the project teaching strategy.

The literature indicates that education today focuses on providing learners with the necessary skills, enabling them to play an effective role when they begin their journey into the world of work (Rahman et al., 2012:110). Furthermore, the literature indicates that children actively use what they get to learn through exploration, interpretation, criticism, and creation (Miranda, 2004:47). Table 4.18 provides a summary of findings regarding SMT ideas about what constitutes successful learning.

Teaching Strategies	**T1**	**T2**	**HOD**	**DP**	**P**
Cooperative teaching strategies			✓		
Multisensory teaching strategies			✓		
Songs and rhyme teaching strategies				✓	
Project method teaching strategies					✓

Table 4.16: Summary of data for question 4

4.8 QUESTION 5: WHAT IS YOUR ECD TEACHERS' QUALIFICATION?

P: Our ECD teachers have not being trained in ECD teaching; they have been trained as teachers in Further Education and training.

The principal indicated that the ECD teachers at his school are not qualified to teach Grade R learners, but they have been trained in the Further Education and Training band.

The literature mentions that the most important requirement for an ECD teacher is to be knowledgeable and to prepare ECD learners for a more structured learning environment (UNICEF, 2000:6; Govindasamy,2010:24). The table below 4.17 shows the summary of question 5

Qualifications	T1	T2	HOD	DP	P
Further Education and Training	✓	✓			

Table 4.17: Summary of data for Question 5

4.9 QUESTION 6: WHAT IS THE IMPACT OF YOUR ECD TEACHERS' QUALIFICATION ON SERVICE DELIVERY?

P: To be honest with you, our teachers are performing poorly, and they need serious training for the Grade R teaching. Thus, why you see that we are performing badly, or we are underachieving.

The principal indicated that teachers are performing poorly due to a lack of training in ECD, which, in turn, negatively impacts service delivery.

The literature indicates that it is widely recognized that highly qualified teachers are an essential component of ECD programmes that improve the quality of outcomes for young children. Teacher attitudes also impact the quality-of-service delivery, in line with the Ecological Systems theory (Pence, 2004:7; Myers,2004:8; Ryan, Whitebook, Kipnis & Sakai, 2011:28). Table 4.18 below shows the summary for question 6.

Impact of the Teacher's Qualifications	T1	T2	HOD	DP	P
Further Education and Training	✓	✓			

Table 4.18: Summary of data for question 6

4.10 CONCLUDING REMARKS

The purpose of the research was to explore the challenges and possible solutions for underperforming Grade R learners in Limpopo. The data discussed in this chapter confirm that to support underachieving Grade R learners, all systems must work as a team to meet the children's needs and address their challenges. This is based on the data obtained during the interviews. In addition, challenges and possible solutions for underperforming Grade R learners must be prioritized at school, in the education district and at home. In addition, partnerships between the stakeholders and parents must be created to support underachieving Grade R learners to be prepared for Grade 1. Grade R teachers should also be well-prepared and passionate about improving their skills, knowledge, and attitudes to support underperforming learners. The teachers are frustrated because the parents, school, DoE, or District are not giving

them the support they need. The challenges and possible solutions for underperforming Grade R learners were also discussed in detail in this chapter. The results were consistent across all the sets of data collected. An important finding from the data is that underachieving Grade R learners have many challenges impacting their learning and development. These challenges made them underachieve and unprepared for the next level, Grade 1.

The study results also showed that Grade R learners, like all other learners, have many needs, challenges, and factors impacting their learning and development. Finally, the results confirm the relationship between the various systems, as set by Bronfenbrenner.

Chapter 5, the final chapter, concludes the research and makes recommendations.

CHAPTER 5

OVERVIEW, MAJOR FINDINGS, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This study aimed to explore the challenges and possible solutions for underperforming Grade R learners in Limpopo. Qualitative data was collected through interviews. The interview process was guided by the interview questions provided in Annexure E. Participants in this study were 20 Grade R learners, two Grade R teachers, a Head of Department, a Deputy Principal and a Principal.

It is important to reflect on what was discussed in the previous chapters. Chapter One introduced the entire study. In chapter two, a literature review was presented, which guided the study and provided information about global lECD challenges and solutions. Chapter Three discussed the methodology and research instruments (interviews and questionnaires) to collect data. Chapter Four presented the collected data and data analysis. The study covered the objectives presented in Chapter 1: To determine the factors responsible for the underperformance of Grade R learners.

- To determine what strategies Grade R teachers currently employ to assist underperforming learners.
- To explore the strategies to support underperforming learners.

This chapter presents the study summary and recommendations for future research on underachieving learners in Grade R. Discussions of the study findings are arranged according to the questions asked. The researcher first summarizes the key findings from the research questions, then the recommendations. The second part will make recommendations for future studies on Grade R underachievement. There will also be a discussion of the study's limitations and, finally, the conclusion of the research.

5.2 SUMMARY OF THE STUDY

The insights provided into the research questions by the study.

5.2.1 Research Question 1: Name the challenges and some possible solutions, for underperforming Grade R learners in the Namakgale district in Limpopo Province.

The findings from the interview show that Grade R learners have some challenges because the teachers do not have the relevant knowledge and skills to teach Grade R learners. Another challenge is that learners lack resource materials. This finding correlates with the literature. It was also found that there is a language problem among the learners; namely, the language of learning that the learners are not the learners' first language, but their second language. Therefore, the Education District is supposed to support the teachers and schools. However, the findings show that the selected school received no support from the District Education Department to support underachieving learners.

Another finding is that parental involvement is minimal as far as supporting underachieving Grade R learners is concerned. As indicated in the literature, parents need to be involved in supporting underachieving Grade R learners. Support should be provided through collaborative processes between the school and parents to assist underachieving learners.

Recommendations

- Schools should ensure that they provide parents with the school language policy during the admission period or when the learners register.
- Parents should regularly meet with the teacher to support the Grade R classes.
- Teachers must skill themselves in the intricacies of teaching Grade R learners.
- Learners must be allowed to use the English language when speaking to their teachers, peers, and parents at home. The reason is that parents want their children to be taught in English and should, therefore, become part of the process of teaching the child by speaking English at home.

  The children cannot master English if they switch to their native language when they reach home.

5.2.2 Research Question 2: What can be considered as the main causes for Grade R learners underperforming?

The Grade R teachers play a major role in teacher- and learner-guided activities. The research findings show that teachers lack training. Furthermore, they do not implement appropriate teaching or assessment strategies in their Grade R classrooms. This is because they lack the knowledge and skills to do so, ultimately resulting in teachers not attending to underperforming Grade R learners. According to the DBE (2011), teachers are responsible for the diverse learning needs of learners, but this can only be achieved if teachers are appropriately trained. As mentioned in Chapter 2, learners from poor socio-economic backgrounds are vulnerable to academic deficiencies, leading to unsuccessful learners. Thus, many underachieving learners come from broken households, with parents who have limited interest in their children's learning and progress. Underachievement is the most common state amongst Grade R learners from unstable or poor families. When learners progress satisfactorily from Grade R until Grade 12, the Grade 12 results will show the role of the foundation phase. This is outlined in Section 1.1, on page 15.

It was also observed that learners naturally use their home language to communicate with their peers. However, research has shown that -when the home language differs from the language of teaching and learning- it contributes to the Grade R learners' underachievement.

The present researcher believes it is difficult for a teacher to make a significant impact in addressing these challenges alone. Only through the collaboration of all stakeholders can underperforming Grade R learners be successfully assisted.

In light of the findings on factors impacting the learning and development of underachieving Grade R learners, the researcher would like to make the following recommendations.

Recommendations

- Grade R teachers must be trained and empowered in level-appropriate didactics to provide quality Grade R education, especially to underachieving learners.
- Schools should arrange training for the Grade R teachers in CAPS as soon as

possible so they do not do random activities but focus on essential skills.

- Teachers should improve their qualifications by furthering their studies in courses aligned with their teaching grades.
- Collaboration and partnership between teachers and parents, as well as the other stakeholders, must be improved by the school.

5.2.3 Research Question 3: How are Grade R teachers currently assisting these underperforming learners in Grade R?

Part of the study investigated the strategies that Grade R teachers use to assist underachieving Grade R learners, and it was discovered that the teachers do not have any such strategies. According to the DoE (2001a), it is imperative to ensure differentiation in curriculum delivery to enable access to learning for all learners. However, the findings revealed that teachers could not devise or employ strategies to ensure underachieving Grade R learners engaged in meaningful activities.

Recommendations

- Teachers must attend workshops or in-service training, where they can be trained on the suitable teaching strategies for teaching Grade R learners. These strategies will help the teachers in addressing learning barriers and development.

  Team teaching strategies should also be a component of the training workshops, as they are effective in helping underperforming learners.

5.2.4 Research Question 4: Are there any other possible strategies that could be used to support underperforming Grade R learners in Namakgale Circuit?

The researchers' findings are that the strategies used by the Grade R teachers are inappropriate and ineffective. This shows that teachers do not have any effective strategies to help underperforming learners in Grade R.

Recommendations

- The following strategies must be introduced in the school:
  - Multisensory learning and teaching strategies must be introduced.
  - Cooperative learning and teaching strategies should be practised.
  - Song and rhyme learning and teaching strategies should be used as teaching

strategies.

- Project learning and teaching strategies should be implemented.

5.3 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The study was conducted in only one circuit of the Mopani District out of twenty-four circuits. In addition, only one primary school in the Namakgale Circuit offering Grade R participated in the study. Therefore, the study cannot generalize the results. Therefore, the findings are specific to the school identified. In addition, the researcher depended only on a small sample of participants, whose responses came from interviews (face-to-face), recordings and questionnaires. A larger scale study of the same nature might provide more challenges experienced in rural ECD and novel solutions that some practitioners might have. Therefore, a more focused intervention can be utilized to improve ECD for rural children.

A further improvement of the study could be including Grade 1 teachers, who may be able to pinpoint the gaps that Grade 1 learners have after completing Grade R.

5.4 FINAL REMARKS(CONCLUSION)

In conclusion, the study's objective was met, and the research questions were answered. The researcher noticed from the results that underachieving Grade R learners have numerous needs and challenges that lead to academic underachievement. The main challenge is that these learners come from backgrounds of disadvantaged socio-economic status, with a lack of parental involvement contributing much to their underachievement.

Furthermore, data analysis shows that Grade R teachers must be qualified to teach Grade R learners. Therefore, teachers must receive proper training to empower them with different learning and teaching strategies and skills and to support the needs and challenges of underachieving Grade R learners. In addition, the data reveals that there must be collaboration between the parents, school, and the Education District, as it is crucial to intervene early to prevent underachievement.

Therefore, a plan of action that includes all the stakeholders in ECD is required to address the challenges of underachieving Grade R learners. In alignment with Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems theory (as presented in Chapter 2), parents, family, peers, childcare, schools, neighborhood, and religious groups are presented as being influential in the child's achievement at the microsystem level. This level involves roles, relationships, and patterns of daily activities that strive to shape cognitive, social, emotional, moral, and spiritual development. The mesosystem also plays a significant role in child development, as it comprises the connection and procedures between two or more settings, containing the developing person, for example, the relationship between the home and school, as well as school and the workplace. According to my description, the mesosystem is a layer that links the child's microsystem and the learning variables, such as the parent-teacher relationship or the link between the child's church and neighborhood. This is significant because parents want to recognize and celebrate their child's academic successes, particularly in reading and math.

5.5 RECOMMENDATIONS

The study recommends that:

- Teachers should be trained in the pedagogical teaching of Grade R learners.
- Parents must support Grade R learners and teachers in their school.
- It is again recommended that teachers must be trained in the new teaching and learning strategies, which will help underachieving Grade R learners.
- Grade R curriculum advisors must regularly visit Grade R classes.

A partnership between stakeholders and the parents must be created to support the underachieving Grade R learners in preparing for Grade 1 (stakeholders refer to health professionals, church leaders, and psychologists).

5.6 SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

The study achieved the purpose for which it was undertaken, namely, to explore the challenges and possible solutions for underperforming Grade R learners. However, it has opened the following for further research by scholars. The study was confined to just one primary school in Mopani East District, in Namakgale Circuit. The selected school does not represent all Mopani District primary schools and circuits. Therefore, the same study should be conducted in other primary schools and circuits to determine whether the challenges experienced are similar in the same context. A similar intervention programme can then be developed for all schools in the area.

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Annexure A: ASSENT FORM FOR MINOR

TITLE: MIXED METHOD STUDY EXPLORING THE CHALLENGES OF ANDPOSSIBLE SOLUTIONS FOR UNDERPERFORMING GRADE R LEARNERS IN ONE SCHOOL IN NAMAKGALE DISTRICT IN LIMPOPO

Researcher's Name: Sepelemane Richard Nkgapele

Researcher's Contacts Numbers: 082 852 8981

What is research?

Research is something where we find new knowledge about the way things (and people) work. We use research projects or studies to help us find out more about children and teenagers and the things that affect their lives, schools, families, and health. We do this to try and make the world a better place.

What is this research project all about?

The project is all about discovering the needs and challenges of Grade R learners who are not performing well.

Why have I been invited to take part in this research project?

It is because we see many learners who are attending Grade 1 and going up to Grade 4, are struggling and we want to find out why they are struggling.

Who is doing the research?

I, Sepelemane Richard Nkgapele, am doing the research and I'm working for the Department of Higher Education and Training. The reason why I'm doing this research is that I want to find out all the challenges facing Grade R learners.

What will happen to me in this study?

You will be requested to answer some questions that will be asked.

Can anything bad happen to me?

Nothing will happen to you, as I'm going to just ask you questions.

Can anything good happen to me?

Yes, you will form part of my participants.

Will anyone know I'm in the study?

No, no one will know about this as it is a secret.

Who can I talk to about the study?

You can talk to myself, your principal, teachers, and your parents.

What if I do not want to do this?

No one can force you to participate in this study. You have the right to say no.

Annexure B: Letter to the School Principal

Dear: School Principal

Permission to conduct a research study in your school.

I, Sepelemane Richard Nkgapele (Student Number 22228623), am a master's student at the University of Mpumalanga. I am optimistically requesting permission to conduct a research study at your school. The aim of this study is to explore the needs and challenges of underperforming Grade R learners.

Your school has been selected because of the developmental gaps that have been observed during my visits to the school. I'm planning to obtain the necessary information for this research project using interviews, observation, and document analysis.

Participants in the study will be the two Grades R Teachers. In addition, twenty Grade R learners will be observed in their natural learning environment. The two teachers will be interviewed for not more than one hour after teaching time. The interview will be audio recorded with the consent of the participants.

There is no foreseeable risk to the teachers or learners that will be participating in this study.

Please note that your identity, all identifying information in the school, the names of the teacher as well as their responses will be kept strictly confidential and will remain anonymous. I also assure you that I will not disturb the normal school routine with this project or cause any financial implications for the school.

Feedback on the research findings will be made available to the school and Limpopo Education Department.

Yours Sincerely

_____

Nkgapele S.R (082 852 8981)

Postgraduate Student

Annexure C:PARENTS' CONSENT LETTER

Dear Parent

Your child..... is invited to participate in a study entitled.

MIXED METHOD STUDY EXPLORING THE CHALLENGES OF AND POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS FOR UNDERPERFORMING GRADE R LEARNERS IN ONE SCHOOL IN NAMAKGALE DISTRICT IN LIMPOPO. I am undertaking this study as part of my master's research at the University of Mpumalanga. The purpose of the study is to explore the needs and challenges of underperforming Grade R learners. I expect to have 20 other children participating in the study.

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and can be identified with your child will remain confidential and will only be disclosed with your permission. His or her name or your name or the name of the school will not be linked in any written or verbal report based on this study. Such a report will be used for research purposes only.

There are no foreseeable risks to your child by participating in the study. Your child will receive no direct benefit from participating in the study, however, the possible benefit to education is to identify the problems as early as possible and support these learners to prepare them for formal schooling. Neither your child nor you will receive any type of payment for participating in this study.

Your child's participation in this study is voluntary. Your child may decline to participate or to withdraw from participation at any time. Withdrawal or refusal to participate will not affect him/her in any way. Similarly, you can agree to allow your child to be in the study now and change your mind later without any penalty.

The information gathered from the study will be stored securely on a password locked computer in my locked office for five years after the study. Thereafter, records will be erased.

If you have any questions regarding the study, please call me or my supervisor, Prof Eurika Jansen van Vuuren in the Faculty of Education. My contact number is 082 852 8981 and my email is nkgapelerichard@ymail.com.

Permission has already been given by the Limpopo Education Department and the ethics committee of the University of Mpumalanga.

If you are willing to allow your child to be observed in this study, our signature below will indicate that you have read the information provided above and have decided to allow him or her to participate in the study. You may keep a copy of this letter.

Name of Child (print)

_____

Name of the Parent/Guardian (print)

_____

Date: _____

Nkgapele S. R
Signature:_____

Date: _____

Annexure D : INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Researcher : Sepelemane Richard Nkgapele

Supervisor : Prof Eurika Jansen van Vuuren

Participant:

Date:

Time:

Interview questions

1. what do you understand by underperformance challenges in Grade R classes?
2. Which factors affect these challenges?
3. How can you be supported to deal with these challenges?
4. What kinds of strategies are followed to ensure that Grade R teachers are helping learners with those challenges?

5. What is your ECD teacher's qualification? (Principal)

What is the impact of your ECD teacher's qualification on service delivery?

Annexure E: Questionnaires for Children

Question	Respond
1. What is the age of your child?	
2. What is his/her home language?	
3. Gender of your child	
4. Are the teachers friendly with your child?	
5. Did your child attend a crèche?	
6. How many break times should your child have every day?	
7. Do you prefer your child to be taught in the first language or English?	

Annexture F: Questionnaire for Grade R Teachers

Category	Response
1. What is your gender?	
2. What is your age group?	
3. What is your qualification?	
4. What is your teaching experience?	

Annexure G: Questionnaire for School Management Team (Head of Department, Deputy Principal and Principal)

Category	Response
1. What is your gender?	
2. What is your age group?	
3. What is your qualification?	
4. What is your teaching experience?	

Annexure H: INFORMED CONSENT FORM (Participant-Teacher)

RESEARCHER: Nkgapele Sepelemane Richard 222238623

TITLE:

MIXED METHOD STUDY EXPLORING THE CHALLENGES OF AND POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS FOR UNDERPERFORMING GRADE R LEARNERS IN ONE SCHOOL IN NAMAKGALE DISTRICT IN LIMPOPO

INFORMED CONSENT FORM (Participant – Teachers)

I,.....(Name and Surname), understand that I am being asked to participate in the above research study and that:

1. This research study is aimed at describing my experience on a mixed method study exploring the challenges of and possible solutions for underperforming Grade R learners in Limpopo.
2. If I agree to participate in the study, I will be involved in an interview process with the researcher who will ask me a set of questions and the interview will be recorded. I may ask the researcher to turn the Dictaphone off while I am answering questions if I do not want my answers recorded.
3. The expected duration of my participation will be approximately one-hour sessions.
4. There will be other participants in the research study.
5. I was selected as a participant because of my experience being a Grade R teacher.
6. I am aware of the benefits of this research study and will not be receiving any reimbursement for my participation in the research.
7. My identity will remain anonymous, and I will be given a code name by the researcher.
8. As my identity will remain anonymous, there are no foreseeable risks or discomforts in my participation.
9. My participation in this study is entirely voluntary, that I may withdraw from this study at any time should I wish to do so.
10. The study has been explained to me. I have read and understood the consent form, all my questions have been answered and I agree to participate. I understand that I will be given findings should I be interested to know about the outcome.

11. I am free to ask any questions about the study or about being a participant and I may contact Nkgapele Richard (Master's Student) at 082 852 8981.

12. The University of Mpumalanga has given guidance and ethics approval to this research.

Full name of participant: ……

Signature of participant: …….

OTHERS

UMP Research Ethics Certificate

LED Letter of permission to conduct research in school.

\mJ UNIVERSITY OF MPUMALANGA

Crt:alioe OpportuniueJ

Prof Mahlom ihol b uffrE.:y MAHLOI'v'AHOLO

School of Early Childhood Education (SECE)

Siyabuswa Campus.

Dear Nkgapele SR

22228623

Protocol Reference Number: UMP/Nkgapele22228623/SECE /MEd/2023

Project Title: A mixed method study exploring the challenges and possible solutions of underperformlng grade R learners in Limpopo

Approval Notification

FULL **APPROVAL.**

Any alteratlon/s to the approved research protocol I.e. Questionnaire/Interviews Schedule, Informed **Consent form, Itle 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 *S* 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,

Prof MG Mahlomaholo

m f Chairp r n **(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 researchnd guarant e to ensure compliance with these conditions. I agree to completion of a yearly prosress , port.

Signature

3.o /.q...$../2:-!2.i?.::3

Date

PLEASE QUOTE THE PROTOCOL NUMBER ON ALL ENQUIRIES

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PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT
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MOPANI EAST DISTRICT
CONFIDENTIAL

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
MOPANI EAST DISTRICT
OFFICE *OF* THE DISTRICT DIRECTOR
1 8 SEP 2023
PRIVATE BAG X578
GIYANI 0826
LIMPOPO PROVINCE

Ref: 2/2/2... E : N obeni D Tel: 0631461114 Email: davidn obeni9 mail.com Date: 15.09.2023

TO NKGAPELE S.R

PERMISSIO TO CONDUCT RESEARCH: A MIXED METHOD STUDY EXPLORING THE CHALLENGES AND POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS OF UNDERPERFORMING GRADE R LEARNER IN LIMPOPO.

1. The above matter refers.
2. The Depa ment wishes to inform you that your request to conduct research on the above meroned Topic has been approved.
3. Your focu should only be limited to selected schoo as per the list of the School listed below:

NAME:>F CIRCUIT	SCI-IOOL
NAMAI<GALE	MASHISHIMALE PRIMARY SCHOOL

4. The following conditions should be considered:

4.1. Arrange1nent should be made with selected schools.

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
MOPANI EAST DISTRICT, Privale Bag X 578 GIYANI, 0826
Tel 015 811 7003

4.2. The research should not be conducted during Examinations especially the 4th term.
4.3. During rtearch, applicable research ethics should be adhered to, in particular the principle of voluntary participation (the people involved should be respected).
4.4. Upon co pletion of the research study, the researcher shall share the final product of the re earch with the Department.
4.5. The resrarch should not have any financial implications to the Department of Education Limpopo Province.

5. Furthe-r, ·ore, you are expected to produce this letter to schools and offices where you inte1d to conduct your research since it will serve as proof that you have been granted rrmission to conduct the research.

6. The DeAartment appreciates the contribution that you wish to make and wishes you success in your research.

DISTRICT DIRECTOR

18/09/2023
DATE

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
MOPANI EAST DISTRICT
OFFICE OF THE DISTRICT DIRECTOR
1 8 SEP 2023
PRIVATE BAG X578
GIYANI 0826
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PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH: NKGAPELE SR