Exploring Grade R teaching and learning in rural schools

by

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DECLARATION

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I declare that the above thesis is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

__________________________________________  ____________________________
SIGNATURE                                      DATE
DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to the disadvantaged rural communities, to my parents, Mazangwa Rachael and Dambile Eliot Makeleni, who could not manage to obtain any qualification but God blessed them with a doctor. This thesis is also dedicated to all my cousins, brothers and sisters and to my late and beloved uncle, Linda Galela, who always appreciated my academic success.
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I am highly thankful to the King of Glory, Lord Jesus Christ, who always guided me to accomplish this journey with success. My sincere gratitude and appreciation goes to:

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4. Ms Nompucuko Constance Manyosha and all other friends and colleagues for their continuous support and encouragement.

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7. My prayer team for always supporting me with prayers.

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative study was to investigate some of the challenges facing Grade R teaching and learning in rural schools and how these challenges influence effective teaching and learning in classroom practice. The study also explored the strategies teachers use to improve Grade R teaching and learning. I used a qualitative case study to provide a detailed description of eight unique cases. Semi-structured interviews, structured observations and document analyses were used to collect data. The study was framed within Vygotsky’s theory of social constructivism which emanates from the concept of the Zone of Proximal Development. In this study, Vygotsky theory is used to examine mediation role of teachers in the development of effective teaching and learning through play. The theories of play were also explored since effective Grade R teaching and learning is based on a play-based-approach. Freire’s theory on pedagogy of the oppressed was also explored since the study focused in rural schools which are allocated in disadvantaged areas. The study sample comprised four Grade R teachers and four Heads of Department from four schools. The selection criteria were based on Grade R historical background and the culture of teaching and learning in schools. Some of challenges highlighted by teachers were determined by their background and experiences and school environmental context. Content analysis was used to analyse textual data and narratives through the process of interpreting the emergent themes on the challenges facing Grade R teaching and learning. The major challenges revealed by this study were lack of outdoor materials, unconducive classrooms for Grade R teaching and learning, lack of toilets, lack of security for Grade R learners and resource materials, underqualified Grade R teachers, Grade R admission policy implementation, lack of monitoring and support, gaps on subject content knowledge and lack of parental involvement. The research findings revealed that these challenges had a negative influence on Grade R effective teaching and learning.

Key words: teaching and learning, monitoring and support, subject content knowledge, resources, qualifications, parental involvement, play theories.
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<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ANA</td>
<td>Annual National Assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ATA</td>
<td>Alberta Teachers' Association</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAPS</td>
<td>Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DBE</td>
<td>Department of Basic Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DoE</td>
<td>Department of Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DSD</td>
<td>Department of Social Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ECD</td>
<td>Early Childhood Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ECDBE</td>
<td>Eastern Cape Department of Basic Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ECE</td>
<td>Early Childhood Education</td>
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<tr>
<td>EDO</td>
<td>Education Developmental Officer</td>
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<td>ETDP-SETA</td>
<td>Education, Training and Development Practices Sector Education and Training Authority</td>
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<td>EWP 5</td>
<td>Education White Paper 5</td>
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<td>EWP 6</td>
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<td>FET</td>
<td>Further Education and Training</td>
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<tr>
<td>FSS</td>
<td>Full-Service Schools</td>
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<tr>
<td>HOD</td>
<td>Head of Department</td>
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<td>ILO</td>
<td>International Labour Organisation</td>
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<tr>
<td>IT</td>
<td>Information Technology</td>
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<tr>
<td>JSS</td>
<td>Junior Secondary School</td>
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<tr>
<td>LoLT</td>
<td>Language of Learning and Teaching</td>
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<tr>
<td>LTSM</td>
<td>Learner Teacher Support Materials</td>
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<td>NCS</td>
<td>National Curriculum Statement</td>
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<td>NGO</td>
<td>Non-Governmental Organisations</td>
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<td>National Planning Commission</td>
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<td>NPDE</td>
<td>National Professional Diploma in Education</td>
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<td>NPO</td>
<td>Non-Profit Organisations</td>
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<td>NQF</td>
<td>National Qualifications Framework</td>
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<td>PPR</td>
<td>Programme and Promotion Requirements</td>
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<td>PQAC</td>
<td>Preschool Qualifications Accreditation Committee</td>
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<td>SACE</td>
<td>South African Council for Education</td>
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<tr>
<td>Acronym</td>
<td>Full Form</td>
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<tr>
<td>SAIDE</td>
<td>South African Institution for Distance Education</td>
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<td>SAQA</td>
<td>South African Qualification Authority</td>
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<tr>
<td>SASA</td>
<td>South African Schools Act</td>
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<td>SASAMS</td>
<td>South African School Administration and Management System</td>
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<tr>
<td>SBA</td>
<td>School-based assessment</td>
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<tr>
<td>SBST</td>
<td>School Based Support Team</td>
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<td>SGB</td>
<td>School Governing Body</td>
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<td>SMT</td>
<td>School Management Team</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNISA</td>
<td>University of South Africa</td>
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<tr>
<td>ZPD</td>
<td>Zone of Proximal Development</td>
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CHAPTER 1:
ORIENTATION TO THE STUDY

1.1 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND OF GRADE R IN SOUTH AFRICA

This chapter presents a background and overview of the study. In this chapter, I present my personal background and experience for the study in rural schools in the Eastern Cape Department of Basic Education (ECDBE), the historical background of the introduction of Grade R in South African context, statement of the problem, rationale of the study, research questions, research aims and objectives, research methodology, literature review, theoretical framework, clarification of the concepts and outline of the chapters. Finally, the structure of the thesis is presented in a form of a brief summary.

To understand some of the challenges affecting teaching and learning in Grade R, I provide a brief historical background to the introduction of Grade R in rural primary schools and its role within the teaching and learning content of the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS). My approach is supported by Feza (2014a:5) in arguing that it is difficult to measure any kind of progress if the history is not recognised as part of the journey. The history of Grade R highlighted the knowledge the researcher had to acquire for investigating some of the challenges facing teaching and learning.

The educational policy, South African Schools’ Act (SASA of 1997), on children’s rights emphasises that children should be given an opportunity to have access to education (Maharaj & Williams, 2011:7). The National Department of Education drafted a policy known as Education White Paper 5 of 2001 to guide the implementation of Grade R in public schools. According to Excell and Linington (2012:3), the objective of the Department of Education in introducing Grade R was to improve learner performance in the early grades and across the upper grades of schooling. The focus areas targeted were to improve learner readiness for school attendance and to minimise the risk of failure and dropout in the education system (International Labour Organisation [ILO], 2012:14). The goal of the Department of Education on the universal reception year in public primary schools was shifted to 2014 for the reason that some schools were not yet ready to introduce the grade due to challenges that existed in the system (Atmore,
Furthermore, Atmore (2012) highlights that the universal Grade R programme was extended to 2018. Helmbold also highlights that the Department of Education did not appear to be ready to universalise Grade R and elaborates that even by 2019 not much movement was expected (Helmbold, 2014:18). Therefore, it remained important to explore some of the challenges facing effective teaching and learning in Grade R. It was the objective of this study to explore these challenges in rural schools.

The most targeted children for reception year are learners in rural schools who have been identified as the most disadvantaged in the education system. The Education White Paper of 2001 targeted children from four and half years, who turn five years by the end of June in the education system. My study focuses on Grade R which caters for five- to six-year-olds. Soma (2011:39) highlights that these Grade R learners are referred to as the reception year learners and this is the age before Grade 1.

The Bill of Rights drafted in 1996 emphasises that all children, regardless of age, should be given access to quality education (Atmore, Van Niekerk & Ashley-Cooper, 2012:7; Freire, 1978:88; Geldenhuys & Wevers, 2015:13). It is upon this basis that in 2001 all nine provinces of South Africa were mandated to have Grade R in primary schools. The Department of Education has placed learners according to their levels of education from Grade R to the tertiary level of education. Grade R learners were placed under the General Education and Training Band. This education band is comprised of the Foundation Phase, Intermediate and Senior Phase. In 2002, Grade R was introduced in South Africa and was included in the General Education and Training Band as a reception year class. Prior to this, reception year classes were accommodated in local community centres and operated without an official curriculum.

All the public primary schools of South Africa were mandated to have Grade R as the first year of schooling. In 2004, Grade R was included in the Foundation Phase grades implementing the National Curriculum Statement (NCS). The NCS was based on the vision and values of the Constitution of the country. The policy document for screening learners with learning difficulties was drafted by the Department of Basic Education (DBE) (2014a:19). It was a response to the need for the development of foundational skills for cognitive development based on improving learner performance in upper grades. This view is acknowledged by Mwamwenda (2014:1) in arguing that children
who attend the reception year class are competent in academic achievements and are better prepared to accomplish their career goals. The objective of the national curriculum in South African education is therefore to improve education for all children, including disadvantaged learners and to reduce learning difficulties in the classroom context. This is done through targeted support structures and mechanisms that are aimed at improving the retention of learners in the education system (DBE, 2014a:9; Taole & Mohapi, 2013:1). The introduction of the reception class was intended to be a support system to address poor learner performance in the education system.

The CAPS outlines the knowledge and skills that learners should achieve at the end of Grade R schooling. Janse van Rensburg (2015:2) acknowledges that the Grade R curriculum prepares learners to be physically, cognitively, affectively, socio-culturally and linguistically mature. According to Janse van Rensburg (2015:2), learners not attending Grade R are bound to experience learning problems in formal education. A notable example is when Grade R learners begin Grade 1 and do not understand basic instructions in language, mathematics and life skills activities. In Grade R, learners need to compete in language and in mathematics by exploring various resources and following instructions accordingly.

The Integrated Strategic Planning Framework for Teacher Education and Development in South Africa (2011-2025) outlines the purpose of the introduction of Grade R as the four-year Foundation Phase class (DBE, 2011e:127). This document sought to raise the importance of Grade R in laying the academic foundation of learners in the education system. The purpose of the grade is to support learners from disadvantaged communities to acquire knowledge, skills and attitudes that are needed in the formal learning years (DBE, 2011a:20). The aim of introducing Grade R was to prepare learners for school readiness and to lay a better foundation in mathematics content areas and in language components in the Foundation Phase. Hence, some researchers recognise Grade R class as an intervention class that improves school enrolment, mathematics and language scores in the upper grades (Krishnaratne, White & Carpenter, 2013:23; Hlupo, Kufakunesu, Denhere, Chinyoka & Ganga, 2013:2). Hence, Hlupo et al. (2013:2) emphasise that learners should be exposed to books, a print-rich classroom environment and manipulation of various teaching and learning materials to increase school preparedness. It therefore appears that there is
a need for effective teaching to prepare learners to be ready to learn new knowledge and skills in the school environment.

Challenges faced in curriculum implementation in schools led to the introduction of CAPS to be implemented in 2012 from Grade R to Grade 3. The aim of the curriculum policy was to replace and reduce some components of curriculum such as the content teachers must teach and the assessment principles to be followed (Tshiredo, 2013:26). The Grade R teaching and learning and classroom structure is unique compared with the rest of the Foundation Phase, even though the grade is part of the phase. In Grade R, classroom layout is made up of groups of plastic tables with chairs. There are various learning stations that make the classroom structure unique, namely; a theme table for displaying the content of the week to be taught, a reading corner, a fantasy area for role play, a block area, a creative arts section, shelves for storage, space for large group activities, a mathematics activity centre, a language activity centre and a life skills activity centre. These stations provide for the indoor activities. There is also outdoor play equipment such as jungle gyms, tyres and climbing ropes that are installed in a spacious space within the Grade R playground.

To manage Grade R programmes, teachers need to follow a daily programme or timetable. The daily programme indicates the daily activities teachers should follow which include teacher-guided activities, routines and child-initiated activities as mentioned in the CAPS (DBE, 2011e:21). Teacher-guided activities are based on the teaching of language, mathematics and life skills and these subjects need to be taught in an integrated way throughout the day. Teachers should consider time allocation for each subject as indicated in the CAPS. Home language is set at 10 hours per week, mathematics is 7 hours per week and life skills is 6 hours per week. This Grade R structure and curriculum content requires teachers who are clear about Grade R curriculum needs and who are able to address challenges that may affect curriculum implementation.

The DBE has made various attempts to introduce changes by training Grade R teachers with the purpose of improving teaching and learning in Grade R classes. However, Janse van Rensburg (2015:1) reports that most Grade R teachers in Gauteng, one of South Africa’s provinces, are either underqualified or unqualified. In the province of the Eastern Cape, Grade R teachers have been employed without a
Grade R qualification and by 2013 the DBE had started to train them in groups. Seemingly, Grade R teachers were not ready to teach Grade R when it was introduced. Between 2002 and 2006, Grade R teachers in the Eastern Cape were paid by School Governing Bodies (SGBs). From 2007 to date, Grade R teachers are directly paid by the DBE, although they are paid less than their colleagues in the Foundation Phase and have no employee benefits (Janse van Rensburg, 2015:8). In the Eastern Cape, Grade R teachers are not employed in a permanent capacity and have to renew their employment contracts yearly.

The Grade R teachers implemented the NCS from 2004 to 2011. These teachers are still involved in the implementation of the National CAPS introduced in 2012. According to the DBE, the provisions to support Grade R implementation include full Early Childhood Development (ECD) qualifications, short skills programmes, workbooks distribution per learner, supplying resource packs aligned to CAPS, indoor and outdoor resources, infrastructure, weekly plans and guidelines for SMT to monitor and support curriculum content coverage but all these seemed insufficient to support the needs of Grade R in rural schools (Atmore et al., 2012:14; DBE, 2014a:36). Furthermore, in the Eastern Cape, Grade R teachers attended various content-related workshops in language, mathematics and life skills.

The introduction of the CAPS was another attempt to strengthen the knowledge and skills to be imparted to learners to maintain the quality and standard of teaching and learning. Kausar and Akhtar (2013:152) believe that if teachers are involved in curriculum programmes and are given an opportunity to utilise the sources, they could improve learner performance. In addition, Taole and Mohapi (2013:40) highlight that teachers' beliefs and conceptions shape and strengthen the curriculum development process in a country. In this study, Grade R teachers shared the challenges they faced in teaching and learning in their respective school contexts.

The above background to Grade R in the education system of South Africa provides important information that explores teaching and learning in rural context. Grade R teaching and learning is often exposed to various challenges. Although the study could not cover all the aspects in depth and in detail, the experiences that were shared by Grade R teachers assisted in responding to the research question of this study.
1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

According to Education White Paper 5 of 2001, Grade R was introduced as a national priority to improve learner performance in the Foundation Phase and across the education system (DoE, 2001:27; Feza, 2014a:23). The current situation in Grade R learners indicates that a significant number of learners have not met the expected level of readiness for formal learning in Grade 1 and this mostly affects sixty-eight percent of learners from disadvantaged communities of South Africa (Brewer et al., 2014:19). Most studies that focused on Grade R teaching and learning reveal that schools in rural areas are still facing challenges and these have negatively affected classroom practices. My interest therefore was to explore in-depth teaching and learning in Grade R taking current challenges into consideration. Literature in Grade R has mostly focused on effective teaching and learning, curriculum change and implementation, experiences of Grade R rural teachers, promotion and benefits of play-based-approaches (Imenda, 2014:205; Janse van Rensburg, 2015: 1; Mupa & Chinooneka, 2015:125; Taole & Mohapi, 2013: 4; Tshiredo, 2013: 26; Wessels, 2011: 7). There has been little emphasis on Grade R teaching and learning with reference to rural school context.

1.3 PERSONAL BACKGROUND AND EXPERIENCE OF THE RESEARCHER

This section serves to describe my sociocultural background. My inspiration is drawn from the seminal work of Freire, a former Brazilian educator, who displayed passion towards education of the disadvantaged communities. I come from a disadvantaged community where I had to cross three rivers by foot during my primary and secondary school years. My parents were illiterate and earned very low salaries. I sought part time jobs in shops and most of the time I was a hawker during my teacher training years. Despite all this, I was determined to be a teacher one day. This determination pushed me to serve in various structures in the Department of Education. During my fourth year in the field of education, I became a teacher trainer on Outcomes Based Education in the programme initiated by teacher unions. During this period, I was a Grade 7, 8 and 9 educator. I then taught in the Foundation Phase for 12 years. I was actively engaged in various Foundation Phase programmes which involved provincial language seminars, training of teachers as a lead teacher and developing support material for teaching and learning. I became motivated to advance
my knowledge and skills on Foundation Phase programmes. This motivation was supported by Freire (1994:83) who indicates that to become a teacher one needs to engage in the acts of studying, teaching, learning and knowing.

I furthered my studies with a master's degree based on the experience of Foundation Phase teachers in implementing the curriculum. Although my study focused on Foundation Phase from Grade 1 to Grade 3, my main focus was on rural schools where I spent most of my life. I needed to give back to my communities. I was then employed as a Grade R subject adviser. This new opportunity inspired me to continue through my journey as an academic. In preparation for my doctoral study, I proposed to explore Grade R teaching and learning in rural schools.

1.4 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The National Planning Commission (NPC) indicates that South Africa finds it difficult to improve quality teaching and learning in Grade R because of the little information that exists about ECD (Excell & Linington, 2012:4; Van der Berg, Taylor, Gustafsson, Spaull & Armstrong, 2011:23). Mukeredzi (2013:2) highlights that rural teachers in South Africa and Zimbabwe experience challenges and some of these challenges are not well known because of lack of research in rural education. This might suggest that the Department of Education does not have enough data on some of the challenges facing Grade R teaching and learning in rural contexts. This study aims at exploring teaching and learning in Grade R in rural schools. The findings would also assist the DBE to consider some critical issues during curriculum review for quality education in disadvantaged rural schools. Grade R teachers in rural schools and in other contexts may benefit from the findings of this study.

1.5 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study was guided by the following research questions:

Main research question:

What are some of the challenges facing teaching and learning in Grade R in rural schools in the Eastern Cape?
Sub-questions:

- How do the challenges influence Grade R teaching and learning in rural schools?
- What are some of the strategies used to improve Grade R teaching and learning in rural context?

1.5 RESEARCH AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

1.5.1 Aims

The aim of this study was to explore teaching and learning in relation to some of the challenges facing Grade R in rural context. The study also aimed at exploring the strategies that could improve Grade R teaching and learning.

1.5.2 Objectives

- To explore the challenges facing Grade R teaching and learning and how these influence effective teaching and learning in rural schools.
- To explore the strategies to improve Grade R teaching and learning in rural schools.

1.6 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

1.6.1 Qualitative Approach

This study used a qualitative design because of its scientific nature in seeking answers to questions for the case under investigation and for provision of a set of predefined procedures to answer the questions, collect information and present clear findings that are applicable beyond the immediate parameters of the study (Bertram & Christiansen, 2015:123; Creswell, 2013:119). Tsai (2013:95) argues that the purpose of qualitative research is to explore the actual experiences of the participants and the influence of the experiences in a real-life situation. This is further elaborated by Khan (2014:2) who states that qualitative research is an inquiry of understanding real occurrences in actual settings. As Creswell (2013:118) posits, the qualitative approach seeks to understand the given problem from the perspective of the local population it involves.

According to Bansal and Corley (2012:5), qualitative research is based on verbal communication to explore questions and gain in-depth knowledge of phenomena. The interviews which were conducted in this study provided me with an opportunity to
communicate with Grade R teachers directly on what they experienced in their teaching practice. Qualitative research is also advantageous to a researcher in the sense that it broadens a researcher's scope for posing new kinds of questions and explored new ways of answering them (Tsai, 2013:3). Tsai also indicates that the researcher should use direct quotes from the participants' stories to illustrate certain points, as well as note verbal gestures or even words or actions which give tangible meaning to the case.

Yin (2014:9) states that the qualitative approach is concerned with the understanding of social life and the way individuals view their life experiences. In this study, the qualitative approach was concerned with the social life of Grade R teachers interacting with various stakeholder such as learners, parents, SMT and colleagues in the school context. It is highlighted that a qualitative study allows for smaller samples to be purposefully selected. Eight participants in this study constituted the sample which was relevant according to the principles of qualitative research study as suggested by Yin (2014:9). Similarly, Creswell (2013:101) regards the qualitative research design as a method of experimentation and of studying human behaviour in natural settings. In addition, researchers use qualitative methods to observe the world around them and to find results that explain what they saw. It suggests that structured observations and documents analysis are relevant in qualitative research and they were the methods used for collecting observable data in this study.

1.6.2 Case Study

According to Bertram and Christiansen (2015:42), the individual experiences are examined in their daily practices and data are collected about a single event or a group of people. To answer the research questions on some of the challenges facing Grade R teaching and learning, a qualitative case study approach was adopted. Stemad (2013:2) explains that, in research, a case study is described as an analysis of one event in its natural setting. Furthermore, the descriptive, exploratory and interpretive nature of a qualitative case study enables researchers to explore the cases in depth by using interviews, observations and documents analysis.

Starman (2013:31) also argues that a case study deals with one case or a small number of cases. This study dealt with only eight unique cases from four rural schools. The study intended to explore the experiences and the meaning each individual
teacher made with regard to the challenges facing Grade R teaching and learning in each school. The data collected from each case gave me the ability to observe transferability between similar cases. According to Khan (2014:4), the case study broadens the scope of a researcher to interpret what the participants say about their reality when the situations between the phenomenon and the context need to be clarified. Therefore, the case study methodology was relevant to be used to explore some of the challenges facing Grade R teaching and learning in schools.

The researcher explored some of the challenges facing Grade R teaching and learning in rural schools and their influence on daily practices. The purpose was to find out the meaning each individual teacher constructed from the challenges facing Grade R teaching and learning in each situation.

1.6.3 Selection of Participants

Grade R teachers from rural schools of the Eastern Cape in South Africa participated in this research. Oppong (2013:2) and Khan (2014: 6) highlight that it is not possible to collect information from all members of targeted population of a research inquiry. Therefore, eight participants from four schools were selected to participate in this research. The selection was composed of one Grade R teacher and one Head of Department (HOD) per school. All the participants were Grade R teachers and HODs who were directly involved in implementing the Grade R learning programmes based on language, mathematics and life skills.

1.6.4 Data Collection Method

To address the research questions on exploring Grade R teaching and learning, I collected data through semi-structured interviews, classroom observations and document analysis. Bertram and Christiansen (2015:123) argue that using qualitative data gleaned from these data collection methods can lead the researcher to gain more knowledge and a deeper understanding of the challenges facing Grade R teaching and learning. Khan (2014:6) describes interviews as an important tool for collecting data based on personal experience as it provides the researcher with various strategies to collect data about the problem under investigation. In this study, semi-structured interviews were conducted with eight teachers from different schools to understand some of the challenges facing the grade. I believed that teachers’ views, opinions and
detailed experiences obtained from the interviews were relevant to the research project. Khan (2014:7) recommends the use of an interview guide with questions relevant to the study which will be answered by each participant in one case study. Classroom observations were carried out in four classes during teaching hours. These enabled me to gather information on teaching and learning practices using an observation schedule as a guide. Field notes were taken during site visits to record actual settings, time duration for classroom observations, as well as the use of teaching and learning media. Document analysis was also used to analyse the supporting documents teachers use in their teaching practices. These were CAPS, DBE workbooks, learner classwork books, learner attendance registers, documents on barriers to learning, weekly term planners, assessment recording tools, mark schedules and report cards such as workbooks and all other material supplied for teaching and learning in a Grade R classroom.

1.6.5 Data Analysis and Interpretation

Mouton (2014:108) explains that the word ‘analysis’ refers to breaking up of the collected data into manageable themes, patterns, trends and relationships. In this study, qualitative context analysis was used to analyse the transcripts of eight interviews, classroom observations and field notes from the four participants as well as information collected from document analysis. All collected data was categorised, coded and labelled as Creswell (2013:201) recommends. The categories were then grouped to form themes to explain the research findings about some of the challenges facing Grade R teaching and learning and the influence of the challenges on effective teaching and learning. The data from interviews was presented first and then complemented by the findings from structured classroom observations and document analysis.

1.6.6 Quality Criteria of the Study

Tsai (2013:5) highlights that quality criteria of the study entails using the appropriate methods for data collection and numerous strategies to promote data credibility. In this study, triangulation of data collected and trustworthiness for obtaining valid information from the participants were ensured as recommended by Tsai (2013:3). Member checks were conducted to confirm the authenticity of my descriptions and interpretations of
participants’ responses. This provided richer and more complete data and thus more complete answers to the research questions.

1.6.7 Ethical Considerations

Researchers acknowledge that ethical considerations are more important in qualitative than quantitative research as the qualitative researcher intrudes into peoples’ lives (Anney, 2014:22; Khan, 2014:9). The researcher should acquire participants’ informed consent in writing. Permission was requested from the DBE circuit manager, school principals and teachers as participants. The study proceeded after approval from the participants and the managers from different levels in the organisation was obtained. To protect participants’ human dignity, pseudonyms for both names of participants and their institutions were used as recommended by Creswell (2013:100). This research also complied with ethical clearance as prescribed by the University of South Africa.

1.7 LITERATURE REVIEW

This section provides an introduction to the international and national literature related to some of the challenges facing Grade R teaching and learning in rural schools. I have observed that there were aspects of the curriculum that were not taught properly and developed in Grade R because of various challenges facing the grade. Some of these challenges caused Grade R learners to miss out on some skills, values and knowledge that equip them for upper grades learning. The following components were reviewed as the key areas that I observed as critical challenges facing teaching and learning in rural schools:

1.7.1 Subject Content Knowledge

The integrated teaching and learning in Grade R is built on language, mathematics and life skills. Researchers have observed a critical lack of quality learning which is caused by teachers’ lack of content knowledge in Early Childhood Education, (Feza, 2013:4; Sinyei, Mwonga & Wanyama, 2012:2; Van der Berg et al., 2011:4). According to Van der Berg et al. (2012), lack of content knowledge has been portrayed as having an influence on the lack of children’s basic informal and intuitive knowledge on mathematics, language and life skills. For example, in their study, Heather, Moletsane, Perry, Mohangi and Ferreira (2012:123-130) revealed that there is an inadequate implementation of physical education in schools, internationally, including South
African schools. These scholars highlight insufficiencies in physical education content in terms of providing extensive substance and guidelines on what and how to teach the study area. Koen and Ebrahim (2013:2) concur that there are skills and knowledge missed by learners in the Early Childhood Education (ECE) and this influences poor learner academic achievement in language and mathematics. The study by Wessels (2011:183) reveals that phonology is not well taught in Grade R and suggests teachers to make use of environmental print, labelled posters and lots of reading and writing based on grade level.

Literature highlights that there is an imbalance in teaching and learning of curriculum content in ECE classrooms (Feza, 2013;4; Koen & Ebrahim, 2013;6; Luneta, 2014:77; Sinyei et al., 2012:5; Siyepu, 2013:8). This implies that early childhood educators lack theoretical knowledge in practice to support young learners to reach their developmental potential. Furthermore, if this problem is left unattended, the inclusion of Grade R in the education system would not serve its purpose as stipulated in Education White Paper number 5 of 2001. Therefore, there is a need for this study to investigate teachers’ subject content knowledge and understanding.

1.7.2 Early Identification of Barriers to Learning

Teachers in Grade R appeared to be lacking experience for identifying learners with learning difficulties (ECDBE, 2015:7). According to Erradu and Weeks (2013:4), learning difficulties deprive learners of an opportunity to develop properly in academic programmes. The DBE (2013:71) states that teachers should identify the state of wellness, development and the learning of each child before engaging the learner in various activities. This area on barriers to learning needed investigation in Grade R.

Abongdia, Foncha and Dakada (2015:4) highlight that barriers to learning manifest in various forms, such as underachieving in a specific subject and learners may show delay in motor skills, perceptual, language and intellectual development. On the other hand, Erradu and Weeks (2013:4), in their study of barriers to learning in the Foundation Phase in South Africa, highlight that some barriers to learning are caused by various factors that are related to curriculum implementation in the classroom environment. Failure to attend to learners’ barriers to learning affects teaching and learning blocks the achievement of the goal of providing education for all (Abongdia et al., 2015:4; Erradu & Weeks, 2013:4). This implies that teachers who work directly with
learners need to have knowledge, skills and a positive attitude to teach and support learners.

This study also aimed to explore teachers’ knowledge and skills regarding barriers to learning as effective teaching and learning depends on how these barriers are addressed. In addition, CAPS emphasises that learners should be taught according to their ability, pace and needs (DBE, 2011a: 5). My experience in working with Grade R teachers also highlights that they are the first people to identify learners with learning difficulties in the schooling context.

1.7.3 Teacher Approach for Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement

In Grade R, learning takes place through play. This approach is facilitated through planning, provision of resources and continuous assessment.

1.7.3.1 Knowledge and understanding integrated planning for learning through play

Literature reveal that teachers lack an ability to plan integrated theme-based lessons and use learning through play approach to facilitate activities (Excell, 2011:59; Excell & Linington, 2012:5; Feza, 2013:5; Wessels, 2011:9). In addition, research findings reveal that teacher-child interaction is of low quality and the reason lies with early childhood practitioners who lack the strategies of how to plan quality learning through play (Moyo, Wadesango & Kurebwa, 2012:6; Yang, 2013:3). The study by Yang (2013:3) in China revealed that teachers experience great difficulties in putting play into real teaching and learning practices although they know what is expected from them. These findings are in line with what I have observed in the classes I visited in the district and what I shared with colleagues from other districts. It is evident that Grade R teachers continue to experience a gap in applying the learning-through-play approach to their teaching practices.

1.7.3.2 Assessment in Grade R

Assessment in Grade R is informal, continuous and should be aligned with planning. The DBE (2011d:24) introduced an assessment policy which determines how to assess CAPS from Grade R to Grade 12. The policy specifies the criteria for assessing Grade R learners for authentic results and for remedial support. It also aims at
supporting teachers to focus on the knowledge and skills Grade R learners should learn throughout the year.

Mohapi (2014:100) notes that Grade R teachers experience difficulties in implementing informal assessment in the teaching and learning context. Similarly, Demircan and Olgan (2011:4) who investigated assessment and evaluation used by ECE teachers in Turkey, reported the same challenge. In their findings, they reported that teachers’ lack of knowledge led them to use traditional assessment techniques based on formal tests because of the view that informal assessment demands more time and more tools to administer. New Jersey Department of Education (2014:15) for pre-primary schools teaching and learning standards indicates that the documents that are used in the assessment process to collect information about learner performance need to be aligned with the curriculum in context and accommodate multiple age appropriate methods. The findings by the New Jersey Department of Education state that the assessment tools used were not age-appropriate and not aligned with teachers’ instructional goals and planning. The above information indicates that teachers in reception-year classes experience challenges in different forms.

1.7.3.3 Teaching and learning material for Grade R

Sinyei et al. (2012:2) and Atmore (2012:6) argue that for effective curriculum implementation, adequate and relevant materials should be provided according to the number of learners. In addition, Taole and Mohapi (2013:8) recommend that the resources should be in a language appropriate for children. Current studies share the same findings and indicate that there are insufficient resources for Grade R which then affects the teaching and learning process (Atmore, 2012:13; Moyo et al., 2012: 8; Taole & Mohapi, 2013:8).

Krishnaratne et al. (2013:40) acknowledge that, internationally, the availability of resources can help the learners to follow teachers’ instructions with ease. Additionally, they found that in rural schools of Philadelphia, teachers were trained intensively on how to use new material to pace lessons according to different learner abilities and needs. On the contrary, Mangwaya, Blignant and Pillay (2013:3) confirm that in Zimbabwe, reception-year teachers and learners operated in an environment where there were no indoor and outdoor materials and teachers had to make their own
resources using recycled and locally available material. Similarly, suitable books were in short supply in Kenya and teachers were encouraged to improvise by using locally available resources to teach music and movement in early childhood classrooms (Sinyei et al., 2012:5). Furthermore, the study also highlights the conditions of pre-primary classrooms as full of cracks and compromised by poor weather conditions. In certain instances, learners were taught under trees. Sinyei et al. (2012:5) argue that Grade R challenges in Zimbabwe affected quality teaching and learning and that educational planners and the Department of Education lacked capabilities to consider resource conditions in rural schools.

Atmore (2012:19) also mentions a challenge of infrastructure in South African schools, which also affect teaching and learning. Taole and Mohapi (2013:3) report that in some rural schools, Grade R learners share classrooms with Grade 1 learners because of the shortage of classrooms and this makes it difficult to apply the learning-through-play approach. The research also highlighted that vandalism of Grade R material by learners in upper grades was common and this led to a scarcity of materials in schools. Based on the literature reviewed, Grade R teachers continue to experience lack of teaching and learning materials, especially in rural contexts. This suggests that, if the challenge of resources in Grade R is not addressed, effective teaching and learning will be a problem and this will compromise a strong foundation in early childhood learning and teaching.

1.7.4 Monitoring and Support for Grade R Teaching and Learning

Taole and Mohapi (2013:5) state that Grade R teachers are somewhat compelled by their School Management Team (SMTs) to digress from their own teaching approaches and teach in the same way as their colleagues in upper grades. This clearly indicates that Grade R teachers might experience challenges in using appropriate and relevant teaching methodologies and that SMTs lack knowledge and understanding of what Grade R teaching and learning entails. Mangwaya et al. (2013:5), in their report on ECE in rural schools of Swaziland, indicate that SMTs reported that they were not trained on ECE learning programmes for monitoring and support. They highlight that SMTs identified teacher supervision as suitable support that is provided in Zimbabwe to ECE teachers and this approach improved communication on curriculum aspects between the SMT and the teachers. In the South
African context, through informal observations and interviews, SMTs experience the same challenges as their colleagues in Zimbabwe in supporting Grade R teaching and learning. Wessels (2011:63) recommends that when changes are put in place, teachers need to be supported to sustain the changes.

Mohapi (2014:4) identifies lack of support from SMTs as a challenge in most South African rural schools. Grade R teachers seemed not to get support from the SMTs in that, in some schools, they were not provided with suitable classroom materials. Meyer, Van der Vyver and Westhuizen (2014:61) conducted a study about caring school leadership in South African schools and concur that teachers received inadequate support and did not experience participative decision-making in their schools. Excell and Livingston (2012:7) highlight that the reason for lack of support lies in SMTs' limited knowledge and understanding of Grade R's unique requirements. Lack of support is identified as an obstacle in improving teaching and learning in rural schools (Jošić, Džinović & Ćirović, 2014:7). The researchers cited above emphasise that the responsibility of the SMTs is to strengthen monitoring and support to improve the quality of learner performance. Therefore, it is necessary to investigate the challenges facing Grade R teaching and learning and the influence of these challenges on learner performance.

1.7.5 Grade R Teacher Qualifications and Training

Taner and Engin-Demir (2011:93) and Chediel (2013:15) claim that the level of education and professional training influence the quality of teaching and learning. Research conducted by the International Labour Office in Geneva highlights that teachers in disadvantaged schools are deprived of quality training (ILO, 2012:37). The International Labour Organization (2012:45) indicates that teachers for ECD are employed on a contract basis, with limited or no professional training. This shows that there is a great failure in applying appropriate teaching and learning standards to ECE globally. Mangwaya et al. (2013:8) confirm that untrained reception-year teachers in rural primary schools in Zimbabwe were employed as ECD teachers.

Previously, Grade R teachers in the South Africa context were employed without requiring any qualifications (Excell, 2011:6; Mohapi, 2014:4). Currently, (in 2019) the DBE is considering qualifications that are appropriate for Grade R teachers. The Grade R research project conducted by the South African Institution for Distance Education
(SAIDE) highlights that there was no clear qualification for Grade R teachers in South Africa (DBE, 2015:45). According to SAIDE, there is lack of clear guidelines on qualifications which led each province deciding on its own requirements for employing Grade R teachers. For example, in the Western Cape Province qualifications such as Level 4 plus 3 years of ECD training were accepted, yet in the Eastern Cape, only Level 4 registration and a Level 5 qualification were accepted. A Level 6 diploma qualification was recommended yet the curriculum content of the qualification was not yet designed. Level 4 as a basic qualification for being a full ECD teacher was approved according to the National Qualifications Framework (NQF), although it was not recognised by the DBE or the South African Council for Educators (SACE) (Excell, 2011:59). The findings show that, in all countries, learner performance is impacted by the standard of teacher qualifications. It is necessary to understand the levels of Grade R teachers’ qualifications to align these with the quality of teaching and learning that is expected according to CAPS guidelines.

1.8 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study was framed by Vygotsky’s theory which emphasises teaching and learning based on a sociocultural approach in the classroom. The theories of play were also explored as they support a play-based approach in teaching and learning practices. The study was also influenced by the ideas of Freire who had a passion for the education of learners from disadvantaged communities. The following paragraphs explore Vygotsky’s theory, theories of play and Freire’s theory on Grade R teaching and learning strategies that teachers should adopt for effective teaching and learning in rural schools.

1.8.1 Vygotsky’s Theory

The Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), which is a principle of Vygotsky’s (1978:86) theory, highlights that effective teaching and learning should be in accordance with the level of child development. In Wessels’ (2011:36) view, ZPD is the difference that exists in children’s potential level of development in doing an activity independently and through the support from the teacher. Siyepu (2013:2) highlights poor learner performance in the South African disadvantaged provinces in mathematics. He believes that teachers can improve learner performance by using the concept of the ZPD to bridge the gap between what the learner can do with the support of the teacher
and without assistance. The Vygotsky theory underpins the ZPD which examines the mediating role of teachers in using the learning-through-play approach to improve learner performance in language and mathematics. The theory was relevant in this study as the study aimed at exploring the challenges that might hinder teaching and learning and the strategies which could be employed to improve learner performance to the extent where learners can work independently by demonstrating various skills and knowledge.

Yang (2013:1) concurs that early childhood teachers need to be skilful in their teaching to support learners according to their own levels of development. He also highlights learning-through-play as a teaching and learning approach which improves academic performance in early grades in China. This implies that to improve Grade R teaching and learning teachers are encouraged to be flexible planners, early identifiers of learner need and abilities, facilitators, assessors and supporters according to the level of learner development. The theory of social constructivism is relevant to this study as it promotes a concept of ‘scaffolding’ (Wood, Bruner & Ross, 1976:89) as a means of improving and reforming educational practices based on implementation of CAPS in the South African context. Looking at the two concepts of Vygotsky’s theory, ZPD and scaffolding, learners should be taught quality material that promotes mental processes within their age of development.

1.8.2 Theories of Play on Grade R Teaching and Learning

This section provides information about the importance of play in Grade R teaching and learning practices. The play theorists view learning through play as the best approach for young learners to learn in teaching and learning process (Bandura, 1977:12-23; Bruner, 1962:32; Froebel, 1875, as cited in Roszak, 2018:18; Piaget, 1972:38). Bandura (1972:45) elaborates that in play learners attain new knowledge and skills in areas such as vocabulary, reading and tolerance. Similarly, Bruner posits that for learners to develop in totality, they have to manipulate concrete resources so that they understand how to use them for discovery learning (Bruner, 1960:33). In the South African context, CAPS indicates that time for free play in Grade R learning environment should be provided, that could benefit learners to acquire more knowledge and understanding of concepts (Smit, 2015:16). In the case of the lack of resources in rural schools, Froebel suggests that teachers should be trained on how
to make their own resources for effective teaching and learning (Froebel, 1885, as cited in Roszak, 2018:153). The theories of play in teaching and learning are discussed in detail in Chapter 2.

1.8.3 Freire’s Theory on Grade R Teaching and Learning

This section provides a brief overview of the ideas of Freire towards the education of disadvantaged people. Freire (1970:81) argues that in teaching and learning, the teacher and the learner are both active partners who need to share knowledge and skills. In the context of teaching and learning, it appears that learning is a challenge that needs to be solved by the teacher and the learner. In his seminal work “The pedagogy of the oppressed”, Freire (1998:67) stresses that in teaching and learning, learners must play an important role by sharing knowledge attained from their sociocultural background. Freire’s (1972:43) idea is based on educating teachers to change their mindset and teaching strategies that focus on the ‘banking concept’ of education which is an approach that is teacher-centred and apply a problem-posing education which allows learners to share their views, knowledge and understanding in teaching and learning environment. It implies that learners are not empty vessels and passive recipient of information in their learning environment. Freire’s seminal work on pedagogy of the past in South African curriculum implementation is fully presented in Chapter 2.

1.9 CLARIFICATION OF CONCEPTS

- Early childhood development (ECD): Atmore (2012:3) explains that ECD refers to children from 0 to 9 years of age. The DBE focuses on 5 to 9 years of age. The Grade R focus in this study is on ages 4 to 6.
- ECE: The International Labour Organization (2012:71) defines ECE as a concept which refers to education of children from birth to 6 years before formal schooling in public schools.
- Grade R: Excell and Linington (2012:6) define Grade R as the first year in the Foundation Phase beginning from 4½ years old turning 5 by the end of June. Grade R is the first year in the Foundation Phase and the final year in the preschool level.
- CAPS: CAPS is a national curriculum policy document which guides teachers on the content to be taught in South African schools and suggests the strategies to be used for effective teaching (DBE, 2011a:3). This curriculum provides Grade R
teachers with content to be taught per term and per subject. The policy document also indicates the approach Grade R teachers should use for teaching each subject.

- Effective teaching and learning: Excell (2011:17) explains effective teaching and learning as the way teachers construct knowledge to support learners in conducive environments by providing all relevant sources of information which could help the learner to develop in various skills through planned activities. According to Tshiredo (2013:6), effective teaching is an approach for learning to take place with the purpose of assisting the child to learn. Effective learning is a positive outcome of what the child acquires from effective teaching in the classroom environment (Sakarneh & Nair, 2014: 11; Tshiredo, 2013: 26).

- Grade R Practitioner: The Grade R practitioner in this research is defined as an individual who works directly with reception-year learners in a primary school setting (Excell, 2011:87).

1.10 OUTLINE OF CHAPTERS

The study is organised and presented in seven chapters. Following this introductory chapter, Chapter 2 provides an overview of national and international literature relevant Grade R teaching and learning in rural schools. A theoretical framework based on the theories that relate to Grade R teaching and learning is also discussed. Chapter 3 fully discusses the research methodology and its components, including the research approach, site selection, sampling of participants to the study, research questions, the research design and methodology, data analysis process and quality criteria. The ethical considerations as a procedure to comply with the rules of the institutions were also discussed in detail. The research findings from semi-structured interviews are presented in Chapter 4. The findings from structured classroom observation are also presented in Chapter 5 and from document analysis in Chapter 6. In Chapter 7, I present the summary of the findings, limitations of the study, conclusions, recommendations and suggestions for further research.

1.11 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter has focused on the introduction and background of the study, the problem statement, significance of the study, research questions, concept clarification and chapter outline of the study. A brief outline of the theoretical framework which includes
theories of play and Freire’s pedagogy of the oppressed was presented. The aims and objectives based on the research questions were discussed. The chapter also gave a brief orientation of the research methodology and the literature review. The next chapter presents the literature review and the theoretical framework.
CHAPTER 2:
LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter 1 of this study presented an introduction and background context to the research study, the significance of the study, research questions, research aim, problem statement and research methodology, definition of terms, chapter division, theoretical framework and a brief literature review. The purpose of this chapter is to review the related literature to explore some of the challenges facing Grade R teaching and learning in rural schools and to identify the gaps in previous studies. This chapter also explores the influence of the challenges on effective teaching and learning in rural schools. The literature on the strategies to improve Grade R teaching and learning is also explored in this chapter. According to Onwuegbuzie, Leech and Collins (2012:4), qualitative researchers seek clarity from previously conducted studies and apply different approaches to achieve expected outcomes of their studies. I critically examine the claims made by the various scholars regarding some of the challenges facing Grade R teaching and learning in rural schools. Furthermore, I reflect on how their claims are warranted for my research. The key challenges facing Grade R teaching and learning internationally and nationally will be reviewed. The last part of this chapter discusses the theoretical framework underpinning this study.

The chapter is structured as follows: It addresses the South African curriculum, the implementation of Grade R learning programmes, Grade R curriculum implementation components, managing barriers to learning, supporting Grade R teachers’ experience, training for Grade R teachers and the theoretical framework.

2.2 THE SOUTH AFRICAN CURRICULUM

For the objectives of this study, it is important to explore the purpose and aims of CAPS. The readers need to know the curriculum in which this study is formulated. The following are the three purposes CAPS serves in order to build future South African citizens.
2.2.1 The Purposes for Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statements

According to the ECDBE (2012: 5), all teachers are mandated, regardless of socioeconomic situation, to perform the following activities:

- To equip learners, irrespective of their socioeconomic background, race, gender, physical ability or intellectual ability, with the knowledge, skills and values necessary for self-fulfillment and meaningful participation in society as citizens of a free country;
- Provide access to higher education;
- Facilitate the transition of learners from education institutions to the workplace.

These purposes give clear understanding of the quality of education that teachers need to strive for, so that their learners get maximum benefit in the classroom. Looking at the above purposes, everybody should have access to quality education, even Grade R learners in rural schools (Freire, 2000:87). It is the objective of this study to explore some of the challenges that might deprive young learners of access to quality education in South Africa.

2.2.2 Aims for CAPS

The Department of Basic Education (ECDBE, 2012:5) further identified seven aims teachers have to adhere to in implementing curriculum in South African education system for CAPS learners. These aims indicate the quality of the learner the education system of South Africa should produce regardless of family sociocultural background. Given the knowledge and understanding of the quality of education that is expected in South Africa, seven aims guided me on exploring some of the challenges facing Grade R teaching and learning in rural schools. The seven aims are listed and briefly discussed below to assist the readers to understand how teaching and learning in Grade R should be shaped to improve learner performance.

- Identify and solve problems and make decisions using critical and creative thinking.
- Work effectively as individuals and with others as members of a team.
- Organise and manage themselves and their activities responsibly and effectively.
- Collect, analyse, organise and critically evaluate information.
• Communicate effectively using visual, symbolic and / or language skills in various modes.
• Use science and technology effectively and critically showing responsibility towards the environment and the health of others.
• Demonstrate an understanding of the world as a set of related systems by recognising that problem-solving contexts do not exist in isolation.

Looking at the above aims, the question arises as to how Grade R teachers align their teaching as the aims of CAPS show that teachers who are well trained and knowledgeable in teaching Grade R curriculum content are needed. Mohapi (2014:6) confirms that reception year teachers lacked content knowledge in life skills, mathematics and language. In this regard, Mahan (2015:14) argues that some reception year teachers were excluded from CAPS training as they were employed on contract. I argue that, although in the Eastern Cape Grade R teachers were not yet permanently employed, those who were in the system were trained on CAPS. If content knowledge is a challenge, then, questions arise on how lack of content knowledge influences teaching and learning and what strategies are used to mitigate the challenge of content knowledge. For the purpose of this study, the quality of teacher’s content knowledge and skills obtained in training and their influence on teaching and learning need to be investigated.

Mohapi (2014:5), Atweh et al. (2014:9), Mahan (2015: 14) and Whitman (2015: 38) believe that Grade R content teaching and developmentally appropriate practices were incompatible. It seems that lack of subject content knowledge may lead teachers to teach content parts of their own choices and that may negatively affect the quality of knowledge and skills learners should acquire for a strong foundation for academic achievement and future development. This contradicts what the Education White Paper 5 highlights, namely, that the introduction of Grade R supports learners in early grades to acquire basic knowledge and skills for laying a solid foundation across the upper grades of schooling (Excell & Linington, 2012:3; International Labour Organization, 2012:14).

Based on the above claims, it is imperative that Grade R teachers should make sure that learners acquire basic knowledge and skills in all the three subjects (mathematics, language and life skills). In addition, the subject content knowledge needs to be
relevant to the national curriculum policy to enable learners in rural schools to be on the same level as other learners at the national level. Grade R is a national programme that requires all stakeholders to participate in supporting its implementation. Seemingly some of the aims may not be achieved in Grade R teaching and learning context. Therefore, teaching and learning becomes obstructive to learners from receiving a quality education.

A study conducted to explore systemic school improvement interventions in South Africa revealed that among the challenges facing teachers in South Africa was poor subject content knowledge (Jet Education Services, 2013:31). Andrich, Hill and Steenkamp (2015:1) concur that teachers' knowledge and skills are important to bridge the gap for children from disadvantaged communities. Whitman (2015:26) affirmed that, although the introduction of ECE in schools is a national programme, it is not properly addressed. My study, therefore, upholds a view to explore some of the challenges that affect Grade R teaching and learning and suggested strategies that could improve teaching and learning in rural context.

Atweh, Bose, Graven, Subramanian and Venkat (2014:20) and Pretorius (2014:53) highlight the importance of empowering teachers with content knowledge, to be competent in imparting knowledge and skills at all levels of education including the reception year. The aforementioned studies link well with the aims of CAPS as activities mentioned are creative parts of human activities in the social environment. Content knowledge is therefore key in fulfilling one of the aims of CAPS which emphasise that teachers' creative and innovative skills in teaching science and technology are required to instil responsibility in learners towards the environment and the health of others. Based on my observations, the reception year content knowledge is not properly addressed by the stakeholders who participate in curriculum development. The content for teaching Grade R learners needs to link the school and home environment.

The following paragraphs explore the three Grade R curriculum learning programmes. The purpose and aims of the South African curriculum are achieved through the teaching of these three subjects (language, mathematics and life skills).
2.3 IMPLEMENTING GRADE R CURRICULUM LEARNING PROGRAMMES

This section of the study reviews language, mathematics and life skills teaching and learning from which teachers have to ensure that Grade R learners acquire the basic knowledge and skills that would bridge the gap when they progressed to Grade 1. The skills learners should learn are stated in the CAPS (DoE, 2012:24). The policy document determines the basic skills, knowledge, values and attitudes Grade R learners need to acquire before they progress to Grade 1. Lemmer and Meier (2015:4) maintain that the purpose of the Grade R curriculum, as a national programme, is to close content gaps for children from disadvantaged families to improve academic performance. In addition, Van Alphane (2013:1) argues that Foundation Phase learners should be taught to be critical thinkers through language, mathematics and life skills. The main focus of Grade R teaching and learning is, however, on the content to be learned and the approach to be used in teaching the content. The context in which teaching and learning is conducted should also be considered as a determining factor for quality teaching and learning. The following paragraphs review the literature on teaching language, mathematics and life skills.

2.3.1 Teaching Language in Grade R

This section explores early language teaching and learning with special reference to Grade R in rural schools. According to Gray and MacBlain (2012:12), young children including Grade R need to recognise written symbols and the sounds that are attributed to these symbols to be able to write. Mahan (2015:27) highlights that the curriculum outcomes are observed when Grade R learners can recognise letter sounds and know that words are made up of letters and can copy short sentences or words written by their teachers. Central to the importance of language in Grade R, the content and strategies for teaching and learning should be a starting point to track learner performance in language.

The reviewed literature indicates that most countries in the world experience language development in reception years as a challenge (Bruwer, Hartell & Steyn, 2014:21; Louw & Wium, 2011:3; Mahan, 2015: 27). The following paragraphs review the challenges facing Grade R in language and how these challenges influence teaching and learning in various countries including South Africa.
2.3.1.1 Teaching language in South African context:

In primary schools of South Africa, the poor performance of Grade 1 learners in language is often associated with poor language development in Grade R. The identified language gap between Grade R and Grade 1 is often highlighted by Grade 1 teachers when learners from Grade R could not write even their names. This study explores whether the Grade R language content specifications are adhered to in the area selected for the study. In South African classrooms, Bruwer et al. (2014:21) argue that learners in Grade 1 have limited language use and are incompetent in communication skills at their level. Bruwer et al. (2014:21) further elaborate that learners could not cope well in language activities in class. Findings also noted that learners in Grade R had progressed with little language competency. According to Mohangi, Krog, Stephens and Nel (2016:27), learners had missed some of language content in Grade R as these are the basic skills and knowledge that are acquired before learners begin Grade 1. It is important that Grade R teacher language content knowledge be investigated to assess the level at which language is used for support measures.

The researchers confirm that Grade R learners in rural schools show little progress in language components and this affects learners' language vocabulary and they become unable to understand language, communicate or follow instructions properly (Mohangi et al., 2016:26; Pretorius, 2014:53; Soma, 2011:26). These findings suggest that Grade 1 teachers should work hard to pursue the aims and objectives that are outlined in curriculum policy documents for Grade 1 (DBE, 2011a:8). As language components are important even for learning other subjects, learners should be supported to develop language competency as early as in Grade R.

As an experienced Grade R subject adviser in the DBE, I have observed that language development in the early grades is not taken seriously by teachers. This study emanates from the belief that challenges facing Grade R teaching and learning in language should be known in order to provide relevant strategies for teaching and learning. Grade R curriculum policy encourages teachers to use integrated teaching and learning through the play approach and in their mediation of language for effective teaching and learning (DBE, 2011a:20). The policy also states that teachers need to follow a balanced, flexible language-rich daily programme to make language teachable
and learnable in all the language components to be taught in Grade R. Seemingly teachers need to teach all the language components equally, following time allocated in the CAPS as per component. In addition, to address barriers to learning, teachers should demonstrate their competence in language teaching (Louw & Wium, 2011:1). It appears that, in order to bridge the gap in language teaching and learning, the language should be taught in Grade R by knowledgeable and competent teachers. This argument emanates from the current predicament in South African research studies that there is a low literacy rate in the country and this crisis is observed among learners who are not taught in their home language (Louw, & Wium, 2011:3; Pretorius & Spaull, 2016: 2). In view of the above, this study explored how teachers adhere to language policy guidelines in Grade R as language appears to be a challenge that faces teaching and learning in rural schools.

Against the background of the low literacy and numeracy rate, therefore, Grade R teachers need to ensure that all language components and mathematics content areas are taught and learned according to Grade R level in preparation for Grade 1 curriculum. Soma (2011:44) points out that the failure to support learners in their home language to develop language skills suggests that teachers experience challenges when teaching language in class. Bruwer et al. (2014:18) affirm that learners should be given an opportunity to increase vocabulary in the language of instruction and develop the ability to express their thoughts fluently to benefit from formal teaching in Grade 1. Seemingly, language is the core subject that needs to be taught effectively as mathematics and life skills concepts are taught in the language of the medium of instruction.

2.3.1.2 Teaching language in Kenyan context

The case of language in the reception year in Kenya shows that language recognition differs from country to country. In Kenya, Jacinta and Rotich (2015:8) report that ECE improves learner performance in the upper grades. The study conducted on the impact of ECE on pupils’ learning in primary schools in Kenya revealed that learners who attended ECD follow instructions easily, recognised numbers and developed reading and writing skills. Similarly, Otieno, Aloka and Odongo (2015:2) concur that ECE in Kenya lays a strong foundation in the education of learners. It is evident that the purpose of Grade R in Kenya is realised fully as parents and teachers work together
towards a common goal to achieve better learner performance. Exploring Grade R teaching and learning in rural school contexts, requires researchers to understand some of the challenges experienced in these contexts and to explore effective strategies of addressing the challenges.

The argument presented above on language teaching and learning highlights the importance of introducing early language skills. Developing emergent literacy enhances the development of knowledge and literacy skills which put emphasis on home language. Mkhabela (2016:29) highlights the importance of teaching in Grade R in home language. Language and mathematics cannot be separated in my research project because mathematics uses language to explain concepts. These two subjects are also Annual National Assessment (ANA) subjects that are externally evaluated in Grade 1.

2.3.2 Teaching Emergent Mathematics

According to Helmbold (2014:10), mathematics has been recognised both internationally and nationally as an important subject to be taught from the early years of schooling. The ineffective teaching and learning of mathematics was noted in Chicago, California and in South Africa (Atweh, Bose, Graven & Venkat, 2014:9). Whitman (2015:16) advises that early mathematics education needs to be designed by curriculum specialists to support learners in mathematics in the early years. The above suggestions indicate that teachers need to start teaching mathematics concepts in Grade R, before learners start formal schooling. It implies that such teachers are expected to have mathematical content knowledge and understanding of the basic mathematics concepts that are taught in Grade R. Mutodi and Ngirande (2014:67) highlight that teacher’s failure to introduce mathematics concepts may deprive learners of access to higher order mathematics from an early age.

The study reported that, internationally, early mathematics skills in low-income countries are below performance thresholds. It is noted that reception-year teachers taught concepts that were easy for them but other concepts were left unattended. It is evident that reception year in some countries progress to next grades with a content gap in mathematics (Norbury, Gooch, Baird, Charman, Simonoff & Pickles, 2015: 27; Ryan, Whitebook & Cassidy, 2014:4; Whitman, 2015: 144).
The following paragraphs review some of the challenges facing Grade R teaching and learning of mathematics in South Africa, California, Chicago and New Zealand.

2.3.2.1 Teaching mathematics in the South African context

In South Africa, mathematics is the second subject in the Foundation Phase which has a high failure rate from Grade 1 to Grade 3. The blame for the failure rate in mathematics is laid at the door of Grade R teachers who failed to introduce mathematics concepts in teaching and learning practices. Although the research findings indicate that learners perform poorly in mathematics in some countries, South African learners are the most badly affected (Mkabela, 2016: 26; Mutodi & Ngirande, 2014:67). The mathematics CAPS provides five specific content areas to be taught in Grade R, namely: numbers, operations and relationships; patterns, functions and algebra; space and shape; measurement and data handling (DBE, 2011b:9-11). Based on my work experience as subject adviser, mathematics content areas often pose challenges for teachers. The lack of understanding of these content areas prompted the researcher to explore some areas that are not well implemented in schools. These areas include mental mathematics, grouping and sharing at the level of Grade R learners. It is noted that Grade R teachers do not use appropriate resources in mathematics lessons to allow learners to solve problems.

The noteworthy evidence of ineffective teaching and learning of mathematics in South Africa is revealed by Mohapi (2014:6). The findings of the study revealed that teachers were uncertain about the mathematics content knowledge they needed (Mohapi, 2014:6). The findings are congruent with those of Helmbold (2014:21) who investigated school readiness in Grade R and found that many pre-primary teachers doubted themselves in teaching mathematics. The studies point out that pre-primary teachers felt that they were unable to teach mathematics in an enjoyable and appealing way that would develop learners’ basic mathematics skills. It is based on this that the study sought to explore the mathematical content gap in teachers in rural school context.

In the South African context, researchers acknowledge that the teaching of emergent mathematics in Grade R is of a low standard (Atweh et al., 2014:9; Feza, 2014b:5; Helmbold, 2014:195; Mkabela, 2016:27; Siyepu, 2013:1). The results of the ANA in 2014 in Grades 1 to 3 are evidence of this. The 2014 ANA results revealed that Grade 1 learners missed some skills in basic counting and as such were, for example, unable
to divide twelve biscuits among three people (DBE, 2014c:14). It is evident from this report that these learners progressed to Grade 1 with a content gap in mathematical activities. Furthermore, it seems that learners were not exposed to practical grouping and sharing activities in Grade R and even in Grade 1. The above findings are aligned with the teacher content knowledge gap and the lack of relevant resources to teach some concepts (Mkhabela, 2016:29).

Machaba and Lenyai (2014:42) confirm that there are few studies conducted on the teaching of mathematics in disadvantaged Foundation Phase schools in South Africa. This study aims to bridge the gap by exploring Grade R teaching and learning in rural schools with special emphasis on the challenges facing such context. The study also aims to address some of the strategies that could improve Grade R teaching and learning in mathematics. These are the reasons that compelled me to include mathematics in this study.

2.3.2.2 Teaching mathematics in California

In California, reception-year teachers thought that mathematics teaching was meant to start from Grade 1. The reception-year teachers were faced with challenges of applying strategies for teaching mathematics in ECD classrooms and this implied that learners could move to Grade 1 with a mathematical content knowledge gap. Ryan et al. (2014:4), in their research on strengthening mathematics related teaching practices in California, found that teachers often underestimated learners’ mathematical abilities. The study further revealed that such teachers were afraid of teaching mathematics and they did not see the importance of teaching mathematics in the pre-primary grade. These teachers did not focus much on teaching mathematics formally in reception year classes. Teachers found it difficult to teach mathematics content because of a lack of their own deep foundational understanding of mathematics. Their study established that lack of content knowledge has a negative impact on developing teachers’ self-esteem and learners miss some mathematics basic knowledge and skills as early as Grade R. These findings show that the challenges facing Grade R teaching and learning in mathematics should be investigated.
2.3.2.3 Teaching mathematics in Chicago

The similar challenge of teaching mathematics in reception year in California was also observed in Chicago. Similarly, a study by Whitman (2015:20) in Chicago revealed that reception year teachers were inadequately prepared for teaching mathematics. The study highlights that teachers portrayed little content knowledge in mathematics concepts. Mkhabela (2016:35) argues that teachers cannot teach what they do not know and understand. The recommendation was that teachers be provided with training in mathematical concepts (Whitman, 2015:144). The teachers’ lack of understanding of mathematical concepts and application of strategies for teaching young children showed that teachers were not equipped with knowledge and skills for teaching reception-year learners. Seemingly, mathematics in reception classes was not adequately taught in Chicago. In my view, content knowledge should be universal among teachers and it needs to be tracked and addressed irrespective of the grades teachers teach. It is against this background that my study seeks to understand some of the challenges facing Grade R teaching and learning and how teachers handle the challenges. Seemingly, the mathematical content knowledge of teachers is one of the challenges that needs to be investigated in this study to provide curriculum planners with information that would help them devise intervention programmes to improve performance in mathematics.

2.3.2.4 Teaching mathematics in New Zealand

The situation of mathematics content knowledge in New Zealand is different from that in Chicago and California. O’Brien (2014:2) investigated strategies developed by teachers in teaching mathematics in ECE in New Zealand. He argues that mathematics in ECD is part of holistic learning. Teachers use various strategies like modelling, posing questions and demonstrating concepts using resources that fostered incidental mathematical conversations in the classroom context (O’Brien, 2014:4). The above findings are relevant to my study since it seeks some strategies that are supportive to teachers in classroom context. Some teachers will benefit from these strategies.

According to O’Brien (2014:4), mathematical conservations are used in a project approach form, giving learners an opportunity to talk about mathematic concepts such as money, time-telling and numbers while working on an activity. Learners benefited from mathematics activities through a playful approach as activities were linked with
their social life. Teachers portrayed early childhood competency in teaching mathematics. Teachers were also able to utilise resources to foster curiosity and extend interest of learners in mathematics. This implies that the instructional strategies teachers use and the availability of resources have greater influence on learner performance (Firmender, Gavin & Mc Coach, 2014:5). Therefore, mathematics needs to be taught in early childhood classrooms. The above studies are aligned with CAPS implementation in South Africa which aims at engaging learners in their education to become responsible future citizens (DBE, 2011a:5) Therefore, it appears that effective teaching and learning in mathematics require teachers to develop sound instructional strategies, knowledge and availability of resources.

In summary, the teaching of mathematics in the South African, Californian and Chicago contexts, provides an insight that emergent mathematics is inadequately implemented in most Grade R classrooms. The situation confirmed that learners will continue progressing to Grade 1 with content knowledge gaps if the teaching of emergent mathematics in Grade R is not effectively done. Having teachers with little or no content knowledge in teaching emergent mathematics in Grade R means that learners will miss some foundational concepts before they progress to Grade 1.

The next paragraph reviews the teaching and learning of life skills in Grade R classrooms. Life skills is the third subject which is offered in Grade R and there is an understanding that it strengthens an implementation of language and mathematics in the grade.

2.3.3 Teaching Life Skills in Grade R

According to ECDBE (2012:3), life skills in the Foundation Phase is a subject that helps teachers to improve learner performance in mathematics and language. Life skills is also a combination of other subjects that are studied in upper grades such as economic and management sciences, arts and culture, social sciences, natural sciences and technology (ECDBE, 2012:15). Therefore, teachers in the Foundation Phase need to be experts in life skills teaching and learning (Sheldon, 2014:16). This is the reason that my study explores some of the challenges Grade R teachers experience in teaching life skills to strengthen implementation of other subjects. The following paragraphs review the implementation of life skills in the South African and in the international context.
2.3.3.1 Teaching life skills in South Africa

The CAPS for life skills provides four study areas that need to be taught in the Foundation Phase, namely, beginning knowledge, personal and social well-being, creative arts and physical education (ECDBE, 2012:8). As Sheldon (2014:16) indicates, teachers in Grade R need to be competent in teaching life skills to meet the requirements for CAPS implementation. The reason for exploring the implementation of the life skills programme emanates from the fact that the themes that are used for planning Grade R teaching and learning are life skills themes. My perception is that physical education, performing and creative arts as study areas of life skills are not taught adequately in schools. Seemingly, teachers are experiencing challenges in those study areas. In my understanding as a teacher, the fine and gross motor skills are developed from these study areas. These study areas support teachers in teaching emergent reading, handwriting and creative writing. Therefore, teachers need to teach them appropriately.

In South Africa, a study on learners’ school readiness in Grade 1 indicated poor development of the gross and fine motor skills of many learners which results in low muscle tone and poor balance (Bruwer et al., 2014:18). In addition, Bruwer et al. (2014:18) argue that learning is affected because learners struggle in colouring and cutting activities required in the Grade 1 curriculum. The study also revealed that learners are slow in completing activities and this often leads to incomplete and untidy work. The influence of ineffective teaching and learning of life skills is acknowledged by Janse Van Rensburg (2015:3) who states that Grade R teachers face challenges in developing learners’ perceptual skills, learning through body movement and emotional development and thus learners’ academic performance in Grade 1 is affected. I have noticed that in South Africa, since life skills is a non-examinable subject throughout the system, it is not given due attention and even the National Development Plan does not address life skills. In this study, teacher content knowledge in life skills needs to be investigated as the CAPS stresses that the subject strengthens language and mathematics implementation in the Foundation Phase (ECDBE, 2012:3).

2.3.3.2 Teaching life skills in Malawi

Chirwa and Naidoo (2014:4) investigated the teaching of life skills in Malawi. They state that the life skills subject is non-examinable and not supervised by school management
and that made teachers not to take it as an important subject. The findings revealed that teaching life skills as a subject was not seriously recognised throughout the education system. The study concluded that learners lacked life skills content knowledge and their gross and fine motor skills did not develop according to their age expectations. In this study, I investigate the role of HODs in monitoring Grade R teaching and learning programmes in rural schools.

2.3.3.3 Teaching life skills in Kenya

A similar challenge of effective life skills implementation in schools is observed in Kenya by Wanyama and Quay (2014:6). The curriculum for teaching and learning physical education in Kenya was available but it was infrequently implemented because content knowledge and insufficient resource materials to teach physical education were a challenge. It appeared that physical education was not much valued by the department of education in Kenya in so much that the instructional time was limited compared with other subjects. Foundation Phase learners require engagement with physical activities aimed at developing their talents in music and for sport activities (Kitivui, 2016:5). In this study, there is a need to explore the strategies Grade R teachers use to teach life skills as stipulated in the CAPS. The availability of resources should be investigated as life skills activities demand them.

2.3.3.4 Teaching life skills in Australia

In contrast with the above findings, some countries value life skills as a major subject, unlike the situation of Kenya where it is treated as a minor subject. In Australia, physical education was the key subject in teaching and learning and was guided by the Victoria Essential Learning Standards per grade (Wanyama & Quay, 2014:6). In addition, the contact time was two to three hours per week for 3- to 6-year-old children. Furthermore, in recognising life skills as a subject, teacher underwent university training of four years for teaching physical education in Australia. Teachers worked in collaboration with associations, organisation of school events, parental involvement and through the political structure for support (Wanyama & Quay, 2014:6). According to the study, learner performance improved because learners had an opportunity to choose activities that developed them in totality. The physical education curriculum was therefore based on a variety of practical activities. The study acknowledges that the life skills subject needs to be fully recognised for improving learner performance across
other subjects. Therefore, this study explores functionality of strategies the DBE has established to support Grade R teachers in teaching life skills.

Seemingly, the challenge of teaching life skills as a subject is a serious problem in Grade R in many countries, including South Africa. Previous studies show that life skills for supporting and strengthening teaching and learning of mathematics and language needs to be considered (Bruwer et al., 2014:18; Chikutuma & Mawere, 2013:3; Janse Van Rensburg, 2015:3; Wanyama & Quay, 2014:6). Clearly, life skills as a subject prepares learners for life as it equips them with basic skills and knowledge for social life. The importance of life skills is observed in fantasy play where learners use language they dramatize and that leads to the development of cognitive skills which help them to develop problem-solving skills that are academically required. Life skills as a subject also prepares Grade R learners to be emotionally ready and socially competent when they start formal schooling. It implies that the development of Grade R life skills is fundamental to progress without failing in other grades of the Foundation Phase if the subject is taught effectively. The importance of life skills in teaching and learning mathematics and language in Grade R needs to be part of my study.

2.4 GRADE R CURRICULUM IMPLEMENTATION COMPONENTS

The Grade R curriculum is part of the Foundation Phase curriculum as outlined in the Revised National Curriculum Statement R-9 of 2002. This has been strengthened through the caps for Grade R-12 that was implemented in 2012 in the Foundation Phase. Grade R teachers are required to plan according to the daily programme (DBE, 2011a:22). This section of the study explores some of the challenges facing effective Grade R teaching and learning by looking at the components teachers need to consider in their implementation of CAPS in complying with requirements of the daily programme.

2.4.1 Grade R Planning for Teaching and Learning

Teaching and learning are based on the content that is prescribed in the CAPS for mathematics, life skills and language. Teachers need to acquaint themselves with the content and strategies in these documents for effective teaching and learning. Soma (2011:28) argues that the planning for Grade R learner activities should develop learners' cognitive, emotional and social abilities and prepare them for formal
schooling. Proper planning involves the content that highlights the skills and knowledge to be learned and the remedial plan to support learners in understanding the concepts (Reche, Bundi, Riungu & Mbugua, 2012:4). To plan for learner activities, teachers need to adhere to the timetable that indicates the daily activities to be done (DBE, 2011b:20; ECDBE, 2012:5; Mahan, 2015:26). Teachers need to orientate themselves to the content of a daily programme to ensure that all activities of the day are done.

This study focuses on how Grade R teachers deal with planning on CAPS to accommodate learner needs in their classrooms following the promulgation of Education White Paper 6 in 2001. This is a policy that mandates teachers to consider diverse learner needs in planning their teaching and learning programmes. The paragraphs below review literature on planning for teaching and learning in rural schools at national and at international level.

2.4.1.1 Planning for teaching and learning in South African context

In South African context, planning is guided by the principle of integration and play-based learning as stipulated in the CAPS. The principle is guided by the themes derived from life skills topics for planning mathematics and literacy activities through teacher-guided and free play indoor and outdoor activities. The importance of planning for effective teaching and learning is endorsed by Soma (2011). In her research, Soma (2011:41) emphasises that if the classroom environment is well planned, it becomes a very powerful tool and can be used as a knowledge-building instrument. According to CAPS, effective teaching and learning requires thorough planning of activities outlined in the daily programme (ECDBE, 2012:9). This study examines planning that Grade R teachers adopt for effective teaching and learning and that can benefit all learners. In understanding effective teaching and learning, planning should cater for all learners.

Taole and Mohapi (2013:2) concur that teachers should create opportunities for young learners to learn effectively in both indoor and outdoor activities. As a principle, Grade R teachers must make sure that the classroom environment is conducive to learning by providing learning materials and learning activities that support school readiness and classroom space for various play areas such as a book area, fantasy, blocks, creative art and a discovery table. Helmbold (2014:12) argues that well-planned adult-guided activities result in good learner performance even in mathematics. Grade R teaching and learning is intensive and requires teachers who are trained and
passionate about Grade R teaching and learning approaches. Therefore, my study investigates the influence of lesson planning on effective teaching and learning in their respective rural schools.

Helmbold (2014:110) investigated Grade R teacher-directed play in the development of mathematical concepts in South Africa. The findings illustrate that in South Africa, teacher-initiated activities were fewer than expected. It was evident that teachers did not follow a daily programme as outlined in the CAPS. Clearly, if teachers do not use time stipulated in the CAPS, their planning would be scanty and some concepts would not be taught. The content coverage would be compromised.

A similar study by Taole and Mohapi (2014:5) on rural Grade R teachers found that SMTs demanded Grade R teachers to use formal timetables like Grade 1 to Grade 3 instead of a daily programme. They also report that Grade R teachers were to plan lessons in the same way as teachers from Grade 1 to Grade 3. The study suggests that Grade R instructional planning was not properly done in schools. Although some Grade R teachers might be aware of the planning that was expected, the SMTs’ higher expectations confused Grade R teachers in that planning in Grade R is flexible and should not follow a formal timetable. In this sense, SMTs lacked a deep insight into what Grade R planning entails. SMTs’ expectations contradicted with what Grade R teachers were expected to plan in accordance with CAPS and how they were trained for effective Grade R learning programmes.

The above studies do not suggest the strategies teachers can use to improve teaching and learning. Therefore, my study needs to investigate the influence and strategies teachers use to improve teaching and learning in their respective schools. The following sections will review how teachers deal with planning in international context.

2.4.1.2 Planning for teaching and learning in Kenyan context

In some countries like Kenya, planning is still a challenge in improving learner performance. Reche et al. (2012:4) investigated primary education in Kenya. The findings inform that teachers’ poor prior preparation resulted in poor learner performance in schools. In their study, Reche et al. (2012:129) reported that teachers were supervised once a term by their HODs and lesson plans were not observed on a daily basis. This suggests that when teachers are supervised by HODs who do not
have a complete comprehension of the importance of planning, they tend to plan content of their choice. In addition, the study highlights that the education of young children was of less value in Kenya. Furthermore, it was clear that teachers sometimes taught concepts that were not in the prescribed content. The results of the study portray that planning was not monitored and this is assumed to be the main cause of poor learner performance in Kenya.

The above study is relevant to my study which explores some of the challenges that are facing Grade R teaching and learning. The case of Kenya suggests that if planning for teaching and learning is not monitored, poor learning outcomes should be expected. The next section reviews quality of planning for teaching and learning in England.

2.4.1.3 Planning for teaching and learning in England

In regard to planning, compared to South Africa and Kenya, the quality of planning in England suggests that reception year teaching and learning was carefully considered and improved learner performance in the higher grades. Siraj and Taggart (2014:20) explored effective teaching and learning in England and found that teachers who planned for their teaching and learning could manage classroom routines, use resources effectively, use instructional time and cater for individual learner needs. According to Siraj and Taggart (2014:18), the lessons planned were learner-centred and encouraged learners to become self-reliant. The study also indicated that those teachers who were less prepared were unable to manage time for teaching and learning and their learners were unable to fit well into the daily routine (Siraj & Taggart, 2014:33). The findings highlight that teachers’ unpreparedness led them to experience low self-esteem in their teaching. The study fits well into my project because the aims of CAPS are intended to develop learners who will be self-reliant in the future. The study needs to highlight the strategies to support or engage those teachers who were unprepared to plan teaching and learning.

It appeared that schools in England adhered to the international view of implementing quality ECE although some teachers were still experiencing a challenge in planning. Planning is emphasised as the key in managing curriculum implementation in the classroom context. The evidence gathered from South Africa, Kenya and England seems to show that planning deserves more consideration in early grades. This
proposes that planning for effective teaching and learning should be monitored on daily basis.

2.4.2 Teaching and Learning Approach

This section explores the teaching and learning approach teachers should use for Grade R in rural schools. In Grade R, play-based learning is valued and it involves teacher-guided and learner-initiated learning in the classroom and outside the classroom. In this study, teaching and learning approach refers to ideal interaction that enables both the teacher and the learner to engage in classroom activities. The following paragraphs explore how Grade R teachers use the approach in their teaching and learning in the rural school context nationally and internationally.

2.4.2.1 Teaching and learning approach in South African context

The approaches Grade R teachers need to use in implementing curriculum are in the CAPS and these approaches are in the form of play. In this study, teaching and learning approach refers to ideal interaction that enables both the teacher and the learner to engage in classroom activities. The play-based approach that is used in teaching and learning needs to be learner-centred and the learning environment needs to be conducive (Aromstam & Braund, 2015:2). It implies that in order for the play-based approach to be successfully implemented, it needs teachers with clear knowledge and understanding of Grade R teaching and learning content and context. In my understanding, the conducive environment needs to be safe and have all relevant resources, including infrastructure, furniture and open space.

Taole and Mohapi (2013:1) indicate that for effective teaching and learning teachers need to apply different play-based activities in various learning situations to ensure that learners are developed holistically. These scholars argue that play-based approaches require teachers to use various teaching strategies that cater for the individual needs of learners. This view is in line with education policy which emphasises that teaching and learning need to consider different learner abilities (DBE, 2011:d:6). The view also supports CAPS principles which promote the use of various teaching strategies to give learners an opportunity to participate in learning. The teaching strategies involve group work, individual and peer work through indoor and outdoor, structured and free-play activities. Teachers need to be competent in the play-based approach as it is regarded
as an appropriate approach for effective teaching and learning. In analysing the researchers’ views, the effective application of the play-based approach in the Grade R classroom improves learner performance as the approach engages learners in activities that require their physical participation.

Soma (2011:27) argues that the play-based approach as a principle in the early childhood classroom environment needs to be used as a vehicle to provide the Grade R learner with opportunities to achieve different cognitive, emotional and social outcomes in preparation for school readiness. According to Soma (2011:27), Grade R learners are still in the process of being introduced to activities that the Grade 1 curriculum will require. Therefore, the basic skills to be acquired in Grade R need to be approached with a learning-through-play approach. The approach needs teachers who are passionate in dealing with young children. In my assumptions as a Grade R subject adviser, not all teachers adopt this approach in their teaching and learning practices. My assumptions lead to the need to investigate the actual cause of ignoring the play-based approach by Grade R teachers.

In South African context, Imenda (2014:96) conducted a study on the promotion and benefits of play in the Foundation Phase and reported that teachers used various activities in applying learning-through-play approaches in classroom practice to improve language, mathematics and life skills. Learners developed self confidence in working in groups, such as making car models with wire, drawing and colouring and lots of indoor activities. It is evident that the play-based approach was planned and applied in teaching and learning practices. Although the study showed the play-based approach to be effective in classroom practices, there were weaknesses that teachers may not have observed in their application of the play-based approach. These aspects are revealed in the ANA diagnostic report, an instrument to measure learner performance in Grade 1, which highlighted that mathematics and language were not properly taught (DBE, 2014c:40). Some components which posed challenges included number sense and data handling and sequencing of events and phonics. These are some of the basic knowledge and skills learners must acquire in early grades. It is evident that the research should be done on how the play-based approach is applied to improve mathematics and language in rural school contexts.
It was also noted that an understanding of the play-based approach in most primary schools in South Africa is still a challenge (Taole & Mohapi, 2013:4; Van Alphen, 2013:20). The study noted that Grade R teachers were teaching in multi-grade settings where more than one grade was accommodated in one class. Classroom space was too small for learners to explore the learning environment and manipulate resources effectively. Teachers reported that time for teaching Grade R was very limited and that resulted in their using one teaching method which was suitable for Grade 1 only. Combining the two grades deprives Grade R learners with an opportunity to learn freely. To my knowledge, although the play-based approach fits both grades, the approach and content are not the same. The Grade R classroom layout is composed of various learning areas which determines what needs to be taught in the classroom as per the learning programme and Grade 1 has a different layout. The previous studies did not reveal much about the outcomes of learning in situations with multi-grade classrooms (Taole & Mohapi, 2013:4; Van Alphen, 2013:20).

The above literature confirms the study which indicates that play is disappearing from South African rural reception-year classrooms (Ogunyemi & Ragpot, 2015:2). The study also suggests that the scholars need to investigate the challenges affecting play-based approach in the classroom in order to maintain the status of play in ECE. Therefore, my study seeks to investigate some of the challenges experienced in using play-based approach and their influence in the Grade R classroom on learner performance.

A similar study by Mahan (2015:5) in South Africa acknowledges that Grade R learners in schools are taught and treated like Grade 1 to Grade 3 learners in the classroom environment by teachers and SMTs. The study revealed that Grade R learners are not given an opportunity to manipulate the resources according to the reception-year level of development which is based on the learning-through-play approach. It implies that if Grade R teachers had to please other teachers and SMTs, they had to shift from the strategies prescribed in the CAPS policy document for Grade R teaching and learning to the level of the Foundation Phase. That would then mean teachers needed to do away with the Grade R learning-through-play approach. For example, the findings of the study by Mahan (2015:6) revealed that parents and staff members expected reception-year learners to write formal tasks and tests as if they were in the upper grades, yet in the reception year there are no formal tasks or tests (DBE, 2011a:21).
The above findings suggest further investigation is needed on SMT content knowledge and policy understanding about Grade R curriculum programmes.

Another challenge noted by Taole and Mohapi (2013:1) in applying the play-based approach in teaching and learning practices was to teach big class numbers. Grade R teachers were faced with big numbers yet their training did not empower them with necessary skills to manage such big classes. The learning outcomes of the play-based approach are highlighted by Moalosi (2013:4) who argues that teachers find it difficult to apply the learning-through-play approach in big classes and may not have time to scaffold learning with many learners. The situation of Grade R learners in big classes is detrimental to their learning. The question arises as to what strategies Grade R teachers use to ensure that CAPS outcomes are effectively achieved under such circumstances. The lack of play opportunities in the Grade R classroom indicates that some aims of curriculum that provide learners with an opportunity to access education are not implemented. This is clear evidence that there are some rural schools which do not apply a play-based approach and that would mean that Grade R teaching and learning does not effectively prepare learners for Grade 1.

The current practices in South Africa provide evidence that SMTs and teachers in mainstream rural schools lack knowledge and understanding of Grade R teaching and learning approaches. The situation may result in teachers shifting from what they know for compliance to principals and their colleagues of the Foundation Phase. This study will inform the principals on learning approach that is expected in Grade R classroom as they are not the product of Grade R.

In view of the reviewed literature about learning through play approach, teachers are aware of the play-based- approach but do not know how it can be effectively applied. The lack of play-based opportunities in Grade R classrooms contradicts with the CAPS teaching approach as teachers should engage learners in various activities that could develop learners holistically. This study provides Grade R teachers with strategies on how to apply play-based teaching and learning in their respective classrooms to make learning fun and enjoyable for improving mathematics and language.
2.4.2.2 Teaching and learning approach in England

The situation of Grade R in England is similar to the one in South Africa. Student teachers at Cambridge Primary in England affirmed that in their teaching practice reception year teachers ignored play-based activities and very few teachers applied them (Rose & Rogers, 2012:6). The findings indicate that 95 out of 100 teachers confirmed that the play-based curriculum for reception year learners was compromised. In supporting their findings, teachers stated that reception year learners worked in a formal classroom environment like Grade 1. Reception-year teachers also stated that they were pressurised to adopt formal approaches by parents and staff members who believed that reception-year children must achieve specific skills before they start formal schooling. The idea of parents and staff members contradicted what the curriculum documents state about what to teach and how to teach in the reception year (ECDBE,2012:56).

In reception year, the teaching and learning approach is based on learning-through-play. Learners acquire knowledge and skills in the process of play. In other words, learners need to be supported according to their ability to learn towards the expected learning outcome (Vygotsky, 1978:45). Parents and staff members appear lacking knowledge and understanding about ECD approaches to teaching and learning. Rose and Rogers (2012:4) suggest that parents and SMTs require training on play-based approaches. I fully agree with the above views and the highlighted challenges need to be further investigated in South African context to determine the influence of principals and parents on effective teaching and learning and how teachers handle those situations in their schools.

2.4.2.3 Teaching and learning approach in Zimbabwe

Chikutuma and Mawere (2013:9) note that teachers in Zimbabwe focused much on activities that are more inclined to intellectual development and demanding drilling than learning through exploration and play. Drilling makes learners forget information learned and sometimes they become bored when they feel that concepts are too abstract for them. Learners in ECD need activities that engage them in playing and that help them gain meaning and understanding of the concepts. Chikutuma and Mawere (2013:9) argued that the approach teachers used in Zimbabwe had very little
influence on the physical development of the ECD learners. In their study, Chikutuma and Mawere (2013:9) found that the play-based approach gives learners an opportunity to explore the learning environment by utilising the resource material. The play-based approach also helps learners to develop fine and gross muscles for classroom activities. They highlighted that through the play-based approach, learners develop in their totality and academic progress improves. In view of the importance of the learning through play approach, Grade R teachers should adopt teaching and learning strategies that would make learners understand the world around them. The study did not indicate the strategies used to mitigate the challenges to ensure that the play-based approach was practised in Grade R. Therefore, research needs to be done on how teachers used play-based for implementing CAPS to make classrooms centres of academic excellence.

Looking at the above findings, age and abilities of learners were not recognised and young learners were learning under a rigid system in England and Zimbabwe. The approach applied by teachers in these countries contradicted Vygotsky’s social construction theory on teaching learners according to the ZPD. Vygotsky believed that scaffolding would not be effectively applicable if the interaction between the teacher and the learner is rigid (Moalosi, 2013:4). Although the efforts are on preparing learners for Grade 1, the lack of a play-based approach may negatively impact the results because the rigid teaching and learning approach may not accommodate all Grade R learner abilities. The outcomes of learning after teachers used those alternative approaches other than the play-based approach was not revealed.

2.4.3 Assessment of Learner Performance in Grade R

This section reviews literature on the assessment in Grade R teaching and learning in classroom practice. Assessment is an integral part of teaching and learning. The outcome of effective teaching and learning is measured with assessment. The goal of assessment is to evaluate how effective teaching and learning take place in the classroom context. Various researchers stress that assessment is meant to collect and analyse information regarding the progress made by the learner towards expected outcomes (Mohapi, 2014:5; Otieno, Aloka & Adongo, 2015; Sethusha, 2012:48). Wagner, Lockheed, Mullis, Martin, Kanjee, Gove and Dowd (2012:5) highlight a few purposes for assessment which include support of teacher professional development,
improvement of instructional design and reduction of learning inequalities. These purposes clearly indicate that, through assessment, teachers can identify gaps in teaching and learning practices. In other words, the need for teachers’ assessment practices to change strategies are determined by learner performance.

In addition, Riley-Ayers (2014:4) and Demircan and Olgan (2011:2) propose that assessment should take into consideration children who may need additional learning support and to monitor trends per subject and for accountability. Lumadi (2013:1) argues that teachers need to understand and be familiar with all the components of assessment that include assessment principles, assessment forms and tools and reporting procedures. It is evident that teachers need to understand the assessment purposes before engaging learners in activities. The purposes of assessment inform the kind of teaching and assessment programmes teachers should follow to support learners.

The following paragraphs discuss the principles teachers need to follow when assessing learners on the content learned, the forms of assessment to be done and on how to report learner performance.

2.4.3.1 Assessment principles in ECE

Assessment principles are regarded as guidelines or assessment processes during teaching and learning practice. Teachers should know that assessment evaluates teaching and learning. They also need to understand that assessment is planned with teaching and learning content because it evaluates the outcomes of teaching and learning in the classroom context. Grade R teachers need to ensure that all content they teach is assessed. For assessment to be effective, teachers need to ensure that all assessment principles are considered (DBE, 2014b:17; ECDBE, 2012:56).

Highlighting the importance of assessment principles, Kanjee and Mthembu (2015:142) insist that teachers need to be clear about the content they should assess and the questions to ask from the learners. They emphasise that learners’ abilities and needs should be recognised so that all learners feel accommodated in assessment. It is evident that the outcomes learners should achieve from the content taught need to be clearly stated and be at the level of learners’ cognitive abilities. I argue that learners should be able to manage their work and finish their tasks in time if there is adherence
to the CAPS. Teachers therefore need to acquaint themselves with the principles of assessment to effectively achieve outcomes.

The assessment principles also require that Grade R teachers should assess learners a holistic manner to find out the actual needs of the learners for support. They need to study the environment where learners come from to align teaching and learning content. Furthermore, different interests and learners’ abilities need to be considered by using various forms of assessment instruction (Kanjee & Sayed, 2013:7; Luneta & Olusola, 2016:248). By so doing, this could help learners to demonstrate their competencies according to their levels of development. In this regard, teachers are expected to make use of evidence collected from the learner to be able to plan remedial programmes. The principle of recording learner performance suggests that assessment must be authentic and that learners be supported according to their individual needs.

Luneta and Olusola (2016:48) highlight the purpose of assessment as to assess knowledge, skills progress and the quality of teaching and learning support provided to learners in their academic development. It needs to be a continuous process that is built into the teaching and learning process. In Grade R, assessment is continuous because teachers assess the process of learning, not the product (DBE, 2011d:25). It is the reason that teachers should adhere to the principles of assessment for effective teaching and learning. Therefore, assessment should be fair, reliable and respect individual needs. In my view, all principles are equally important and need to be effectively implemented when the teacher considers the importance of what assessment is in teaching and learning practice.

I argue that to ensure that effective teaching and learning takes place teachers have to adhere to assessment principles. When teachers assess, they benefit because they can reflect on their teaching and improve on such teaching. In this case, the literature highlights that most teachers in South Africa have limited knowledge of assessment for addressing learner needs in teaching and learning practices (Deacon, 2016:9; Kanjee & Mlooi, 2014:97; Kanjee & Mthembu, 2015:143; Kanjee & Sayed, 2013:7). Deacon (2016:9) raises a specific issue that teachers in the Foundation Phase including Grade R teachers have limited knowledge and skills regarding basic principles of assessment and there is limited research on assessment of literacy in the
Foundation Phase. In their recommendations, Sayed et al. (2014: 26) further suggest that research is required about how often teachers should assess and monitor learners’ learning. In order to support this claim, this study investigates whether teachers adhere to the principles of assessment as part of planning. In the end, the importance of the principles needs to be known and understood by all school stakeholders to avoid a shift from the Grade R assessment practices in schools.

Mohapi (2014:5) also reveals that reception-year teachers struggle to practice informal and continuous assessment as they assess learners with formal tests. It is therefore concluded that Grade R teachers have an assessment knowledge gap. It is evident that assessment of Grade R learner performance is not authentic as learners are assessed in the Grade 1 format. This also implies that Grade R learners may progress to Grade 1 without being properly assessed and without understanding concepts taught in Grade R. In order to address the challenge of incompetence of Grade R teachers on assessment, researchers suggest a need for training for addressing the academic needs of learners (Kanjee & Mthembu, 2015:2; Riley-Ayer, 2014:9). I agree with the idea of training on assessment, although some Grade R teachers are pressurised by their SMTs to assess learners according to Grade 1 to Grade 3 format.

In conclusion, I have learned from the literature that the assessment practices in schools have changed the principle of assessing the process of learning in Grade R. I have noted that Grade R learners write formal tests in the same way as Foundation Phase learners. Teachers assess the product of learning, yet Grade R learners are engaged in emergent learning of concepts. It shows that assessment practices are incongruent with the CAPS for Grade R assessment policy which does not recommend formal assessment and tests (DBE, 2011d: 26; ECDBE, 2012:56; Mahan, 2015:26). Although the reviewed literature does not identify the consequences of not adhering to the assessment principles in teaching and learning in Grade R, it reflects that there are challenges affecting implementation of assessment practices. Indeed, lack of assessment knowledge may lead to the assessment forms being unreliable and assessment tools being invalid. Learners need to be assessed according to Grade R principles and strategies.
2.4.3.2 Forms and tools of assessment

- Forms and tools of assessment in South African context;

Principles of assessment guide teachers on how to design the forms and tools of assessment. The content is guided by the principles of assessment on what to assess, how, when and who is assessed. In order to apply the principles of assessment effectively, Naidoo and Mkhabela (2017:5) suggest that teachers should use various assessment strategies to scaffold learning of content. Learner achievement is assessed in two main forms: formative and summative. Formative assessment is described as a learner-centred tool that helps teachers to support learners in improving their performance in classroom contexts and it provides learners with continuous feedback (Sethusha, 2012:36). Similarly, Riley-Ayers (2014:4) shares the view that formative assessment provides the teacher with information on performance which can assist in formulating instructions according to the needs of individual learners in class. This form of assessment is done continuously throughout the process of teaching and learning. In a classroom context, teachers interact with learners to monitor and support the way they process information during teaching and learning practices. Therefore, teachers need to have clear knowledge and understanding of using formative assessment to cater for the different needs of learners (Naidoo & Mkhabela, 2017:10).

In Grade R, assessment is informal and continuous (ECDBE, 2012:56; Kanjee & Mthembu, 2015:17). Informal assessment monitors and supports learners’ progress in various activities and in various forms such as observations and learner-teacher interaction in learning activities. Grade R assessment is based on the process of learning and therefore assessment is entirely informal. Teachers need to monitor and support the process of learning until the child can work independently. According to Sethusha (2012:17) and Naidoo and Mkhabela (2017:11), continuous assessment uses various assessment practices with the purpose of tracking learner progress during teaching and learning activities. Furthermore, assessment helps teachers to provide remedial strategies. It appears that informal assessment needs to be practised in reception-year classrooms to monitor and support learners’ academic progress.

A study by Mohapi (2014) on in-service training of reception year teachers in South Africa indicates that reception-year teachers experience challenges on how to implement informal assessment. Mohapi (2014:100) argues that teachers need to plan
their assessment carefully to achieve its purpose. On the other hand, Long (2014:108) reported that Grade R teachers used various forms of assessment such as practical work, oral and even small group work. The findings reveal that teachers used assessment forms that are CAPS-aligned. I argue that formative assessment is the appropriate form of assessment in Grade R and it should be adopted by all teachers.

Summative assessment is another form of assessment that is important for teachers to know and apply in their teaching and learning activities. It is a tool that reports the overall learner progress. In the Foundation Phase, summative evaluation is a collection of informal tasks done on a quarterly basis in the form of quarterly schedules to inform the Department about the overall performance of learners (DBE, 2011d:22). Summative assessment is informed by formative activities such as observation, oral work, practical demonstrations and written work and it enables learners to explore various skills in classroom contexts (ECDBE, 2012:58; Kanjee & Mthembu, 2015:24). The information obtained from summative assessment is shared with some sections of the Department of Basic Education such as the examinations section, curriculum section and school governance. The purpose of summative assessment is to share the academic results obtained and discuss the challenges for improving learner performance.

According to Naidoo and Mkhabela (2017:10), various forms of assessment are required and teachers need to consider learning styles of all learners by designing instruction to accommodate their diverse needs, interests and learning abilities through real-world activities that are familiar to them. In so doing, assessment could be regarded as being meaningful to learners. I argue that the forms and tools of assessment need to be planned in conjunction with the curriculum model being implemented. At the same time, forms of assessment should be aligned with the subject content taught and this would suggest that assessment is fair in terms of assessment principles. The assessment tools as well should be aligned to assessment forms to ensure the quality of the tool. Kanjee and Mthembu (2015:2) stress that training should be conducted to ensure that teachers know and understand the importance of formative and summative assessment in teaching and learning practices. Grade R teachers therefore need to use various assessment strategies to ensure that learners progress to Grade 1 with all the relevant knowledge and skills.
In Grade R, the evidence of learner performance in a skill is presented in assessment tools such as observation sheets, checklists and rubrics. This section on assessment is relevant to my study as it reports on the quality of learner performance which is determined by various factors in the education system such as quality teacher support system, resources and other relevant factors. Teachers need to be clear about the criteria they use for assessing learners. I have noted that Grade R teachers experience a challenge in using informal assessment forms and tools in the teaching and learning process. It suggests that the forms and tools of assessment used in Grade R teaching and learning should be investigated to improve quality of assessment and learner support measures.

- Forms and tools of assessment in Zimbabwe

This section presents information collected on forms and tools in Zimbabwe. Studies on assessment in Grade R teaching and learning have revealed that teachers experience various challenges that cause them to change assessment principles in classroom activities (Chikutuma & Mawere, 2013:9; Rose & Rogers, 2012:7). The challenges mentioned include lack of Grade R teacher assessment knowledge, pressure from parents and lack of understanding of Grade R assessment principles by teachers and SMTs in the mainstream system. In Zimbabwe, reception-year teachers were pressurised by SMTs, parents and Foundation Phase teachers to adopt formal assessment as a policy for the whole school (Chikutuma & Mawere, 2013:9; Rose & Rogers, 2012:7). In terms of my background knowledge on principles of assessment, the context in which assessment was conducted was unfair and did not cater for the diverse needs of Grade R learners but only for Grade 1. Then, the question arises as to how reception-year teachers determine learner performance if they do not adhere to the principles of assessment and how they identify the actual learners who need support. Another question is on the strategies that are used to support reception-year learners and whether teachers support Grade R learners with Grade 1 teaching and learning strategies. In my perception as Grade R curriculum adviser, learners were overwhelmed with work that was above their level of development and that may lead them to drop out from school later in their school lives because they are not equipped with the fundamental skills for success. This shows that, internationally, Grade R teaching and learning is still embraced with various challenges and this needs further investigation.
- **Forms and tools of assessment in Kenya**

Teachers in Kenya practised informal assessment in reception-year teaching and learning contexts. Otieno et al. (2015:8) confirm that, in Kenya, teachers assess reception-year learners through observations. The research findings revealed that teachers used observation tools for assessing indoor and outdoor activities. Furthermore, teachers believed that the practical nature of observation assessment gave them an opportunity to gain a holistic view of learner performance in practical situations. During observation, teachers recorded important details while learners were engaged in various learning activities. It appeared that teachers had knowledge and understanding of using assessment tools during teaching and learning activities. Seemingly, teachers in Kenya knew how and when to use formative assessment on a continuous basis. This suggests that informal assessment is applicable and can yield good results if teachers adhere to the principles of assessment.

- **Forms and tools of assessment in Wales**

The situation of assessment was different in Wales where assessment tools and checklists did not indicate guidance on feedback and remedial strategies for learner support (OECD Directorate for Education and Skills, 2014:96). Assessment tools were not aligned to the subject content. The findings revealed that teachers in Wales experienced a lack of understanding on how to plan formative assessment. Seemingly, the assessment tools introduced by individual teachers did not accommodate all learners' abilities. The provision of reporting needs to be clear and assessment tools must be aligned to curriculum content. Teachers are expected to provide relevant feedback about learner performance for remedial support. This is a critical aspect of assessment because once the teacher provides feedback that contradicts learner performance, the feedback may negatively affect the academic progress of the learner. The support may not give meaning to the learner and may become a barrier to learning.

- **Forms and tools of assessment in England**

A study on assessing reception year learners using a rating scale was conducted in United Kingdom by Norbury et al. (2015:8). According to the study, the reception-year learners in United Kingdom were assessed at the end of the year on curriculum goals with a rating scale of 1–3: 1-emerging; 2–expected and 3–exceeded (Norbury et al.,
2015:4). The findings indicated that learners were incompetent in language in reception-year classes. From the findings, the time frame for moving learners along the rating scale was insufficient. At the same time, learners were not continuously supported during the year. According to Norbury et al. (2015:8) even the assessed content was not aligned with the age cohort; therefore, poor academic results might be experienced. In my understanding as a teacher and as subject adviser, the assessed content needs to be aligned to the age cohort to enable learners to understand assessment activities. Therefore, in the case of England, the actual learner performance may not be predictable. It illustrates that the content to be assessed should be relevant to learners’ ZPD. I posit that that subject content knowledge, assessment and reporting are indispensable. It can be said that the negative impact of subject content knowledge might result in a poor assessment process and reporting. The situation of England showed that Grade R learners were not given an opportunity to learn according to their level of development.

2.4.3.3 Reporting learner performance

In South Africa, teachers are required to provide parents, stakeholders and the DBE with quarterly reports on learner progress. School schedules per grade are used for reporting to the DBE about the whole class performance. Report cards are used to report learner performance to parents and other stakeholders. The DBE introduced the Programme and Promotion Requirements (PPR) for assessment from Grade R to Grade 12 as a guiding document for reporting the level of learner performance, (DBE, 2011d:6). The PPR uses the seven-point scale of achievement levels (namely, 1–7) and achievement descriptors that rate learner performance after teacher observation (DBE, 2011d:6). The reporting in Grade R is done according to the language of instruction. The interpretation of achievement levels is based on teachers’ knowledge of the subject content and how the learners learn. Teachers need to know and understand how to rate learner performance using the achievement levels and descriptors for authentic results. The authentic rating is part of teaching and learning because it helps teachers to provide learners with relevant academic support.

Conversely, in South Africa, Grade R learner performance is reported quarterly to the DBE in a form of work schedules. These work schedules are informed by recording tools that collect rated learner performance using descriptors for assessment activities.
The report cards are used as the prescribed tool to inform parents about learners' level of performance with levels from descriptors (ECDBE, 2012:58). The rating scale and descriptors report the level on which the learner is operating in the classroom. It is then that the parent and the teacher may determine that different strategies are needed for supporting the learner to improve academic performance. Sometimes the results on report cards may not be aligned with learner performance when the teacher is not clear about rating scales and descriptors.

Hoadley (2014:3) reports that Grade R teachers in South Africa face a challenge in reporting learner evidence. She highlights that Grade R teachers find it difficult to assess learners properly and their feedback is often of poor quality. This argument acknowledges what is highlighted by various researchers about Grade R teachers’ current lack of assessment knowledge in classroom practices (Kanjee & Mthembu, 2015:2; Mohapi, 2014:5; Riley-Ayer, 2014:2). It is also noted that the level of higher-order thinking of children in classrooms is low. The noted quality of reporting learner performance may give unauthentic results on learner performance. The researcher posits that the reason may lie in the lack of monitoring and support in schools and even by the district officials. In other words, the way of reporting learner performance needs to be explored as it is part of teaching and learning and the head teachers could potentially explain the reasons better.

Long (2014) agrees that learner performance is not authentically reported in early grades. Long (2014:123) elaborates that the principals in schools do not want negative feedback about learner performance on report cards but only skills mastered. The principals want negative feedback to be reported informally to parents. Although the aim of the principals is to establish good relationships between teachers and parents, the information on the report card will thus not be authentic. At the same time, the principals try to avoid negative comments that may discourage parents about their children’s progress. I disagree with the strategy used by the principal and suggest that it is dangerous. When the child moves to another school, the report card would reflect an image that would cause teachers to doubt the status of the school in terms of teaching and learning in that school. I note that the literature focuses much on the challenges that affect assessment and little on what can be done to overcome those challenges.
2.5 LANGUAGE OF TEACHING AND LEARNING IN THE GRADE R CLASSROOM

This section of the study explores the challenges facing Grade R language of teaching and learning in Grade R. The current literature emphasises that language is a primary tool that is used by learners to communicate their needs, play various games and to compete in cultural practices (Brunner, 1983:103; Gray & MacBlain, 2012:110; Soma, 2011:37; Whitman, 2015:44). However, language is a valuable tool in teaching and learning when it is the language of the learner (Freire, 1978:40; Piaget, 1962:181). It proves that through language, learners can communicate with each other to solve problems which need higher-order thinking, especially when manipulating the learning material and sharing. It is clear that the language of instruction is another important aspect that needs to be considered in Grade R classes. It is against this background that the language of learning and teaching is one of the important components that needs to be explored in Grade R. Louw and Wium (2011:1) emphasise that in class, the language of the child should be considered as the tool for learning language components and other subjects such as mathematics. This highlights that teaching and learning should be planned in the language of learners to be effective.

The following paragraphs review the literature on language of teaching and learning in rural schools with Grade R in both the national and international contexts.

2.5.1 Language of Teaching and Learning in South Africa

In South Africa, Foundation Phase teachers are mandated to teach learners in their home language. The three Grade R subjects (language, mathematics and life skills) are taught in home language as the policy of the country indicates (DBE, 2017:11). In this study, I intend to explore the influence of language in teaching and learning in the Grade R classroom context.

In South Africa, Grade R learners learn in their home language but the challenge is with teachers who lack vocabulary in the indigenous home languages such as isiXhosa in the Eastern Cape or IsiZulu in KwaZulu-Natal (Molteno, 2017:63).

Highlighting the challenge facing Grade R teaching and learning, Molteno (2017:29) complains that although Grade R learners should be taught in their mother language, in most cases, parents want their children to be taught in English as early in their life as possible. Soma (2011:37) elaborates that if two or more languages are used in one
Grade R classroom, learners will experience a major challenge. I have noted that parents feel that if the child cannot speak and write English there is no teaching and learning in that school. It is clear that in disadvantaged communities, parents do not understand that teaching and learning is said to be effective when the learner can communicate concepts at a desired level, irrespective of the language used. I suggest that parents should be engaged in educational issues to be aware of the challenges that face Grade R teaching and learning pertaining language of teaching and learning.

It convinces me that one language in Grade R is enough for effective teaching and learning. In my knowledge and understanding, Grade R learners have not yet developed the cognitive ability to master the rules of two languages. I uphold the view that learners may end up mastering not even one language if two or more languages are used in Grade R class.

Similarly, Molteno (2017:13) proves that for academic success, the majority of learners in South Africa learn better when they learn in their mother language. From the background statement made by Molteno (2017), I align the low rate of educational progress in rural schools reported by Mohangi et al. (2016:4) with a lack of language implementation in early grades. I found that most Foundation Phase studies did not address the issue of the Grade R language of teaching and learning. Therefore, it is imperative that the influence of language in Grade R teaching and learning in rural schools be investigated. In my view, the curriculum planners and policy designers will be able to plan the strategies to mitigate the challenges facing Grade R language for teaching and learning.

Hadebe-Ndlovu (2016:8) recommends that one language of teaching and learning should be promoted on pictures, toys and graphs for understanding the content to be taught. Even though home language as a language of teaching and learning is recommended, the practical part of home language use in Grade R classrooms does not appear to have been investigated (Hadebe-Ndlovu, 2016:8). I argue that the lack of home language practice is evident in printed resource materials and teacher-learner interaction in the classroom. I maintain that the reason lies in the fact that the challenges facing Grade R in rural schools in language are not well investigated and are only noticed in Grade 1 when learners do formal tasks through the ANA.
In addition, Soma (2011:73) investigated multicultural education in Grade R classrooms in South Africa and found that parents in rural schools insisted that children must learn in English. This English was their first additional language and that became a challenge to teachers in teaching and learning practices. It was highlighted that teachers found it difficult to teach learners whose home language was not English. For example, learners demonstrated a limited language proficiency in mathematics lessons in early grades where they could not understand numerical concepts in English (Machaba, 2013:42). This suggested that the language policy was not fully implemented in ECD classrooms. I believe that SMTs failed to orientate parents on language policy. The above findings fit well into my study as I aim at exploring some of the challenges that face Grade R teaching and learning in rural schools and how they influence teaching and learning.

In other countries, mother language is not considered and reception-year learners are taught in a language a country prefers to use as a language of instruction. The following paragraphs explore how home language is considered in other countries for teaching and learning in reception year class.

2.5.2 Language of Teaching and Learning in Kenya

In Kenya, English has been adopted as the language of instruction at all levels of schooling (Atweh et al., 2014:17). It appears that children from other cultural backgrounds other than English would be disadvantaged. The language policy of Kenya stipulates that children should learn new terminology instead of improving and extending their existing mother-tongue terminology. Even reception-year learners have to learn all subjects in English. It shows that the language of the majority of learners was not recognised in teaching and learning. I argue that the government and policy designers lacked knowledge and understanding that teaching and learning is effective when teacher-learner interaction is in language of the learner. Atweh et al.’s study did not indicate the influence of foreign language in teaching and learning in reception year class.

2.5.3 Language of Teaching and Learning in England

Similar evidence regarding language is observed in England where teachers use English the language of learning and teaching. English is the only language that is
used to unite all different cultural groups in England (Arnot, Schneider, Evans, Lium, Welply and Davies-Tutt, 2014:48). It appears that policy makers believe that learners would gain language competency as they progressed to upper grades.

The initiative of using one language in the country is questionable for reception-year learners who have different home languages. Arnot et al. (2014:48) reported that the language policy did not recognise minority cultures even though in the reception-year learners learn better in their mother tongue.

Studies on using mother tongue language for effective teaching and learning indicates that both teachers and parents still have a gap in understanding the importance of home language in improving the learner performance in reception classes. The parental knowledge gap is a challenge for teachers as they interact with learners in the classroom. It seems that advocacy on language use in reception year has not been done by both the principals and the departmental officials. The influence of language in Foundation Phase, particularly in Grade R, should be explored as one of the instruments to assist effective implementation of curriculum.

**2.6 RESOURCES FOR SUPPORTING TEACHING AND LEARNING IN GRADE R**

This section of the study explores the challenges and the influence of the challenges in Grade R teaching and learning. It is noted that learners in disadvantaged schools continue to experience challenges in accessing information for their academic progress. The unavailability of resources is a big challenge to teachers and it hinders learner performance, especially in disadvantaged primary schools. Some of the resources include infrastructure and Learner Teacher Support Materials (LTSMs). Therefore, resources should be available as part of teaching and learning and should align with curriculum content.

The following paragraphs explore the availability of resources in rural school in South African context and in other countries.

**2.6.1 Resources in South Africa**

According to Modisaotsile (2012:4), LTSMs are used to enhance teaching and understanding of the subject content. In other words, resources bring the global picture of what is taught and help learners to make a direct link with the world around them.
The research findings by Lingam and Lingam (2013:1) indicate that teachers’ planning alone cannot enhance teaching and learning unless the LTSMs are provided. As highlighted by Krishnaratne et al. (2013:39), the provision of learning materials, such as children’s books, posters, flip charts and chalkboards support teachers in planning lessons and encourage learners to learn. This illustrates that, due to the failure to provide teachers with adequate and suitable quality material, teaching and learning practices may be negatively affected. It is evident that teaching and learning requires resources for learners to benefit more in classroom activities and for making learning enjoyable.

Additionally, Taole and Mohapi (2013:7) argue that the resource materials distributed to schools should be aligned with the curriculum and be written in simple language that accommodates teachers and learners. Atmore et al. (2012:44) and Chikutuma and Mawere (2013:18) also suggest that the resources should be age-appropriate in terms of language, be sufficient, be available for use by children, be attractive and be durable and safe to play with. It pointed out that teaching subject content without the resources cannot achieve quality of education that is expected in Grade R. At the same time, teachers need to have knowledge on how to check the material that is relevant for Grade R. In most schools, I visited as a curriculum adviser, the supplier of materials for Grade R did not take into consideration the language of teaching and learning. As a result, most materials were in English yet the school’s medium of instruction was isiXhosa. This resulted in most Grade R materials being shifted to Grade 1 where English First Additional Language is introduced. Grade R then experienced a shortage of resources. It is the aim of this study to explore some of the challenges facing Grade R teaching and learning and how these challenges influence teaching and learning in classroom context.

Modisaotsile (2012:4) affirms a decline in the standard of education in rural schools of South Africa due to the shortage of basic learning resources such as books and Grade R material. Similarly, Taole and Mohapi (2013:5) in their research on rural Grade R resources in South Africa observed a lack of indoor and outdoor material that deprives learners of opportunities to manipulate material for learning. This shows that that learners in ECD missed some knowledge and skills in all three Grade R subjects because of lack of equipment which aims to support learners in developing listening and speaking skills and hand-eye coordination for reading and writing. The main cause
of the shortage of resources in these schools was not indicated in the literature. Furthermore, the reasons for not taking care of the resources by the schools, the SMTs and Grade R teachers are not highlighted in the literature review.

Amongst all the challenges on resources in rural schools of the Eastern Cape, infrastructure did not accommodate learners with physical disabilities. This might suggest that these learners could not perform some classroom activities. It is evident that the policy on inclusive education, which calls for accommodating all learners, has been given limited attention by the DBE. It implies that resources need to be prioritised for effective teaching and learning if education is for all people. These priorities need to start in Grade R, the first grade for learning basic skills and knowledge. The purpose of my study is to investigate the influence of availability and alignment of educational resources as part of teaching and learning in rural primary schools. The strategies teachers have developed to adapt their teaching and learning and the constraints they experienced in classroom activities are explored.

The literature reviewed for this study highlights that the issue of resources in Grade R is not given much attention in schools (Mohangi, Krog, Stephens & Nel, 2016:76; Mukeredzi, 2016:92; Oluwafemi, Nma, Osita & Olugbenga, 2014:123). These studies reveal that in all rural schools the funding for the ECD programmes is too limited to purchase even the basic resources for basic operations. It is noted that most Grade R resources are donated and teachers receive a limited top-up amount of material from the school (Mohangi et al., 2016:76). It appears that the information about the availability of Grade R resources in classrooms and the reason for the shortage of material to support curriculum implementation is not well publicised. It is in view of these challenges that the study sought to fill the gap of the unpublicised issue of inadequate resources by investigating their influence in teaching and learning in rural schools of the Eastern Cape.

The teacher guidance on how to utilise resources can stimulate children’s early learning in numeracy and life skills. Atmore (2012:44) suggests that when new resources arrive at schools, teachers should be orientated on how to use them in class. Taole and Mohapi (2013:7) suggest that the LTSMs should be user-friendly to support successful implementation of the curriculum. As a curriculum adviser, I suggest that the material will be user-friendly when it is written in the language of teaching and
learning and is aligned with the subject content. Teachers need to be practically orientated with the utilisation of resources. Thereafter, monitoring and support as a follow-up programme should be done in the classroom context.

In South Africa, Helmbold (2013:197) found that there were schools that had mathematics resources but teachers had no training and knowledge on how to use the resources effectively. Helmbold recommends the provision of resources with practical guidance in the form of demonstrations and training on how to use the available resources. Similarly, Taole and Mohapi (2013:7) emphasise training workshops with lesson demonstrations and post-workshop training and follow-ups in classrooms to ensure that curriculum objectives are implemented. It appears that teacher training on utilisation of resources is a key for effective curriculum implementation in classroom activities. I argue that teachers learn better when the use of resources is demonstrated directly with learners in the classroom. In light of this study, a few studies investigated follow-up workshops on utilisation of resources and report about feedback.

2.6.2 Resources in Zimbabwe

The unavailability of resources is a common challenge facing reception-year teaching and learning in rural schools of Zimbabwe. In Zimbabwe, 40% of rural ECD centres were inadequately equipped with resources (Hlupo et al., 2013:2). This is a big percentage of rural schools that were still operating under extreme conditions of inadequate resources. This illustrates that learners had little opportunity to access quality education because, in the reception year, learners learn through play and through experimenting. The shortage of resources resulted in teachers leaving some lessons out focusing on subject areas that did not need many resources such as counting, shapes and story time (Chikutuma & Mawere, 2013:6). Reception year learners thus lose a lot of information they need in preparing for their Grade 1. This shows that teachers may find it difficult to improvise when there are no materials at the school. Thus, it is important for learners to have an opportunity to manipulate resource material early in the reception year.

Studies concerning education in rural schools highlight that ECD teachers in various countries are experiencing challenges regarding educational resources for implementing effective teaching and learning. Some of these countries include Tanzania, Sweden, Finland, Zimbabwe, Ghana, South Africa (Acheampong &
Williams, 2015:36; Elibariki, 2014:39; Khumalo & Mji, 2014:3; Lind & Stjernstrom, 2015; Mupa & Chinooneka, 2015:125). The absence of adequacy of resources makes teachers handle subject content in a complex manner that does not engage learners. Elibariki (2014:19) also indicates that poor results in education relate to the amount of resources and instructional material allocated to it. Mupa and Chinooneka (2015:128) emphasise that the availability of resources and the way they are used predict learner performance in primary schools. Seemingly, teachers experience challenges in developing abilities to effectively match teaching strategies and the content to achieve the expected learning outcomes. It is noted that there is a great need for appropriate resources. It is suggested that teachers should be trained on resource-making so that they can develop their own classroom resource materials in accordance with learner needs (Elibariki, 2014:45; Froebel in Park & Yang, 2016:128). This may help to address the shortage of resources in schools and learner performance.

2.6.3 Resources in South Pacific

On the account of resources, Lingam and Lingam (2013:1) conducted a study on resources in South Pacific at Fijian Primary School and discovered that teachers experienced a shortage of resources. The study further highlights that without the provision of LTSMs, teachers were unable to provide effective teaching and learning. It is evident that the shortage of resources has a negative influence on learners reaching their full potential. Schools need to be provided with resources such as good quality materials, textbooks relevant to the curriculum, infrastructure and library facilities, especially in rural areas where many learners are at a great disadvantage. The curriculum of the 21st century demands more materials and learners to be hands-on in classroom activities.

2.6.4 Resources in United States of America

Ernst (2014:2) conducted a study on excellent schools of United State of America to investigate the influence of the availability of resources in planning learner activities. The findings revealed that the training on how to use resources and the availability of resources equipped the reception-year teachers in selecting activities for learners in playrooms and grounds. Learners were directly engaged in activities and that improved learner academic performance in schools. This proves that teacher orientation on how to use resources for teaching and learning needs to be taken into consideration with
new curriculum implementation techniques. Orientation on resource utilisation may avoid materials being kept in sealed boxes because everybody will know their importance in teaching and learning. Children with access to these resources would improve their academic performance even in upper grades. The study by Ernst (2014:7) provides me with aspects to focus on in exploring the influence of resource material utilisation in teaching and learning. Teacher orientation and its influence are key aspects that need to be noted in this study.

Siraj and Taggart (2014:12) note that in schools where resources are adequately provided teachers plan their lessons and utilise the resources effectively in classroom activities. Teachers use resources to cater for individual learner needs and that enables learners to do various activities independently. Seemingly, the availability of resources creates a space for learners to develop higher-order thinking through independent manipulation of resources. The adequate provision of resources plays an important role in assisting teachers to handle some of the challenges that may hinder teaching and learning in the classroom. For example, the well-resourced classroom environment minimises chances for disciplining learners because each learner has an activity to do. The information shared by Siraj and Taggart (2014:12) highlights the availability of resources and the need for teacher orientation as a strategy that can be used to improve learner academic performance.

2.7 MANAGING BARRIERS TO LEARNING

The Grade R teachers are the first people who need to have an ability to identify learners with learning difficulties in schools. The DBE (2014a:6) highlights that learners experience various challenges that hinder their access to learning in class. These barriers are caused by various factors that include the content of the curriculum, classroom organisation, teaching methodology, language of teaching and learning, teacher and learner support material and assessment strategies (ECDBE, 2011d:2; Erradu & Weeks, 2013:4). These are some of the aspects teachers should observe in their planning as they might hinder positive learning outcomes. The following paragraphs review literature on barriers to learning in South African context and in international context.
2.7.1 Barriers to Learning in South Africa

The Education White Paper 6 (EWP6) on inclusive education was introduced in South Africa with the aim to accommodate all learners in the education system (DBE, 2011c:2; Erradu & Weeks, 2013:2). The purpose of EWP6 is to change education and training to accommodate the diversity needs of learners. It is indicated that schools need to adapt curriculum and assessment practices to accommodate learners with learning difficulties in the system of education (DBE, 2014b:21).

The relevance of EWP6 policy in this study is the belief that Grade R teachers are the immediate people in primary schools for handling learners with barriers to learning. Abongdia et al (2015:3) argue that teachers must have skills and knowledge to identify learners with learning difficulties for remedial purposes. It is my understanding that barriers to learning can be addressed as early as in Grade R and the number of learners experiencing learning difficulties might therefore decrease in lower grades and across the upper grades. This study will explore the influence the Grade R teacher’s knowledge and understanding of managing learning difficulties in order to improve learner performance in class.

The ECDBE (2015:7) highlights that many Grade R teachers in the education system lack awareness and skills for identifying and addressing learner needs in the classroom. This implies that teachers work with learners without understanding their needs in totality. Teachers’ lack of knowledge on managing barriers to learning gives the impression that learners miss opportunities to learn some basic knowledge and skills. I argue that in the past, reception-year teachers were excluded from training on barriers to learning in the Eastern Cape; only Grade 1 to Grade 3 teachers benefited in the Foundation Phase. It was in 2015 when the ECDBE initiated training for Grade R teachers on barriers to learning. Teachers were provided with a Training Manual on Barriers to Learning as a supporting document in classroom activities. It is therefore important to explore the influence of training on barriers to learning in supporting teaching and learning.

Abongdia et al. (2015:5) acknowledge the challenge of barriers to learning in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa which are caused by various factors such as extremely big classes, lack of parental support and even schools with minimum numbers of teachers who are required to teach multi-grade classes. The situation of
Grade R is critical where teachers may often teach more than 40 learners (Chimhenga, 2016:33; Mohangi et al., 2016:74). The result of multi-grading in the Foundation Phase is likely to be that Grade R learners would not cope well in such a big class. Grade R learners need individual attention. Lack of attention may mean that educational needs of learners with learning difficulties will be ignored. Teachers who are not well trained may find it difficult to teach a big class. It is doubtful whether large classes allow sufficient time for all learners to develop physically, emotionally, socially, cognitively and linguistically. Teaching and learning would not yield good results and would become an exercise in futility.

Taole and Mohapi (2013:4) confirm that Grade R teachers in public schools are multi-grading Grade R and Grade 1. Seemingly, Foundation Phase is at a risk where unqualified Grade R teachers are multi-grading. The multi-grading scenario may not benefit either Grade 1 or Grade R learners to achieve better learning outcomes. Learners with barriers to learning might not be effectively supported as Vygotsky (1978:87) and Moalosi (2013:3) indicate that it is hard to scaffold learners in big classes.

Geldenhuys and Wevers (2013:3) argue that learners with learning difficulties end up being treated like all other learners in teaching and learning activities. This means that if barriers to learning are left unattended, some learners will be disadvantaged in classroom activities. This challenge may result in higher dropout rates in upper grades because basic knowledge and skills will be missed in Grade R. The reviewed literature does not indicate the influence of the challenges on Grade R teaching and learning or the strategies that were used to address these. This study seeks to understand the influence of the challenges and the strategies used to improve learner performance.

Abongdia et al. (2015:4) highlight that the use of abstract terminology in inclusive education makes it very difficult for Grade R teachers to understand the concepts used in documents guiding teachers on dealing with barriers to learning. It appears that difficult terminology confuses teachers about the remedial measures to be provided to learners with learning difficulties. Teaching and learning may be negatively affected in that basic knowledge and basic skills may develop at a slow pace in classrooms or may not develop at all. It appears that documents on barriers to learning should be simple and address the challenges facing teaching and learning.
2.7.2 Barriers to Learning in Other Countries

Internationally, quality education for all is a concern but many learners experiencing barriers to learning are still excluded from the mainstream (Geldenhuys & Wevers, 2013:1). According to Reuckert (2019: n.p.) “there are 130 million children in school who are not learning basic skills like reading, writing and mathematics”. Other barriers include a lack of qualified teachers, poorly-trained teachers, insufficient numbers of schools, a lack of LTSMs, poverty, gender discrimination, conflict and natural disasters. Children with learning barriers are in an even worse position. Reuckert (2019: n.p.) maintains that

*Students with disabilities have lower attendance rates and are more likely to be out of school or leave school before completing primary education. They are suspended or expelled at a rate more than double the rate of their non-special education peers. A combination of discrimination, lack of training in inclusive teaching methods among teachers and a lack of accessible schools leave this group uniquely vulnerable to being denied their right to education.*

These problems seem almost insurmountable coupled with inadequate funding of education in many countries, mainly in underdeveloped countries in Africa and the Middle East. My study focuses on one microcosmic aspect of such barriers since it would be impossible to address all these within the scope of this study.

For example, Brazil (2012:17) points out that where training is available, the courses that teachers attend are not aligned with the curriculum they are expected implement in their classes. This results in the teaching staff lacking the knowledge needed to deal with learners experiencing barriers to learning. It appears that the curriculum designers and the inclusive education planners do not work collaboratively. According to my experience, inclusive education is meant to support curriculum implementation. Inclusive education provides strategies on how to support learners to achieve academic goals. In this regard, the lack of alignment between curriculum development and inclusive education contributes to the teacher knowledge gap in managing barriers to learning in classroom activities.

It appears that teachers are experiencing challenges in supporting learners with learning difficulties. Teachers in schools lack expertise to deal with learners experiencing learning difficulties in a teaching and learning situation (Chimhenga,
Thus, many learners are experiencing gaps in their academic progress and in their lives, because they were not given relevant support to learn according to their pace and ability. Thus, this influenced me to include the aspect of barriers to learning in this study. The Grade R programmes need teachers who know and understand remedial programmes that can be provided for learner academic achievements. The information obtained on barriers to learning will assist me to explore the influence of EWP6 in supporting Grade R teaching and learning in schools.

2.8 SUPPORT FOR GRADE R TEACHERS

This section of the study explores the nature of support personnel the reception-year teachers currently experience in teaching and learning practices. Nkambule and Amsterdam (2018:8) note that teacher support in schools is the key that every teacher needs to improve their teaching practices. They emphasise that the support is needed by all teachers, both qualified and unqualified but it is more needed by those who are unqualified. Reche, Bundi, Riungu and Mbugua (2012:3) argue that the quality of school management personnel plays an important role in guiding teachers in implementing educational policies for academic achievement. Taole and Mohapi (2013:8) and Nkambule and Amsterdam (2018:6) affirm that support is needed in implementing curriculum changes. The arguments reflect that SMTs need to monitor and support the work of teachers through regular class visits. It is clear that Grade R practitioners also require coaching and mentorship from their work personnel at schools like their colleagues in the Foundation Phase.

The following paragraphs explore the support Grade R teaching and learning receive nationally and internationally and how the support influences teaching and learning in rural schools.

2.8.1 Teacher Support in the South African Context

In the South African context, Grade R teaching and learning needs support from SMTs. This statement emanates from the fact that most Grade R teachers come from preschools and are not trained to teach Grade R. Nkambule and Amsterdam (2018:4) highlight that SMT and developmental support groups are expected to provide internal sources of support for teachers at schools to improve teaching and learning. It is noted
that teachers rely on their managers for instructional leadership, support on classroom-management issues and for parental support.

The challenge is on SMT knowledge and understanding on how to support Grade R teaching and learning. It is noted that in most South African schools, teacher support is inadequate (Van der Berg, 2016:26). Hwenha (2014:21) maintains that the lack of teacher support might be caused by the poor relationships between the ECD/Grade R practitioners and the principals in schools. For this reason, Grade R teachers might find it difficult to receive support to practise the skills they acquired in training institutions and workshops. Hwenha (2014:22) also states that lack of support and poor relationships lead to job dissatisfaction and many practitioners decide to quit the sector. I attribute this to the lack of appropriate leadership skills within the school and how teaching and learning is managed to improve learner performance.

Omar (2014:4) warns that the absence of supportive work personnel can create difficulties to teacher development and change may also be negatively affected for curriculum development. A further complication might arise when a lack of SMT support leaves teachers with gaps in implementing curriculum changes. Furthermore, the SMTs may not know the actual teacher development programmes they need to organise for teacher empowerment. It is evident that without monitoring and support, challenges in ensuring effective teaching and learning in Grade R cannot be addressed. The challenges will remain unknown if they are not investigated.

Madikida (2016:59) declares that there is a lack of departmental support for capacitating SMTs to perform their role of monitoring and supporting teachers. According to Nkambule and Amsterdam (2018:4), the lack of knowledge and understanding SMTs experience brings changes that are sometimes incongruent with the knowledge teachers have already acquired. This aspect may affect teaching and learning if SMTs continue to exercise their powers unilaterally and change the Grade R teaching and learning approaches.

During informal conversations with me, school managers complained that they were not guided on how to monitor Grade R programmes. The conversations emanated from the classroom work that was not monitored during onsite support visits at schools. This challenge is not well publicised; as a result, it hinders implementation of Grade R educational programmes. It appears that little research has been undertaken and
reported on the quality of work support personnel for Grade R. It was therefore necessary for this study to include support personnel in the investigation into exploring effective teaching and learning.

The challenge of SMTs’ lack of knowledge on managing Grade R programmes is a contributing factor to ineffective Grade R teaching and learning in rural schools. The unqualified teachers may become more confused on what and on how to teach in Grade R. It shows that teaching and learning would be negatively affected because teachers feel demotivated and may not teach well. Therefore, learners may experience delays in acquiring knowledge and skills they should use as a foundation for Grade 1. It implies that teachers need support that is aligned with the content that will be relevant to Grade R teaching and learning.

Badungela (2012:23) and Mohapi (2013:3) suggest that the DBE must provide SMTs with instructional programmes for guiding teachers on curriculum implementation. These instructional programmes should be based on monitoring curriculum content coverage, Grade R workbook utilisation, quality of learners’ work, planning, assessment and recording of learner performance (Badungela, 2012:23). I thus developed an interest in exploring the influence of HODs for managing Grade R teaching and learning. Between 2001 and 2010, I noticed that Grade R programmes were not monitored by SMTs.

The reviewed literature does not report much about the influence of untrained SMTs’ support on effective teaching and learning in Grade. My aim, therefore, is to provide a clear understanding of the influence of SMT support personnel on Grade R teaching and learning in rural schools.

2.8.2 Teacher Support in Australia

The support for ECD teachers on curriculum implementation differs from country to country. It is noted that the situation of Australia on teacher support and ECD programmes is similar to that of South Africa. Campbell-Evans, Stamopoulos and Maloney (2014) state that in Australia, there is inadequate leadership training for early ECD. The study points out that ECD managers are incompetent and sometimes they are reluctant to carry out leadership roles (Campbell-Evans et al., 2014:2). Seemingly, ECD operates with little or no leadership support. The ECD teachers may face a
challenge of having school managers who are unsupportive in their teaching practices. It is clear that the situation allows teachers to manage themselves. In my personal view, some of these teachers may not know the expectations of the educational policies guiding ECD implementation and may need guidance.

2.8.3 Teacher Support in Canada

A similar study was conducted by the Alberta Teachers’ Association (ATA) in Canada on the SMT support in ECD. In Canada, teachers’ work in Alberta schools was evaluated by school boards and no feedback after classroom observation was given (ATA, 2013:8). The situation of Canada aligns with the research conducted by Nkambule and Amsterdam (2018:8) which maintains that sometimes HODs were expected to support teachers in subject areas of which they had little or no content knowledge. In my view, the evaluation did not make any sense to teachers because they could not reflect on their work. I argue that the school board did not understand its purpose in monitoring and support. The ATA recommended monitoring, support and timeous feedback for professional growth and for improving quality teaching and learning, (ATA, 2013:53). According to my experience, feedback assists teachers to evaluate their work and make corrections for future development. The ATA did not clearly reveal the influence of evaluation on classroom observations and clear strategies used to ensure quality support to teachers. In reality, it is impossible to achieve good results on learner performance if teaching and learning is not monitored.

2.8.4 Teacher support in Zimbabwe

Hlupo et al. (2013:6) confirm that in rural areas of Zimbabwe 80% of head teachers managed ECD without training. Magwaya, Blignaut and Pillay (2013:454) acknowledge that in Zimbabwe HODs indicated that they were never prepared for the introduction of reception classes and were mandated to monitor them without training. Furthermore, they had their own classes and appeared overloaded.

The case of Zimbabwe shows that everybody thinks that reception-year learners can be taught by anyone, regardless of training or not. It also suggests that the relevant support cannot be provided if the head teachers are untrained to manage ECD. The ECD practitioners may be driven towards teaching and learning that will accommodate the curriculum expectations of head teachers. In my understanding, those expectations
may be incongruent with ECD teaching and learning programmes. It is evident that the head teachers support for reception year teaching and learning may not be appropriate with curriculum needs because of little or no knowledge about ECD. Although the above studies indicate the challenge of HOD lack of training and the strategies used to support teachers, the influence of the challenges were not mentioned.

2.9 THE TRAINING OF GRADE R TEACHERS

Training is regarded as a key that empowers teachers with skills and knowledge to implement curriculum with consistent teaching methods. Atmore (2012:14) and Hwenha (2014:31) argue that the quality of ECE lays a good foundation when teaching and learning practice is done by trained early childhood teachers. The following sections explore literature on the training Grade R teachers obtained to improve teaching and learning in the grade.

2.9.1 Training of Grade R Teachers in South Africa

In South African context, Grade R teachers were previously employed with a preschool qualification. According to Janse van Rensburg (2015:4), the minimum qualification requirement for Grade R practitioners was either an NQF Level 2 or NQF Level 4 preschool certificate when Grade R was introduced in 2001. This is equivalent to Grade 10 or Grade 12 and is not a tertiary qualification. The level of qualification clarifies that when Grade R was introduced the Department of Education was not ready with the actual qualification for Grade R. Looking at the quality of the qualification, Grade R was introduced under pressure in the education system. Therefore, Grade R teachers continued struggling with teaching and learning strategies they were not trained for. Undoubtedly, training has a positive influence on teaching and learning if it has been aligned with curriculum needs. The above reasons indicate that training in this study is one of the challenges needs to be investigated in order to improve quality of teaching and learning.

From the experience of teaching in the Foundation Phase, as a cluster leader in the district as well as Grade R curriculum advisor, I noticed that Grade R teachers are not happy with monitoring. The quality of work observed during class visits revealed that there are Grade R teachers who never obtained any training. On this challenge, Hwenha (2014:31) emphasises that if learners are in the hands of untrained teachers
to provide care and support, learners tend to experience problems in their learning processes. This suggests that Grade R teaching and learning needs to be explored for supporting teachers to improve learner performance. My background knowledge is that teaching and learning needs teachers to be well invested with knowledge and skills. The skills and knowledge should be aligned with prescribed content.

Mahan (2015:18) argues that Grade R teachers are struggling to teach learners because some were not trained on CAPS implementation including those who were at college after the CAPS was introduced. The study points to the negative influence the lack of training might cause in teaching and learning. The questions arise of how these teachers cope in teaching Grade R learners, yet they do not have subject content knowledge or strategies for assessment. The presentation made by Hadebe-Ndlovu (2016:28) on Grade R teachers’ preparedness to teach emergent literacy in Durban acknowledges that the training Grade R teachers received was inadequate for teachers to deliver the curriculum effectively. It suggests that teachers may experience challenges on how to plan integrated teaching and learning, apply the teaching and learning approach and even manage learners with barriers to learning. These are some of the major curriculum components teachers need to apply when teaching Grade R. The lack of training shows that teachers will produce learners with gaps in academic performance. The influence of training Grade R teachers obtained needs further research by this study.

Omar (2014:2) suggests that in-service training needs to focus on the subject content knowledge, classroom management, teaching methods and evaluation of learners. For this reason, I have seen a need to explore the quality of training Grade R teachers obtained because CAPS demands an appropriate progression from Grade R to Grade 1. Then, I argue that the effective implementation of Grade R teaching and learning needs to be traced back to the quality of the training Grade R teachers receive, without forgetting that historically, in the Eastern Cape, most Grade R teachers were recruited from preschool centres. Teachers must implement policies and strategies that measure effective teaching and learning in Grade R, yet they have no basic knowledge and skills about ECD content.

It is confirmed that the qualifications for government employees in South Africa are established on the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) by the South African
Qualification Authority (SAQA) (Atmore, 2012:14). Atmore (2012) further explains that ECD qualifications are offered at Further Education and Training (FET) colleges and ECD Non-Profit Organisations (NPOs). It is suggested that the content of the qualification should be aligned with the content of the prescribed curriculum that would address strategies to be used and assessment requirements for Grade R teaching and learning (Machaba, 2013:48). This would assist teachers to teach the relevant content with confidence.

The current study indicates that the Department of Basic Education found that a Level 4 qualification was not good enough for preparing Grade R teachers (Andrich et al., 2015:2). That resulted in the Department of Basic Education introducing a Level 5 qualification which was a Grade R diploma. Presently, most Grade R teachers have ECD Level 4 and a few have a Level 5 qualification (Andrich et al., 2015:3). Those who have Level 5 have an opportunity to advance their qualifications to a Level 6 diploma and up to Level 7 (degree) through distance learning (Mohangi et al., 2016:73). The initiative implies that South Africa is making a slow shift in improving the qualifications of Grade R teachers for effective teaching and learning. However, the pace of upgrading Grade R teacher qualifications is too slow because curriculum changes are ongoing and rapid. Therefore, it is important to explore the influence of training on teachers’ experience in implementing CAPS in Grade R classrooms. Although the problem with Grade R teacher training and qualification status is well known, it is not yet resolved and needs further investigation because of ongoing curriculum changes of the 21st century.

2.9.2 The Training of Reception-Year Teachers in China

Sun, Rao and Pearson (2015:16) investigated the achievements and challenges in rural areas globally. In China, rural schools have very few kindergartens (reception year) with qualified teachers and it is a good example of a country which has experienced the challenges of unqualified staff and the challenge of a low standard of education. For the purpose of this study, it is important to investigate the influence of unqualified Grade R teachers on teaching and learning. In addition, the support of the Department of Education provided to Grade R teachers to improve teaching and learning in their respective schools is essential for investigation. This would assist in supporting Grade R teaching and learning in South Africa and abroad.
2.9.3 The Training of Grade R Teachers in Singapore

In Singapore, a Preschool Qualifications Accreditation Committee (PQAC) was established to develop a qualification by allocating modules with a number of credits. As a result, preschool teachers in Europe have a general teaching certificate as a compulsory requirement (Sun et al., 2015:10). It is an indication that Singapore is managing the challenge of employing unqualified ECD teachers. It is noticeable that such qualifications are considered as an important tool for supporting teachers to improve learner performance. This is one of the strategies that may assist to improve Grade R in South Africa.

2.9.4 The Training of Grade R Teachers in Zimbabwe

Similarly, Zimbabwe experiences a challenge of employing unqualified reception-year practitioners. Teachers employed by SMTs in collaboration with SGBs had no training for teaching reception-year learners or knowledge of ECD learners (Hlupo et al., 2013:6). It is highlighted that only 10% of teachers were qualified to teach ECD. The other teachers taught ECD classes with diplomas or certificates that were not relevant to ECD teaching and learning programmes. In my understanding, perspectives from this study indicate that there are important components teachers should consider for effective teaching and learning. These components may include the curriculum principles, assessment principles and the learning-through-play approach. The low percentage of qualified teachers shows that ECE was not considered as a key to improving quality learning in the education system.

2.10 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework of this study was briefly discussed in Chapter 1. This section discusses the theories in depth, highlighting their alignment with the problem statement of the study and with CAPS implementation. CAPS prioritises effective teaching and learning to improve learner performance. The study is underpinned by the social constructivism theory proposed by Vygotsky.

The theories of play to strengthen the ideas of Vygotsky in Grade R teaching and learning practices are explored. The study also adopted the ideas of Freire which are based on knowledge constructed by an individual in social and cultural contexts (Freire, 1974:77). The following paragraphs explore Vygotsky's theory as a framework
that underpins this study with the support of the theories of play. Freire's seminal work on the pedagogy of the oppressed was used as this study was conducted in rural areas where the majority of disadvantaged learners live.

Social constructivism presents the view that learners’ academic performance improves when teaching and learning is based on the culture and the context of the learner (Gray & MacBlain, 2012:72; Nordlof, 2014:6). In other words, Vygotsky’s constructivist theory emphasises teaching and learning that accommodates learners’ immediate environment, age and cultural experiences (Vygotsky, 1981:164; Freire, 1974: 100). The theory fits well in this study because it is aligned with CAPS implementation in Grade R classrooms which prioritises home language as the medium of instruction in the Foundation Phase. The theories in this section answer the questions based on the strategies teachers can use to improve learner performance in rural schools.

2.10.1 Vygotsky’s Socio-Constructivism in ECE

In the following paragraphs, I explore Vygotsky’s theory contributing to effective teaching and learning, language of teaching and learning, the learning-through-play approach and the contribution of the ZPD and scaffolding in improving teaching and learning in the classroom context. These are important aspects that need to be applied in Grade R teaching and learning. For this reason, Vygotsky’s theory, in this study, provides the strategies that can support teachers in implementing Grade R academic programmes.

2.10.1.1 Vygotsky’s theory in teaching and learning

Nordlof (2014:11) reveals that Vygotsky’s theory of learner development is based on the previous knowledge the learner has already acquired. The theory suggests that the previous knowledge of the child should be used as a knowledge base in teaching and learning. Vygotsky’s theory shows that learning is a developmental process whereby new concepts are built on previous concepts that the learner has already acquired from his/her immediate society. It is noticeable that the previous knowledge the Grade R learners obtained from their society is the foundation of learning when they begin formal schooling. It is my opinion that at the beginning of the year, baseline assessment needs to be an integral part of planning. This will help teachers to understand the
background knowledge of the learner and abilities and determine the needs of the individual ECD learners.

The important contribution of Vygotsky’s theory is acknowledged by Feza (2013:4) in teaching and learning mathematics. She suggests that in developing a child’s cognitive thinking in the classroom teachers have to adopt teaching and learning strategies. Some of the strategies are highlighted in the Grade R daily programme which involves child-initiated activity and adult-initiated activity (Vygotsky, 1967:16; Feza, 2013:4). Vygotsky (1978:57) indicates that Grade R teachers should also plan individual and group activities to engage learners in cooperative learning. These are Vygotsky’s suggested techniques which should be part of planning to accommodate different learning styles. Seemingly, if teachers can adopt Vygotsky’s ideas, they would have a positive impact on Grade R introduction although these strategies need a trained teacher to apply them effectively in the classroom.

2.10.1.2 Language of teaching and learning

The socio-constructive theory emphasises the effective use of language as a tool in teaching and learning. Vygotsky (1986:107) stresses that learners learn concepts which are the product of words. He emphasises that learners express themselves in the development of thought and in cultural growth of consciousness. The reason for choosing Vygotsky’s theory in this study emanates from the reception-year learners who experience problems with language and with grasping content instructions. Moalosi (2013:3) affirms that teachers lacked facilitation skills for supporting learners with language problems. I reason that teachers’ incompetence in language teaching may result in incompetent learners in language performance.

Vygotsky (1978:63) states that in teaching and learning, language plays an important role as a psychological and cultural pedagogical tool that supports the learner to tackle problem-solving activities for individual development. In stressing the importance of Vygotsky’s theory, MacBlain (2012:74) argues that Vygotsky’s theory emphasises that language should be used as a cultural tool to mediate concepts in classroom activities. In my view, the cultural part of language reflects the basic language concepts the learner acquires from his/her home environment. Therefore, teachers need to ensure that the language used in teaching and learning enables the learner to understand the content in the classroom. Then, learners may feel motivated in learning new concepts.
Language needs to be part of this study as it may hinder teaching and learning if it is not addressed.

Imenda (2014:35) shares a view that Vygotsky’s theory of constructivism values language as the tool for promoting children’s abstract thoughts through social interaction with adults and other children. These interactions can help learners to adopt social roles and the rules of the society to which they belong (Vygotsky, 1967: 207). In this regard, social roles and rules are learned in life skills and are applied across other subjects such as mathematics, science and technology (DoE, 2011b:5).

In the case of life skills as a subject, learners are taught on how to greet adults, friends and teachers, which are norms and values of the society. The instructions to do activities in various subjects are also given in language. Therefore, Grade R teachers should adhere to the language of teaching and learning for positive learning outcomes through play-based approach. On the other hand, teachers need to plan learning activities according to the abilities of learners observing the ZPD proposed by Vygotsky.

The current proponents of Vygotsky’s theory maintain that mathematics concept knowledge is improved in classrooms when children receive instructions in their home language (Feza, 2013:4; Longman, 2014:125; O’Brien, 2014:4; Ryan et al., 2014: 4; Whitman, 2015:44). In my personal view, Vygotsky’s theory engages policy makers, teachers and curriculum planners to take into consideration language as the most critical aspect of teaching and learning. In the reception year, Vygotsky’s theory determines the relation between the language policy and the existing teaching and learning practices based on the curriculum content requirements for learner academic achievement. It means teachers should adhere to the reception-year language policy in their interaction with learners in classroom activities. Grade R teachers therefore need to create the contexts for learners to develop vocabulary that will relate to learners’ academic achievement.

I believe that if the language policy can be implemented effectively, learners may work with numbers, unpack mathematics concepts and deal with language aspects with ease, with or without teacher support. The Vygotsky’s theory encourages cooperation between the learner and the teacher and with other learners in teaching and learning classroom activities. It appears that language should be given priority by all
stakeholders participating in transforming education. In the reception year, little research has been done on language development in the classroom. Moreover, Vygotsky’s theory provides me with information about the importance of language development in reception-year classes and the strategies the teacher is expected to apply for improving learner academic performance.

2.10.1.3 Vygotsky’s contribution towards learning through the play approach

This section of the study explores the role of play in the Grade R teaching and learning classroom environment. In Grade R, learning takes place in the form of informal play. Learners should listen to the instructions, rules, talk, see objects and manipulate them according to the activities organised by the teacher (Aronstam & Braund, 2015:6). The learning-through-play approach makes learning enjoyable and fun in the classroom. Gray and MacBlain (2012:76) highlight that children’s play begins in positive social interaction with skilful adults. In this study, skilful adults are the Grade R teachers in the classroom environment. These teachers implement CAPS in Grade R through a policy known as play, learn and grow together (ECDBE, 2012:3). The policy provides teachers with various teaching and learning activities that can be approached by playing. These activities include creative and performing arts, physical education, assessment, oral presentations, construction games, puzzles, role play and fantasy corners (Aronstam & Braund, 2015:6). It is an indication that play is a form of learning that develops the child physically, cognitively, socially, emotionally and academically.

In the Foundation Phase, the theory of Vygotsky focuses on teaching mathematic and language in primary schools. From what I have learned in Vygotsky’s theory, the child can remember the concepts with ease when being hands-on in an activity. The theory of Vygotsky fits well in this study as it deals with young children who learn by seeing and doing by manipulating objects in a classroom environment. I deduce that learning through play enhances more chances for active learning which can instil intrinsic motivation to the learner towards academic achievement. In conclusion, the Vygotsky’s theory encourages teachers to give learners an opportunity to explore resources in the form of play and that may improve learners’ higher order thinking. For this reason, the theory is used to guide teachers to shift from an overly structured teaching and learning approach in Grade R classes.
2.10.1.4 ZPD and scaffolding in teaching and learning

The ZPD and scaffolding are concepts that underpin Vygotsky’s theory. The theory sheds light on how learners can cooperate effectively in the classroom context and what teachers can do to improve learner academic performance. The ZPD and scaffolding have different definitions but they are used concurrently in teaching and learning. In other words, scaffolding cannot work until the teacher understands the level of learner cognitive ability and teaching and learning cannot be effective if the ZPD is not well considered. Vygotsky (1978:40) highlights that in teaching and learning, scaffolding plays an important role in mediating construction of knowledge in classroom practices.

Siyepu (2013:3) and Moalosi (2013:3) explain that the term ZPD indicates that there are activities the learner can do independently and activities the learner can do with the support of the teacher in the classroom context. The explanation suggests that effective teaching and learning is determined by the cognitive abilities of learners. It is therefore important that the content, resources and approaches be at the level of learners. In this note, Vygotsky supports the principles of CAPS which state that learners should learn according to their own levels and abilities. In addition, Nordlof (2014:12) outlines that teachers can use scaffolding as an approach to support learners to reach their ZPD.

Vygotsky (1978:40) also states that learners perform better with the support of more developmentally-advanced children than when they work alone. It is quite clear that teachers need to provide learners with quality support to help them to cooperate effectively in learning activities. Viewing the definitions of both of Vygotsky’s concepts, teachers should plan various forms of activities that will be relevant to the age of learners and that accommodate diverse learner needs.

In scaffolding, teachers transmit skills and knowledge to support learners in steps until they can work independently (Moalosi, 2013:2). This refers to the importance of competency of teachers that they should apply as they work directly with Grade R learners. Feza (2014b:4) acknowledges that ZPD and scaffolding are recommended for teaching mathematics in the Foundation Phase. She argues that the failure of teachers to understand Vygotsky’s ZPD and scaffolding may lead to ineffective teaching and learning. Moalosi (2013:3) elaborates that if teachers fail to take the ZPD
into consideration in their teaching and learning, learners will not develop in knowledge and skills. This theory reminds teachers to plan the tasks according to the age cohort so that it can be easy to provide meaningful support to the learner.

Vygotsky’s theory also emphasises that teachers must consider that learners develop at a lower and upper level in the academic process. In the lower level of ZPD, the child can work independently, while in the upper level of ZPD the child needs the support of the teacher (Gray & MacBlain, 2012:77). In their explanation, teachers should plan various tasks for learning to support learners to reach their optimal development and to monitor each individual learner up to the expected standard of achievement (Gray & MacBlain, 2012:78). I believe that if teachers can apply the ZPD and scaffolding concepts strategies in the classroom context, they could manage challenges that affect learners with learning difficulties. Then, Grade R learner performance could improve because monitoring and support would meet all learners’ needs.

However, although scaffolding is important in supporting teaching and learning, it is ineffective in big classrooms (Chimhenga, 2016:33; Moalosi, 2013:3) because it is time-consuming to provide individual support in such situations. On the other hand, Vygotsky’s theory is criticised for its failure to provide teachers with strategies to deal with learners who do not cope when teachers scaffold learning (Gray & MacBlain, 2012: 12; Moalosi, 2013:3). Despite the weaknesses observed in Vygotsky’s theory, I claim that there are some valuable aspects that are important for teaching and learning the theory shares. Such aspects include the quality of support to be supplied by teachers; the consideration of the cognitive level of learners; the promotion of cooperative learning; and the identification of the role of the teacher as a mediator of learning. All these aspects make the theory more credible in a study about effective teaching and learning. Therefore, the theory supports the effective teaching and learning that is expected in Grade R.

In conclusion, in this study, I used Vygotsky’s theory as a framework as I believe that it emphasises the role of the teacher which is to provide effective instruction and constructive feedback to learners through social interaction. The theory also advises teachers to allow learners to take the initiative in developing themselves through cooperative activities to show that learning is facilitated and knowledge has developed. In relation to this study, by adopting Vygotsky’s teaching strategies, constructivist
teachers can cope better in supporting learners with different learning abilities, which is one of the main purposes of this study in exploring some of the challenges facing Grade R teaching and learning.

2.10.2 Theories of Play in the Grade R Classroom

The importance of play is discussed by Piaget, Freud, Bandura, Froebel and Bruner. All these theorists maintain that play is a part of every child’s life and is characterised by few rules and fair discipline in the play field. This shows that teachers should be committed in their classrooms to engage learners in hands-on activities. The play theories emphasise the intensive utilisation of resources in Grade R class activities.

2.10.2.1 Piaget’s contribution towards Grade R teaching and learning

- Piaget’s concept of conservation in Grade R

According to Piaget (1962:181), play contributes a great deal to the child’s physical, cognitive, emotional, social and personality development. For the purpose of this study, in teaching and learning practices, play is used as a tool to develop learners’ ability to grasp information and skills of the planned content. Piaget (1972: 65) also expresses the idea that play is a means of children’s learning and of exploration in the sociocultural context. This highlights that the cognitive level of the child determines the way in which the child gains new knowledge and skills through play.

Talking is identified as the most important activity in early childhood classes. Piaget (1962:181) clarifies that learners are not only involved in new activities in their play but also apply existing knowledge. In this regard, learners come to school with basic knowledge they acquired from their sociocultural background. Their sociocultural background has a strong influence on their pretend-play which Piaget calls symbolic play (Zhang, 2017:8). This suggests that learners come to school with content knowledge they acquired from home and society. Therefore, it is the role of teachers to use that knowledge as the foundation for the new concepts to be introduced.

In my personal opinion, for better learning outcomes, teachers need to value learners’ sociocultural background, as the purpose of CAPS is to equip learners, irrespective of their socioeconomic background, race, gender, physical ability or intellectual ability,
with the knowledge, skills and values necessary for self-fulfillment and meaningful participation in society as citizens of a free country (DBE, 2011b: 5).

In addition, Piaget (1962:181) claims that play allows learners to practice the knowledge and skills they learn from their teachers, parents and peers. In order to understand the series of actions required to be applied in children’s play, Piaget’s concepts of accommodation, imitation and assimilation should be understood in the teaching context. Accommodation refers to the revision of the current knowledge according to new surroundings whereas assimilation is the application of previous knowledge to handle with new situations (Piaget, 1962:181). Learners should be engaged in activities that are appropriate for their age level which includes learner-initiated activities supported by adults (Bhagat, Haque & Jaalam, 2018:129; Piaget, 1972:32). Piaget’s theory on play is supported by Aronstam and Braund (2015:2) who affirm that play is a key instrument in the promotion of learning in the classroom and outside the classroom context. In this study, Piaget’s theory draws Grade R teachers’ attention to the influence of play in improving learner performance in early grade classes.

In addition, Piaget (1962:181) introduced the concept of conservation as a strategy to improve learners’ cognitive skills in play-based activities. Talat, Abro and Jamali, (2013:40) define conservation as the ability of the child to understand symbols or material according to their relationship and appearance. Piaget (1952, cited in Hattie & Bolton, 2017:9) highlights that young learners show an understanding in activities which involve conservation of numbers, liquid, length, mass, weight, area and volume, as early as at age five. He elaborates that learners need to be provided with manipulatives to solve problems in conservation.

In light of Piaget’s statement, Helmbold (2014:100) claims that conservation of numbers forms the foundation for understanding mathematics concepts in ECE. According to CAPS, these are some of the skills that Grade R learners are expected to master before they progress to Grade 1 (DoE, 2011b:8). I posit that Grade R teachers need to be well invested with content knowledge and understand the play-based approach to achieve the expected outcomes on conservation to promote self-discovery of information in the teaching and learning context. Helmbold (2014:84) contends that young ECD learners can be guided on how to perform Piaget’s
conservation tasks. This confirms that learners in Grade R can acquire the concept of conservation if teachers use the learning-through-play approach. Some of the challenges affecting teaching and learning are addressed in the following discussion.

According to Talat et al. (2017: 47), young learners in rural schools find it difficult to apply their knowledge and skills on concept of conservation. Muthivhi (2014:7) concurs that in South Africa, learners from rural schools perform poorly on conservation tasks of Piaget. The most affected learners are from socio-economically disadvantaged families and communities where there are shortages of resources, an absence of electricity and little print media. The situation shows that learners in rural schools are still facing a challenge in accessing quality education. Regarding socioeconomic status of rural learners, the situation presages that learners could experience cognitive development delays when starting formal learning. In this regard, it shows that there are strategies teachers in rural schools cannot apply in their teaching practices because of rurality and the poor socioeconomic status of schools. Strategies to improve teaching and learning in rural schools are desperately needed.

- Piaget’s influence in early childhood language teaching and learning

Piaget (1972:32) mentions that in their play, young learners use language as an instrument for socialising in the school environment. According to Piaget (1972:32), language is used for asking questions about something, asking for something and to express feelings. Learners become acquainted with social rules through language use in social interaction with others. Piaget believes that a child’s language and cognitive development go hand-in-hand but thinking develops before language ability. This support the idea of Vygotsky (1978: 52) who states that concept formation does not exist without verbal thinking. It implies that teacher education programmes should empower teachers with language that can engage both the learner and the teacher in a meaningful communication discourse to achieve better learning outcomes in classroom context.

2.10.2.2 Freud’s psychoanalytic theory

Freud (1970:10) believes that through play, a child learns to express his or her feelings. According to Freud (1970:10) learners begin to identify their genders as early as in their childhood. Smit (2015:46) concurs that gender differences influence children’s
play and agrees that girls like pretend-play while boys prefer constructive play. This indicates that in Grade R classroom teacher needs to have a variety of resources to accommodate both genders. It appears that fantasy area and block areas should be provided to ensure that both aspects of play are accommodated. According to Smit (2015:110), girls usually play in small groups with a variety of indoor and outdoor resources and boys enjoy rough games and adventurous play.

2.10.2.3 Bandura’s theory of social learning

Bandura’s social learning theory has three important components teachers need to observe in their teaching and learning practices.

• Observational learning

In this component, Bandura (1977:12-23) believes that learning takes place through human interaction in a social context. According to Bandura (1989:34), children learn by observing the behaviour of adults as role models and they imitate it at some later stage to achieve a goal of learning. Bandura indicates that play begins at home where parents buy play materials. Learners use the material to imitate the people they see either on television programmes or in their local areas. The free play and pretend-play activities are where learners demonstrate their cognitive perceptions (Bandura, 1989:34). Zhang (2017:80) indicates that parents learn from children’s play more about the children’s interests and predict their future careers. He also suggests that parents and teachers need to consider learners’ personal differences. The challenge noticed is that most adults in rural communities do not understand the importance of play, yet adults’ intervention has a positive influence on quality learning-through-play approach (Zhang, 2017:81). Parents should also be orientated on the importance of play on learner development.

• Imitation

The above component indicates that after a learner observed the behaviour of others, the learner begins to assimilate it and imitate the behaviour according to his or her interpretation. Abuhatoum, Howe and Chang-Kredl (2014:395) elaborate that learners who are highly engaged in social play activities such as pretend-play tend to be more creative in manipulating objects. In imitation, learners interact with other learners and that socialisation leads to language development because children learn new
vocabulary and meanings (Zhang et al., 2017:57). The theory capacitates teachers and parent on the value of playing in learning new concepts. In this regard, teachers need to facilitate play in their classrooms by providing resources and space for learning.

- **Modelling**

This is a third component of Bandura’s theory which teachers need to observe in their daily practices. I believe that modelling fits well in this study on life skills subject where learners use household utensils to imitate what their elders do at home, in hospitals, in the garden and in their environment at large. According to Bandura (1977:14), learners need to be exposed to demonstrations where they have to model the behaviour of a role model in classroom context. The role model in this context is the Grade R teacher. Grade R learners often copy their teacher, even their characters. It is important, therefore, to model a behaviour that is aligned with the growth and development of the learner.

2.10.2.4 Bruner’s discovery learning

According to Bruner (1962:87), play is a process of discovering information and mode of learning. He believes that the child has the responsibility to search out the information that is appropriate to solve problems in given situation. It is stated that previous knowledge forms the base to access the new knowledge. Through discovery learning, learners can approve or disapprove any information at their disposal (Freire, 1970:10). It proves that learners in teaching and learning processes should be treated as human beings with ability and potential. The view is supported by Freire (1978:102) who believes that learners should be engaged in a dialogue as active beings in their education. Bruner’s theory fit well in my study which explores teaching and learning based on the principles of teaching learners to be active citizens of tomorrow. The theory encourages teachers to use learning through play in their teaching practices to develop learners’ cognitive abilities to learning.

He developed three stages of discovery learning teachers need to observe in their planning, namely; enactive, iconic and symbolic stage of learning (Bruner, 1961:66).

- **Enactive stage of learning**
In the enactive stage, Bruner (2010:4) states that learners need to be actively engaged in manipulating concrete resources that are used to access information and use inductive reasoning to form new connections and imaginative solutions. It appears that learners should be given the opportunity to play with the materials in order to understand how they work. In South African context Solis, Khumalo, Nowack, Blythe-Davidson and Mardell (2018:25) urge teachers to create classrooms cultures of open play-based activities for learners to discover a lot of information. Bruner (1957:4) insists that in play activities, learners attain new vocabulary, reading skills and tolerance. In this study, teaching and learning is based on learning through play. The lack of play would mean that teaching and learning was not effective.

- Iconic stage of discovery learning

In the iconic stage of discovery learning learners are able to make mental images of materials and they no longer need to manipulate them directly. At this stage, learners visualise concrete material without touching them. Bruner (1957:4) calls this stage as ‘memory in action’ because during the process of play, the learners remember and think about the events and experiences from the past. In my understanding, at this stage, learners’ memory has developed to the extent that learner can transfer learning from one event to a similar event.

- Symbolic stage of learning

This stage of learning is based on language acquisition of learners in early grades. In this stage, learners use abstract ideas to represent the world. It is a stage when learners can use their observations to evaluate, judge and think critically about the problem on hand (Bruner, 1960:79). Bruner believes that language is an important tool to improve learners’ ability to deal with abstract concepts. He also emphasises that the role of teachers is not to transfer knowledge to the child but to facilitate thinking and problem-solving techniques (Bruner, 1961:105). In his theory, Bruner encourages teachers to support learners to be active in constructing their own knowledge. In this study, Bruner’s theory supports the principles of CAPS implementation which Grade R teachers need to adhere to for improving learners’ academic achievements.

McLeod (2018:3) reminds teachers that learners should go through all the stages proposed by Bruner to be able to solve problems in their academic journey. He
emphasises that, effective teachers should provide support and scaffold learners through these three stages. Scaffolding helps learners to be able to solve problems independently (Vygotsky, 1978:86). The responsibility of the teacher is to guide learners in teaching and learning practices towards building their own knowledge base instead of teaching through rote memorisation (Bruner, 1952:32-33). This emphasises that learners should be given an opportunity to make mistakes, fix them and ultimately gain knowledge they can use even outside the classroom.

Finally, Bruner (1961:9) adopts the view that all learners are capable of tackling complex concepts in any subject if they are taught effectively following their stages of development. Bruner’s theory draws teachers’ attention to the fact that they need to plan lessons that support learners to discover information. Teachers should present information initially at a simplified level and move gradually to a more complex level. This is an ideal strategy to learners being scaffolded to solve problem by themselves.

2.10.2.5 Froebel’s play theory

According to researchers, Froebel is one of the theorists who has a passion for ECE and believes in developing his own play materials such as toys, balls, tubes and cylinders (Helmbold, 2014:47; Roszak, 2018:153; Park, 2016:128). Froebel views play as self-activity in which learners express their own feelings. Learners perform various activities such as sewing, tracing, drawing, weaving, cutting and clay modelling. Froebel’s classes were equipped with wooden blocks, toy pets and finger play materials. Froebel’s theory emphasises language, numbers and hand-eye coordination. Froebel (2001:77) believes that learners should be engaged in activities in which they can use natural resources to make objects. To mention a few, he included rocks, leaves, sand, plants and branches (Roszak, 2018: 153; Quinn, 2013:1). In my personal view, Froebel stresses that, for learning through play to be effective, the environment should be safe.

Froebel (1885) cited in Park (2016:128) maintains that teachers need to use natural vegetation or waste material to develop resources and called this work ‘gifts’. He emphasises that the teacher should collect relevant materials and engage learners in the ‘work of doing’. A good example was given where a child was given a gift of blocks to build a three-dimensional object and the child built a house. Smit (2015:111) concurs that hands-on experiences are important for young children because they learn better
by doing. Park (2016:128) highlights that Froebel, by his ‘gifts’ metaphor, targeted the improvement of language and mathematics in all grades. According to Brehony (2013:2), Froebel also designed teaching materials, songs, rhymes, curriculum and daily routines for small and large groups lessons with diverse learner abilities. He stressed that during break-time, learners should be given an opportunity to enjoy physical activities, sing songs and recite rhymes. After all, the theory encourages teachers to follow a daily programme by observing time for teacher-guided activities and free play activities.

The theory of Froebel fits well in my study as it equips Grade R teachers with strategies on how to make resources using waste and natural material to teach the Grade R curriculum. I have noted that most of the materials mentioned above are collected by teachers for the fantasy area, block area and language development. I posit that Froebel’s theory encourages teachers to be creative and this is a major focus of CAPS implementation so that they would produce creative learners. Using ‘gifts’ for teaching and learning appears to be important for Grade R teaching and learning and needs to be further investigated for material-making and to strengthen mathematics and language development.

All five play theorists (Piaget, Freud, Bruner, Bandura and Froebel) view play as an important tool that develops learners in totality, that is, physically, emotionally, mentally, morally and socially. These theories support the idea of Vygotsky on which this study is framed. In my view, understanding the theories of play can provide a framework for Grade R teachers about the strategies they can use to improve teaching and learning in implementing curriculum. These theories of play also provide a useful insight into how children learn in Grade R classrooms and also to take into consideration the social context in which teaching and learning takes place. The theories of play also encourage teachers to plan their daily routines properly so that they include play properly in learner activities. It appeared that if Grade R teachers ignore the play-based approach in their classrooms, teaching and learning is subject to fail.

Below, I present the theory by Freire which is based on how play theories work in disadvantaged communities as Froebel indicates that the materials he made were ‘gifts’ to disadvantaged schools.
2.10.3 Freire’s Sociocultural Constructivism

The ideas of Freire in the education system are based on changing education in disadvantaged communities by engaging students and teachers to work collaboratively to modify the situations that were discriminatory and unjust (Mahmoudi, Khoshnood & Babaer, 2014:87). In his work, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire (1970:68) emphasises that teachers should be the agents of change in their classroom environment regardless of challenges they may experience. He highlights that teachers as agents of transforming education system need to be courageous, patient, tolerant, joyful, loving and provide security in their respective teaching and learning environments. It alleged that if teacher does not possess the above-mentioned qualities, teaching and learning may not be effective.

Freire focusses on educational strategies and the analysis of language. According to Freire (1970:57; 1974:100), there should be a dialogue for emancipatory education. In his explanation, Freire stresses that students and teachers should be involved in discussions about social conditions that touch their lives and attempt to take critical decisions. In this study, Freire’s ideas suggest that teachers and curriculum designers should recognise learners (students) as beneficiaries of curriculum and be involved in shaping the quality of education they need for social growth and economic development. The theory fits well in study which takes place in deep rural schools in a democratic country with diverse cultures. The ideas of Freire pave the way for me to explore the literature on the exploration of teaching and learning in Grade R and also provide strategies that can be employed to improve learner performance in rural schools.

The following paragraphs discuss what teachers should do in order to overcome the challenges they face in teaching and learning in disadvantaged schools.

2.10.3.1 Freire’s theory on teaching and learning

The proponents of Freire’s sociocultural constructivism hold the assumption that learners’ academic performance improves when teaching and learning is based on the culture and the context of the learner (Gray & MacBlain, 2012:72; Mulaudzi, 2016:35; Nordlof, 2014:6). This suggests that the sociocultural constructivist theory emphasises
teaching and learning that accommodates learners’ immediate environment and cultural experiences.

The seminal work of Freire focuses on the educational programmes that aim much at rural ignored communities (Alam, 2013:27). Freire (1984:34) indicates that teaching and learning is effective when the teacher and the learner interaction is planned to accommodate the culture of the learner. The main focus of Freire is on the classroom and on the impact of the interaction between the teacher and the students based on knowledge acquisition. At the same time, Freire reminds all the stakeholders that are involved in democratic education that education should be designed based on the needs and interest of the people it serves. In a democratic country like South Africa, Freire (1984:34) perceives education as a practice of freedom to which each individual should have access. In his view, Freire (2000: 88) is concerned with the education that emancipates people from the culture of being dependent and to be the agent of change in the society. In this study, the ideas of Freire are aligned with my objective for undertaking this study in rural schools to reveal some of the challenges that deprive learners of the ability to discover the ways they can liberate themselves and how they can be addressed.

Shih (2018:66) concurs that education itself should aim to liberate people to make it easy for people to liberate themselves. Therefore, my study will empower both teachers and curriculum designers to think about the quality of teaching and learning rural schools provide and the strategies to be adopted for academic successes of learners. Freire (1998:67) condemns the traditional teacher-centred approach. He maintains that it deprives learners of an opportunity to share their academic experiences in a non-threatening environment (Alam, 2013: 27; Shih, 2018:64). Freire (1998:67) wants teachers to recognise learners as important subjects in knowledge creation. Furthermore, teachers should think critically of how to maximise learner engagement in their learning process as beneficiaries of learning.

In Pedagogy of the Oppressed, Freire fights for the recognition of children’s culture in the education system as he believes that learners learn best when education is aligned with their cultural and historical background (Freire,1996:48). Mahmoudi et al. (2014:85) perceived that the aim of Freire is to transform education whereby schools should be considered as institutions for social change by fostering critical thinking of
learners. Through critical thinking learners would be able to change their surrounding environments according to their societal needs. Freire (1994:83) claims that when learners grow up, these opportunities would help them to understand their position in the community and to devise strategies to change their communities to improve social life.

The work of Freire fits well in a country like South Africa which is culturally diverse and with many people living in disadvantaged rural areas. South African studies reveal that despite many programmes being initiated to support education in rural areas, there is not much change in the situation surrounding rural education (Mohangi, Krog, Stephen, & Nel, 2016:2). These researchers confirm that the rate of educational progress in rural communities is very slow and the cause is due to various challenges that take time to be resolved but negatively affect quality education. Among the changes made in education is to expose Foundation Phase learners to home language as a language of teaching and learning (DBE, 2011a:6). My study seeks to explore how language is recognised in teaching and learning as learners may use language to shape their future careers.

Freire’s ideas allege that the responsibility of the teacher is not to provide answers to learners but to support learners to achieve a form of critical thinking about real-life situations. Teachers need to shift from their traditional teaching approach and adopt new strategies that should engage learners in various activities that would mold them into responsible citizens.

2.10.3.2 The influence of Freire on teaching and learning language

Freire was an adult educator who believed that language is the requisite to education to help learners to discover the meaning of the text. Freire (1997:58) stresses that language is a fundamental human right people should acquire for the foundation of lifelong learning. He believes that if the teacher speaks the language that is not understood by learners in the classroom teaching and learning may not be effective (Freire, 1970:145). In his language teaching career, Freire (2000:72) was guided by his theory of Critical Pedagogy based on critical language as its component. In this study, language is the acquisition of reading, writing and spoken words developed through interaction between the learner and the teacher in the teaching and learning.
process. Therefore, teachers should consider the language of learners as a learner use in learning and in interpreting problems in their life-long career.

Freire (1996:28) expresses his first experience of language development in reading and writing to his parents as the greatest motivation in his career education. He indicates that he first learned to read, write on the ground and copy words before he started schooling. These are Grade R language learning strategies that are stipulated in CAPS (DBE, 2011a:20-21). Freire began to write sentences when he started schooling and his teacher recognised him as an active participant in the learning process. It is clear that children who have had early reading experiences with their parents benefit during formal instruction that follows in later years and they have a distinct advantage over their peers (Mji, 2014: 265). The challenge is where learners grow up in communities in which there are no libraries and parents have little or no formal education.

The work of Freire proposes that people should take responsibility to change education systems according to their needs. This also involves those who live in rural communities. According to Botman (2014:238), effective teaching and learning depends on language recognition in the education system. Therefore, parents need to support their children at home and those who lack guidelines on how to support their children should be provided with support. The strategies parents need to use in supporting their children at home should be investigated.

Freire’s schoolwork became a stimulus in academic journey through family support obtained (Freire, 1996:29). In this regard, the experience of Freire reveals that parents should be critically literate in their societies in order to support children with basic literacy skills. Therefore, language teaching and learning should be an integral part of teacher and community education and development. This is one of the strategies our education system needs to adopt to support learner academic success.

During his early childhood experience with learning language from his parents and preschool teacher, Freire (1996:81) developed a love of language by spending lots of money on books and on old journals for reading. This clearly encourages progressive teachers to take the initiative to bring life into the classroom regardless of the contextual background of the learners. For teachers to gain such insight, they should live with and learn from societies in which they teach. Freire encourages teachers to
develop a love of language in reading so that their learners may learn from them. In my understanding as a Foundation Phase teacher, young learners easily adopt the academic lifestyle of their teachers and take it up with them to upper grades.

Freire (1978:88) insists that it is important for learners to become critically literate so that they understand the purpose of the information they are receiving by questioning its content in order to figure out its possible partiality. Freire (1970:76) suggests that mediation should be in the form of dialogue to encourage everyone to teach learn together in a cultural language in which mediation takes place. He emphasises the role of critical understanding to remove deprivation and injustice (Mahmoudi, Khoshnood & Babaei, 2014:86). In other words, the teacher and the learner should work cooperatively in terms of knowledge sharing using their own experiences and language to explain the concepts.

Freire (1970:57; 1974:77) emphasises that critical literacy is not only a skill to be learned but practice that is socially constructed and contextually negotiated. The challenges and their influence on critical literacy teaching and learning need to be investigated in order to provide teachers with strategies to improve learner performance. My concern is with the content knowledge teachers have in teaching and learning practice.

2.10.3.4 Freire’ methods of teaching and learning

According to Freire (2000:46), there are two methods teachers use in their teaching practices: the banking concept of education and the problem-posing approach. Freire draws a distinction that banking concepts aims at suppressing critical apprehension of reality while problem-posing education favours the discovery of reality through critical thought and free communication. The following paragraphs discuss the two teaching methods identified by Freire.

• Banking concept of education

Freire (1970:72) describes the banking concept as a teaching situation where the teacher is a depositor of knowledge and skills and learner is the receiver in teaching and learning process. According to Freire, the banking concept of education is teacher-centre in that learners are identified as recipients of information and teacher as a depositor – he called the method 'anti-dialogical' because it does not allow participation
of the other people and favors one-way communication. In his observations, Freire (2000:30) highlights that students who are involved in a class where the teachers use the banking concept, the desire of the student to asks questions or to question the teacher or to participate in the discussion is minimal or non-existent. Brown and Walter (2013:3) highlight that, Freire does not favor the banking concept because it promotes passive learning in the process of teaching and learning.

Brown and Walter (2013:15) indicate that there are still teachers who use the banking concept in their classes, even though many educational theorists condemn it. In my study, the banking concept does not support CAPS implementation and this suggests that subject advisers and SMTs need to strengthen monitoring and support to avoid the use of the banking concept in teaching. In my personal opinion, the banking concept is used by teachers who do not plan teaching and learning or have a content gap in the subject.

- Problem-posing education

Freire (2000:73) initiated a teaching method called problem-posing pedagogy to accommodate the teacher and the learner in the same level in teaching and learning context. Teachers use this method integrate knowledge and skills in the form of a dialogue based on community issues. In his explanation, problem-posing education recognizes both the teacher and the learner as active participants in teaching and learning practices and calls this method as dialogical that allows two-way communication in the teaching and learning context (Shih, 2018:64).

Freire (1978:57) as a proponent of democracy, claims that teacher is no longer a depositor of knowledge and skills and learner a recipient in teaching and learning process. In this regard, Freire highlights that teachers should present the relevant content to the learners so that learners respond by answering questions and enquiring about the information presented to them. According to Brown and Walter (2013: 6), Freire argues that the content is relevant when it is based on community matters and learners are able to participate at a higher-order level in the learning process. Freire used the problem-posing method in his classroom by inviting students to think critically about subject content, instead of simply accepting it (Brown & Walter, 2013:28).
In this study, Freire’s problem-posing pedagogy provides teachers with teaching and learning strategies that may help with CAPS implementation. The problem-posing method also empowers teachers to strengthen the implementation of CAPS in their classrooms. According to CAPS, learners should be taught to identify and solve problems, think critically, work independently, investigate and be active and responsible citizens, (DoE, 2011b:4-5. This study views Freire’s problem-posing method as a guideline to teachers on what democratic teaching and learning should look like to improve learner performance in disadvantaged schools. The purpose of this study is to investigate some of the challenges facing Grade R teaching and learning and the strategies that are used to improve teaching and learning in rural schools. Freire (1996:38) suggests that, in order to make education meaningful, it should be a societal issue that engages various stakeholders in decision-making such as school principals, teachers, parents, community leaders and children as well. This indicates that the education system should cater for the interests and needs of all the inhabitants regardless of cultural background.

In summary, Freire perceives the challenges teachers experience in the education sector as related to societal issues. His work and ideas take into account the knowledge of populations to be taught. Freire’s work underlines the link between knowledge, ability, power and the importance of dialogue and participation in learning.

2.11 CHAPTER SUMMARY

The literature on some of the challenges facing Grade R teaching and learning was discussed. Some of these challenges include lack of support personnel for the reception year, inadequate resources, lack of subject content knowledge, lack of knowledge on managing barriers to learning and the inadequate training teachers received. These challenges have a negative influence on Grade R learners who progress to Grade 1 with gaps in basic subject content knowledge and skills. To understand the broader picture of what happens in Grade R, I deduce that these challenges have not been adequately researched in an integrated way, especially as they affect each other. From the literature review, there is little information that stakeholders such as principals, teachers of the mainstream learners, parents, NGOs or curriculum designers are fully aware of these challenges and their influences in implementing Grade R programmes. It is evident from the literature that ECE lays the
foundation for improving learner performance in the early grades and across the upper grades when curriculum implementation is fully supported.

Vygotsky’s social constructive theory supports effective teaching and learning through teacher and learner involvement in academic activities in the classroom environment was explored. The ideas of the play theorists (Piaget, Freud, Bruner, Bandura and Froebel) who stress the value of play in Grade R teaching and learning were also explored. Since this study was conducted in rural schools where most disadvantaged learners live, Freire’s work on *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* was included in literature review.

The next chapter presents the research design and methodology adopted for conducting this study in Grade R schools of OR Tambo Coastal District in the Province of Eastern Cape, in South Africa.
CHAPTER 3:
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

In Chapter 1, a brief overview of the process of gathering information on the challenges facing Grade R teaching and learning in rural schools was provided. The previous chapter has presented the literature review and the theoretical frameworks underpinning the research question which includes the play theories of Piaget, Bandura, Froebel and Bruner. The literature review and theoretical framework provided a solid framework that indicates that people understand the world better through research, as emphasised by Bertram and Christiansen (2015:7). A detailed description of the research process followed in addressing the main research question is presented in this chapter. This study is qualitative and employed a case study approach, highlighting the criteria used for selecting participants, how data were collected and analysed. The chapter further presents the research findings, quality criteria and ethical considerations.

3.2 QUALITATIVE APPROACH

3.2.1 Qualitative Research Design

This study used a qualitative approach because of its scientific nature in exploring the main research question which is “What are some of the challenges facing Grade R teaching and learning in rural schools?” Bertram and Christiansen (2015:40) advise that, after a research problem has been identified, a research design should be in place which is an important plan on how the research will be conducted. In this study, the research problem was about some challenges facing Grade R teaching and learning in rural schools. The qualitative research design was used to explore the identified research question (Bertram & Christiansen, 2015:40).

3.2.1.1 Advantages of the qualitative approach

The qualitative approach, according to Martella et al. (2013:294), is a flexible systematic approach in understanding qualities of a phenomenon within a research context. Qualitative researchers tend to be concerned with the way individual people view the world and the way they experience events. In addition, Tsai (2013:95) argues
that in qualitative approach, the researcher aims to capture personal meanings of individuals. Therefore, the qualitative research design was appropriate in my study as I was concerned with the way Grade R teachers and their HODs interpret teaching and learning and how their interpretation influences their practices in classroom contexts.

According to Maxwell (2013:105), the openness and flexibility of the qualitative approach allows the researcher to pursue new discoveries and establish relationships with the participants. The qualitative approach was more relevant in my study as the rationale emanates from the lack of research about the challenges facing Grade R teaching and learning in rural schools. The approach is recommended by Lichtman (2014:4) when the researcher wants to know more about peoples’ actions in the field of study.

In addition, the nature of qualitative research enables the researchers to address the kinds of questions that provide different answers in various ways (Flick, 2014:4). Lichtman (2014:4) argues that the qualitative approach helps the researcher to be innovative in looking at new ways of asking and answering questions when dealing with people. The qualitative approach suggests that the qualitative researcher can study the situation and develop strategies to ask questions that persuade participants to provide more answers to the research questions. Researchers who adopt a qualitative approach aim to explore the diverse views of different people to reveal different aspects of problems within a community (Choy, 2014:5). A qualitative approach gave me a broader scope for collecting data, which provided discussions and conclusions about the effective Grade R teaching and learning in rural contexts. Choy (2014:2) also argues that the qualitative approach is about examining cases that happen in real-life situations. Lichtman (2014:9) concurs that qualitative research is based on finding the opinions, attitudes and experiences of participants. In addition, qualitative research aims at collecting information that helps in understanding human character and the causes that determine such character (Lichtman, 2014:9; Choy, 2014:2). My study is based on exploring experiences of Grade R teachers in their natural state of teaching the grade.

3.2.1.2 The advantages of an interpretive paradigm

I also adopted an interpretive paradigm as it provided a greater understanding of the challenges facing Grade R teaching and learning. The proponents of interpretivism
believe that truth is formed by a set of realities extracted from historical, local and non-
generalizable events (Guest et al., 2013:6). According to Kan (2014:2), an interpretive
paradigm view of the world is subjective. He explains further that an interpretive
paradigm allows people to form their own reality of the world in different contexts
through interactions with others. In other words, the interpretive paradigm allows
individuals to express their perceptions and views in their respective contexts. The
interpretive paradigm fitted well in my study as the aim of the study was to find out how
participants perceived the challenges facing Grade R teaching and learning in their
different school contexts. I interpreted the information collected from the teachers in
the way it was extracted from the interviews, structured observations and document
analysis. Data interpretation was based on teachers’ challenges in the curriculum
implementation process in classroom activities.

3.2.2 Case Study

A case study approach within the qualitative approach was used to explore the
challenges facing Grade R teaching and learning and the influence of those challenges
in rural schools. Bertram and Christiansen (2015:42) recommend a qualitative case
study as it examines a phenomenon within its real-life practice and data are collected
about a single event or a group of people. I was influenced by the idea that a case
study enables researchers to examine the experiences of participants within a specific
context in detail. Pacho (2015:1) highlights that a case study allows the researcher to
analyse social contexts and reflect upon every experience.

Johnson (2014:357) highlights that in a qualitative case study, the researcher is
expected to give a comprehensive description about the number of cases under
discussion. In addition, various researchers define a case study as an empirical
enquiry that investigates the case in depth and in detail in a real-world context and can
use a variety of methods such as interviews, structured observations and documents
analysis (Mills & Birks, 2014:145; Yin, 2014:16). The above definitions of a case study
support the use of the cases in my research to explore the research question. The
reason for selecting case studies emanates from the need to hear various voices about
the challenges facing Grade R teaching and learning. The definitions also allowed me
to use various research methods to collect data for rich presentation about the research
problem.
3.2.2.1 Advantages of case studies

Case study design is described as an approach that is used to have a complete idea about the challenge being explored and to ask appropriate questions that help to capture the fullness of human action (Choy, 2014:4). This definition further indicates that the information gathered should be relevant to the human actions explored. Therefore, the case study design fitted well with my study as I intended to understand the challenges facing Grade R teaching and learning and the influence these challenges have in classroom activities.

The case study allowed me to use interviews, classroom observations and document analysis as data collection methods to acquire more information related to Grade R teaching and learning. Furthermore, Yin (2014:20) maintains that case study research needs a researcher to report all the evidence collected through triangulation without generalising. Case study design also broadened my scope to ask appropriate questions to capture intensive data about the status of Grade R in the education system. As the definition of a case study indicates, the findings from Grade R teachers and their head teachers were described, interpreted and presented without generalisation.

Another feature that made a case study design appropriate in my study is that case study research focuses on one participant, setting or situation (Martella et al., 2013:324). In my study, participants were studied individually in depth and in detail to find out relevant information about the challenges facing Grade R teaching and learning in rural schools. According to Guest et al. (2013:14), a case study aims at finding something that is unique to the case. In other words, the study under investigation needs to come up with original information that would frame studies of other researchers in similar situations. A case study design became relevant to my study as it presented a thorough analysis of one case across a larger set of cases which was a population of Grade R teachers in their teaching and learning practices in rural schools.

According to Pacho (2015:3), a qualitative case study helps to explore knowledge and understanding about the situations in which people live in communities. Furthermore, a case study helps to discover some aspects that are little known or not known altogether. The challenges facing Grade R teaching and learning in rural schools are
little known. In this study, community services that were explored were Grade R teaching and learning in the classroom. For a case, the researcher needs sufficient access to the data that can be collected through interviews, reviewing documents and make structured and field observations (Guest et al., 2013:14; Johnson, 2014:357; Yin, 2014:56). The case studies provided direction in understanding the research problem of my study.

3.2.2.2 Disadvantages and limitations of case studies

According to Choy (2014:5), a case study design poses a risk of improper interpretation. He argues that the flexibility of a case study leads to data manipulation which is uncontrollable, repeatable and generalisable. These disadvantages influenced my analysis of data in trying to avoid losing focus on the research question. In responding to quality assurance, Bertram and Christiansen (2015: 43) highlight three limitations associated with a case study design. First, the data collected reflects the case under study. Second, the claims are supported by the data and not generalised. Third, the findings are not usually generalisable. Maree (2016:82) confirms the limitations stated by Bertram and Christiansen (2015) and argues that multiple stated cases studies may dilute the importance and meaning of the single case.

3.2.3 Selection of Participants

The sampling procedures and processes of selecting participants and contexts were briefly discussed in Chapter 1. Lichtman (2014:30) indicates that the researcher needs to decide in advance about the selection of participants and the research site.

3.2.3.1 The study sites

Maxwell (2013:30) believes that it is crucial in the field of research for the researchers to understand the context within which the people behave and the influences of their behaviour on the context. Creswell (2013:99) argues that participants should be engaged in a study that is relevant to where the research is conducted. Therefore, I sampled participants in rural schools and this setting is where the research was conducted.

For my study, the participants and the research sites were in the rural schools of the Eastern Cape Province. The Eastern Cape Department of Education is divided into
twenty-three mega districts. These districts are clustered into three regions (Cluster A, B and C). I limited the scope of the research by sampling eight teachers (four Grade R teachers and four HODs) from four rural primary schools of Lusikisiki in OR Tambo Coastal District which is in Cluster A in the Eastern Cape Province in South Africa. In selecting participants, I was guided by Oppong (2013:2) and Khan (2014:6) who emphasise that it is impossible to collect information from all members of the targeted population of a research inquiry. The selection procedure in my study was based on the recommendation by Johnson (2014:28) that the researcher needs to select participants and sites according to common characteristics which are aligned with the purpose of the study. The primary schools were selected based on their Grade R historical background and the culture of teaching and learning. These primary schools had introduced Grade R as early as 2005.

3.2.3.2 Purposeful sampling

My study used purposeful sampling to select participants, as this sampling method is most relevant for qualitative case studies (Johnson, 2014:154). In addition, Oppong (2014:2) elaborates that in purposeful sampling the participants should demonstrate a sound knowledge and understanding of the problem being addressed. It is recommended that the research question should be well framed and specify the kind of participants that should be included in the research study (Guest et al., 2013:44). In my study, only Grade R teachers and Foundation Phase HODs were purposively selected to participate. These Grade R teachers and HODS were directly engaged in Grade R teaching and learning and I assumed they were knowledgeable about Grade R teaching and learning. I was highly influenced by Johnson’s (2014:265) argument that the researchers should note in their purposeful sampling that there is no ability to generalise from a sample of the population.

The following table provides details of the Grade R teachers and HODs who participated in the study.
### Table 3.1: Biographical information of participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name*</th>
<th>Context</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Experience</th>
<th>Qualification</th>
<th>Training institution</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MS Zondi</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Class teacher</td>
<td>9 years</td>
<td>Grade 12</td>
<td>Mqikela SSS</td>
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<td>Level 5</td>
<td>University of North West</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mrs Mbelu</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Class teacher</td>
<td>10 years</td>
<td>Grade 11</td>
<td>Mqikela JSS</td>
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<td>Level 4</td>
<td>Mausi Private College</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms Solani</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Class teacher</td>
<td>8 years</td>
<td>Grade 12</td>
<td>Mgezwa SSS</td>
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<td>Level 6</td>
<td>SANTS</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mrs Lindani</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Class teacher</td>
<td>10 years</td>
<td>Grade 12</td>
<td>Belmani SSS</td>
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<td>NPDE</td>
<td>University of Fort Hare</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ms Zuza</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>HOD</td>
<td>25 years</td>
<td>Grade 12</td>
<td>Hillbrow SSS</td>
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<td>SPTD</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Honours</td>
<td>Walter Sisulu University</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mrs Silo</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>HOD</td>
<td>24 years</td>
<td>Grade 12</td>
<td>Toli SSS</td>
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<td>STD</td>
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<td>BA &amp; Honours</td>
<td>University of South Africa</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mrs Mputi</td>
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<td>HOD</td>
<td>24 years</td>
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<td>Palmerton SSS</td>
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<td>Mrs Ledi</td>
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<td>HOD</td>
<td>25 years</td>
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<td>North West University</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Honours</td>
<td>University of South Africa</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Pseudonyms

The table above provides a profile of the participants. As evident in the table, only one Grade R teacher is qualified, according to the NQF (Atmore, 2012:14; DBE, 2014:25). The teachers’ profile indicates that only one HOD (Mrs Zuza) was qualified to teach in the Foundation Phase and to monitor Grade R. The other three obtained qualifications to teach in secondary schools. This implies that Grade R was monitored by some Foundation Phase HODs who did not have the relevant qualifications to teach Grade R.

Guest et al. (2013:43) claim that in qualitative research the participants are expected to be the most knowledgeable people in the population they represent. Participants are selected according to their knowledge and expertise regarding the important
information that is needed (Gentles, Charles, Ploeg, & Mc Kibbon, 2015:9; Johnson, 2014:264; Lichtman, 2014:28; Martella et al., 2013:305). Therefore, I selected Grade R teachers with more than five years’ experiences of teaching and Foundation Phase HODs who monitored and supported Grade R teachers more than five years.

These participants work directly with Grade R learners in implementing Grade R learning programmes based on language, mathematics and life skills. The rationale was to select participants who could provide rich information about the challenges facing Grade R teaching and learning in the rural school context.

The HODs could identify some of the basic challenges that face Grade R teaching and learning and the strategies used to address those challenges. Grade R teachers’ selection was based on the fact that they were dealing with a holistic approach to learner development in providing a foundation for further teaching and learning. The number of participants and the selection were determined by the research objectives and the knowledge of participants about the case under investigation (Bertram and Christiansen, 2015:59; Flick, 2014:178; Guest et al., 2014:43; Johnson, 2014:141; Pacho, 2015:3). The objective of my study was to investigate the challenges facing Grade R implementation programmes through teaching and learning in rural schools and to understand the influence of the challenges on effective teaching and learning.

The participants shared the strategies they used to improve teaching and learning in their respective schools. The objectives were achieved by selecting only eight participants as it was impossible to involve all people of the targeted group of a research inquiry (Bertram & Christiansen, 2015:59; Khan, 2014:6; Oppong, 2013:2; Maxwell, 2013:30). The small sample allowed me to obtain intensive and deep data to answer the research question. Guest et al. (2013: 63) highlight that a minimum number of participants help to understand the occurrence of events in their natural settings. Similarly, Johnson (2014:153) states that a few cases are suitable for qualitative research study and that gives an in-depth understanding about individual cases.

Additionally, Creswell (2013:99) states that selection decisions need to consider the accessibility of data, data collection methods and the relationship with the participants to be involved. In my study, participants were selected from two neighbouring circuits. I easily established relationships with Grade R teachers and the Foundation Phase HODs as my current work entails monitoring and supporting Grade R classes for
improvement of teaching and learning. The next part of this study discusses the data collection methods.

3.3 DATA COLLECTION METHODS

In qualitative research, data collection methods are used to collect experiences shared in a social context and in a natural setting. I decided about the data collection methods after selecting participants. Flick (2014:14) emphasises that the qualitative researcher needs to make the correct choice of relevant research data collection methods that yields good results. In my study, I used multiple data collection research methods to maintain credibility of the results (Creswell, 2013:102). I ensured triangulation using semi-structured interviews, structured classroom observations and document analysis as recommended by Creswell (2013).

Creswell (2013:128) highlights two important gains the researcher obtains when multiple data collection methods are used. Firstly, one gains a secure understanding of the issues that are investigated. Secondly, multiple data collection provides information about different aspects of the phenomenon being studied (Creswell, 2013:128). In other words, multiple data collection method quality assures rigorous, credible and justifiable research. Pacho (2015:1) points out that triangulation for collecting data is appropriate when a research question is clear to address a research problem. I was guided by this question in collecting the data “What are the challenges facing Grade R teaching and learning in rural schools?” The data I collected through the various research methods aimed to address the research questions. The qualitative data was interpreted and presented without bias and generalisation.

3.3.1 Semi-Structured Interviews

The value and the worldwide use of semi-structured interviews in the field of education influenced me to adopt this data collection method. According to Babbie (2014:326), a qualitative interview is an interaction between and interviewer and interviewee, where the interviewer has a plan that is inquiry-based in relation to the research problem. In my study, the plan of enquiry was directed towards the challenges facing Grade R effective teaching and learning in rural schools. Semi-structured interviews aimed at better understanding individual experiences and discovering trends in the field of education (Bertram & Christiansen, 2015:82). In this study, interviews were regarded
as a suitable instrument to explore the challenges facing effective Grade R teaching and learning. The qualitative nature of semi-structured interviews enabled me to obtain information from the participants through face-to-face engagement. Flick (2014:16) states that qualitative research considers that participants have different viewpoints and practices because of their different contextual life experiences. Qualitative research suggests that the participants may respond differently to research questions. I was aware that, although teachers teach in similar school contexts, the challenges and their interpretation, through practices, might not be the same.

Johnson (2014: 233) mentions that the qualitative in-depth interviews are important in collecting detailed data about human thoughts, beliefs, knowledge, reasoning, motivations and feelings about a research problem. Johnson (2014:233) also emphasises that, if the researcher wants to understand the participants’ perspective, qualitative interviews are used to get into the inner world of participants. Open-ended questions were used in in-depth semi-structured interviews with eight participants. The reason for embarking on semi-structured interviews emanates from the fact that interviews give participants ample opportunity to express their experiences and views openly.

The interviews were in the form of narratives as a qualitative approach focuses on narrative interviews (Flick, 2014:198). In his explanation, Flick (2014) reveals that narratives refer to the knowing and remembering of events that participants can narrate to answer the research questions. Teachers narrated their lived experiences about the challenges facing Grade R in schools and the strategies used to improve teaching and learning in rural schools. Teachers provided a detailed account of their implementation of Grade R learning programmes, their understanding of Grade R curriculum implementation components, ideas on managing barriers to learning and the support they experienced, as well the training they received. The narratives gave me access to rich data regarding the challenges facing Grade R teaching and learning.

3.3.1.1 Interview guides

To gather rich information from participants, Patton (2015:439) suggests that the researcher develops an interview guide that has a set of questions to be asked during the interviews. The interview guide is a checklist used during the interviews to ensure that all relevant topics are covered and to guide the conversation. The interview guide
saves time as the researcher focuses on the questions that are sequentially presented in the guide. Patton (2015) also highlights that the other topics emerge as conversation continues. I therefore developed an interview schedule as a guide to manage interviews and to focus on the research questions (Appendix 11 and Appendix 12).

The questions for Grade R teachers and Foundation Phase HODs were different. The questions for Grade R teachers were based on teaching and learning content regarding classroom practices. Foundation Phase HODs were asked questions based on monitoring and supporting of Grade R teaching and learning as this is part of the SMT’s roles and responsibilities. To manage the process of interviews, I established a relationship of trust with the participants by making them understand the purpose of the research and assured them that their personal integrity would be maintained. Participants could narrate relevant stories and highlight the strategies they used to overcome the challenges in their daily practice.

3.3.1.2 Timing and recording of interviews

The interviews took sixty minutes for each Grade R teacher and Foundation Phase HODs. The first ten minutes was spent explaining the background and the purpose of conducting my study as well as the expected outcomes. Yin (2014:110) claims that more time for interviews allows one to gain more information in one single sitting. In my study, the time scheduled for interviews was recommended as suitable for probing questions and to raise follow-up questions when I discovered that some information was lacking (Pacho, 2015:6). The time for interviews was scheduled to cover questions based on some of the challenges facing Grade R teaching and learning. I discussed time for interviews with individual participants. The time participants agreed upon was after teaching hours. In the Foundation Phase, teaching hours end at 13h30 but in Grade R teaching time ends at 13h00. In all schools, participants chose 14h00 to 15h00. Teachers arrived fifteen minutes before interviews started. All participants preferred to be interviewed in their respective classrooms in schools as it was convenient for them.

I audio-recorded all the interviews with permission from the eight participants. The conversations were recorded to be played back for clarity and verbal quotations to be provided in the analysis as suggested by Pacho (2015:44). The recordings were chosen as the best way of capturing the exact words of the participants on the research
question. They also economise time for taking notes and recalling information to produce authentic results. Audio recordings gave me time to focus on asking questions and to ask follow-up questions for clarity. Transcription of the interviews was done immediately after each interview to avoid losing any information from participants.

3.3.1.3 Member-checking

I was influenced by Maxwell (2013:105) who recommends interview transcripts as tools to record information that is used during the analysis process. Each participant had an interview transcript with a code name for the purpose of anonymity and confidentiality. The audio recordings were transcribed onto a computer and printed. Thereafter, I went back to the participants with the transcribed cases in order to verify what I had captured. The cases that were found to contain misunderstandings were corrected.

3.3.1.4 Disadvantages and limitations of interviews

In selecting interviews, I was aware that there were challenges I might encounter as participants of this study were teachers and I was a subject adviser. Bertram and Christiansen (2015:83) highlight that, if the researcher is in a position of power, the participants may be reluctant to talk openly about the information needed. They also indicate that a researcher may gather a lot of textual data which may cause a lot of unnecessary work to be transcribed for analysis. Maree (2016:93) also adds that the researcher is easily diverted to unrelated aspects if the interview schedule is not used. That was an indication that I had to focus on the questions that were scheduled for interviews. Interview data also need to be verified because sometimes facts may not represent the actual information needed (Bertram & Christiansen, 2015:86).

There are also limitations which the researcher needs to note when collecting data through semi-structured interviews. According McMillan and Schumacher (2014: 224), the researchers should not ask questions that the participants would find it difficult to answer. The researchers are also advised not to rephrase questions frequently. In addition, Maree (2016:94) emphasises that the researcher should not persuade the participants to answer the questions they are not willing to answer. I followed these guidelines during the interviews.
3.3.2 Observations

3.3.2.1 The purpose of observations

I planned structured classroom observations to gain first-hand information about teaching and learning in the Grade R classroom environment. I wanted to verify the information obtained from interviews. Classroom observations are recommended as a method in which a researcher works in the field to gather information about a phenomenon (Martella, Nelson, Morgan & Marchand-Martella, 2013:628). In my study, Grade R classrooms in schools were the fields to collect information about the challenges facing effective Grade R teaching and learning in a natural setting.

Johnson (2014:236) defines observations in qualitative research as watching human actions with the purpose of understanding the reasons for those actions and their influence in real-life situations. In this study, the behavioural patterns were the ways in which teaching and learning took place in the classroom context. The phenomenon of interest was to identify, through observations, the challenges that influenced effective teaching and learning practices in classroom contexts.

Various scholars identify observations as important sources of evidence for collecting information in natural settings to strengthen the data collected from the interviews (Bertram & Christensen, 2015:84; Johnson, 2014:236; Yin, 2014;). Therefore, I decided to plan classroom observations where I observed teachers interacting with learners in a classroom setting during teaching and learning activities. According to Yin (2014:113), observations range from formal to casual data collection activities. Formal data collection is referred to as a well-structured or planned observation. The role of the participant and the researcher are planned beforehand. The casual data collection is informal; it does not follow any process or sequence. In my study, observations adopted a formal data collection approach as teachers were observed according to an observation schedule (Appendix 13) during interactions with learners in the classroom.

3.3.2.2 The process followed in conducting the observations

The classroom observations were conducted in four Grade R classrooms in different schools during teaching hours. Only Grade R teachers were observed in the classrooms. In this case, Foundation Phase head teachers were excluded because
they were not teaching Grade R. I spent two days in each school for classroom observations. During classroom observation lessons, I was a non-participant observer, sitting at the back without interrupting the teacher.

Bertram and Christiansen (2015:85) state that structured observations can only be successful if the researcher clearly knows what he/she is looking for in a classroom situation. In my study, I was exploring the strategies teachers used in teaching and learning as well as utilisation of resources, management of barriers to learning, assessment forms, teachers’ subject content knowledge and language of teaching and learning. All three Grade R subjects were taught and the focus was on targeted subject areas. In life skills, creative arts and physical education were the main targeted study areas that were observed. Physical education was not taught as teachers complained that they did not have outdoor materials. In informal conversations with teachers in the Foundation Phase, I discovered that learners’ progress to Grade 1 with a content gap in creative arts and physical education, yet these study areas are meant to support learners in developing emergent writing skills through play activities. The areas that were observed in language were writing and reading. In mathematics, learners were taught mental mathematics and grouping and sharing activities. All these subject areas were identified as areas where learners may experience a content gap in the Foundation Phase.

I recorded all lessons conducted in Grade R classrooms that were based on the targeted subject areas using a video-recorder. The observation data were coded with pseudonyms. The use of video-recording has been recommended by various researchers as a valuable device that is used for capturing what teachers and learners do in a classroom environment and can do to improve teaching and learning practices (Gilmore & Adolph, 2016:6; Goldman, Pea, Derry & Baron, 2014:10). The video recordings were done set to capture all the information based on teaching strategies and subject content knowledge applied in Grade R teaching and learning activities. From these, I gained a detailed pictured of the challenges facing Grade R teaching and learning.

Teachers were observed teaching only the subject areas that were identified as leading to content gaps in the Foundation Phase in language, life skills and in mathematics. The total number of lessons taken to complete classroom observations were five per
day in each of the four schools. There were two lessons of 15 minutes for each language component (emergent reading and writing), one lesson of 20 minutes for mathematics (combining mental maths and sharing activity) and two life skills lessons of 20 minutes as per study area (one physical education and one creative arts lesson). In total, there were ten lessons that were video-recorded per school. The use of videos for later review enabled me to focus on lesson observation and notetaking of some critical points. After I had done with data collection and interpretations, I shared information with participants to make comments on what I had recorded for analysis.

I observed both the teacher and the learner interaction and the physical settings in which teaching and learning took place. Learner interaction included non-verbal cues such as body movements, gestures and tone of voice while teaching. I used field notes, as recommended by Johnson (2014:239), to record all observations in physical settings. I took notes during the observation process to ensure that the relevant information was collected without bias. Some of the areas that were observed include classroom layout, indoor and outdoor equipment, classroom environment, classroom management, the availability of teaching and learning material such as readers, posters, counters, big books and other relevant material for Grade R teaching and learning.

Classroom observation assisted me in finding out some important data to back up the trustworthiness and quality of the research findings. In this study classroom observations were used to recover the information that I missed in interviews regarding the challenges facing Grade R teaching and learning in rural schools. The information obtained from classroom observation enhanced the data collected through interviews during a data analysis process.

3.3.2.3 Disadvantages and limitations of observations

There were also disadvantages of classroom observations which I observed when collecting data. I was aware that my presence in the classroom might cause the teacher to lack confidence in teaching and learning practices (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014:224). Another disadvantage was that learners might not cooperate in a lesson because they might feel reluctant to voice what they think. These disadvantages may affect data collection because the study may not yield the expected outcomes.
I also understood that there were also limitations that bound me to remain in my observer role at all times. Maree (2016:90) stresses that the researcher should observe the events as they occur without interruption. Bertram and Christiansen (2015:90) concur that interaction during classroom observations is limited to the teacher and learners only. Therefore, I focused on the interactions between the teachers and learners throughout lesson observations.

3.3.3 Document Analysis

Document analysis is a non-interactive qualitative data collection method with little or no interaction between the participant and the researcher (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014:386). I reviewed official documents that were available for supporting teaching and learning in schools. For each school I visited, I requested teachers to provide all the documents that I needed to support evidence collected from interviews and observations. I collected teachers’ work evidence which included lesson plans, mark schedules, a sample of DBE learners’ workbooks, attendance registers to verify Grade R age cohort admitted, CAPS for planning teaching and learning, provincial weekly term planners, assessment recording tools and report cards.

I scrutinised all the documents mentioned above to explore how teachers utilised these documents to overcome the challenges they faced regarding Grade R teaching and learning. I was influenced by the view that the documents are important in finding data that is most relevant to the research objectives (Guest et al., 2013:252). The purpose for collecting documents from teachers was to explore the challenges in effective teaching and learning and how teachers addressed the challenges indicated during interviews. My aim was to see how effectively the CAPS and other supporting documents were used in teaching and learning.

The study also aimed at exploring the strategies that could improve Grade R teaching and learning. My aim was to explore the extent to which the CAPS and other supporting documents were collectively used in teaching and learning to improve everyday classroom practices. The focus was on the content coverage which determines the quality of work in Grade R. As Flick (2014:355) posits, documents are made by people for some purpose and they become relevant for research only through the researcher’s interpretations. I interpreted those documents to add to the information from the semi-structured interviews and classroom observations.
I used a document analysis checklist to analyse and interpret the documents to align them with the classroom observations and interviews. For credibility, I analysed relevant material teachers used for enhancing Grade R teaching and learning. Follow-up questions were used to support the information I needed for clarity. The information from document analysis was used for data analysis and interpretation.

Document analysis can have disadvantages when collecting data. According to Maree (2016:88), not all documents are relevant to provide the information needed to answer the research question. Maree (2016:6) elaborates that some documents may be incomplete or inapplicable for the objective of the study. Some documents could be biased to the extent that the researcher may gather information that does not address the research question. I managed to handle some of the disadvantages in order to succeed in exploring Grade R teaching and learning information in all the four rural schools by focusing only on the information that helped me to answer the research questions and supported the other information obtained from interviews and observations.

Document analysis also has limitations the researcher should note. In this regard, Maree (2016:89) highlighted several limitations of document analysis in collecting data: unfair treatment of owners of documents, misinterpretation of information and regarding all documents as equally valid when they may not be. The research was also limited to the documents provided by the participants. As a result, in my case, there were documents that I was expecting to get but I could not.

The following section discusses how the collected data from document analysis, interviews and observations were analysed and interpreted.

3.4 DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Chapter 1 presented a brief discussion on data analysis and interpretation. The previous paragraphs discussed the sampling of participants and the methods of data collection. The reviewed literature on qualitative research indicated that the researcher should ensure that the captured data yielded quality results for the research problem. In this section, I discuss the process of analysing the captured data on some of the challenges facing Grade R teaching and learning.
3.4.1 Organisation of Data

To organise data for better analysis, Martella et al. (2013:607) and Mills and Birks (2014:43) suggest that the researcher should compile a profile of each interview, the observations and the analysed documents for each participant to categorise, order, manipulate and summarise the collected data to attain answers for the research. In addition, Flick (2014:393) suggests a file that would be labelled with an indicator to identify each participant. In my study, the profiles for each of the eight participants were developed from interviews, document analysis and observations. File folders for each participant profile were labelled with various codes that made retrieval of information easy when analysing the data. I labelled each file folder with a code name as recommended by Mills and Birks (2014:43) and Patton (2015:530). I assigned codes to the relevant themes for interpreting the collected data. Interpreted codes led to the findings about Grade R teaching and learning.

In a qualitative case study, each case is analysed intensively as a separate entity and the case study report provides the exact evidence for each case by providing an in-depth understanding of each case (Johnson, 2014:359). I analysed cases individually. The purpose was to deal with in-depth interpretation of the individual case. Patton (2015:537) posits that once the raw case data is organised, the researcher may write a case record. Johnson (2014:591) concurs that it is helpful to focus on individual cases and transcripts at a time. I collated the findings of all the eight cases and created a detailed description and interpretations that gave one final report about the challenges facing Grade R teaching and learning in rural schools.

3.4.2 Content Analysis

Content analysis was used to analyse the data by extracting themes (Creswell, 2013: 225; Mouton, 2014:165). Content analysis deals with words and themes that can be communicated for obtaining relevant findings (Mouton, 2014:165). The data I collected about the challenges facing Grade R teaching and learning were analysed by interpreting what had been heard, seen and observed in the field. This allowed me to identify key facts in written text that assisted me in understanding and in interpreting the raw data. I used an inductive approach to identify similarities and differences that were identified in the various sources of data collection to answer the research problem. Lichtman (2014:40) highlights the advantage of the inductive approach as it
allows identification of central ideas that support themes related to the research problem under investigation. Bertram and Christiansen (2015:119) state that the inductive approach encourages the researcher to analyse data by looking at topics that emerge and code them. In other words, the inductive approach allows the research findings from the explicit themes to emerge. I analysed documents after conducting interviews and classroom observations. Key concepts in documents allowed me to formulate codes that were aligned with the research questions and reviewed literature. I identified the themes from the emerging patterns.

I employed content analysis to analyse data and interpret the emergent themes. I transcribed the interviews verbatim and read transcripts using the interview schedule as a guide to ensure an accurate reflection of participants' responses. Through the process of content analysis, I transcribed the interviews from the eight participants, making key notes in a code book. I also presented the data collected from observations and document analysis in separate sections in each file, coded all similar key ideas and reviewed all coded notes to see similarities and differences.

### 3.4.3 The Creation of Themes

According to Mills and Birks (2014:43), data analysis is based on the researcher’s decision-making processes about evidence identified in the data. I read the interview transcripts, observation notes, observation schedules and the document analysis checklists intensively. I began with interviews and looked for the themes that emerged from the collected data, looking at relationships and differences in the text. I identified concepts from teachers’ responses and from observations and grouped them according to their relationships. The concepts then were coded and the data were organised into themes and categories.

#### 3.4.3.1 Coding

The codes were grouped into themes and then into categories according to the meaning they entailed. The categories that were related were grouped together to form new themes. After I had studied all the transcripts thoroughly, I grouped all the themes that I listed in an analysis notebook. I examined the themes individually and in detail considering their relevance to the research question on the challenges facing Grade R teaching and learning in rural schools. Sub-categories and the emerging categories
were identified. The process was revised several times to ensure that each piece of information was placed where it belonged for reporting.

I used handwritten notes to report all the evidence that had been collected from the participants and observed in the field. Patton (2015: 530) states that handwritten notes and coding make it much easier and more productive for the researcher to see data in its concrete form. I recorded all the relevant information that provided rich data for analysis. The notes were recorded each time I interacted with the participants until the analysis was completely done for reporting the findings. I drafted an analysis guide where I listed the themes with questions that were asked during the interviews and the areas that were targeted for observation, as well as for document analysis. I then focused on one question at a time to look at how each participant responded and that helped me to identify relationships and differences. The relationships and differences from the participants’ responses were assigned codes in a code book (Kuckartz, 2014:35). The responses that were related were grouped together under one abbreviated code (Rr- meaning related responses). Then different responses were also coded as (Dr- meaning different responses) under each theme and new themes that were generated. Data were then classified and categorised for interpretation purposes (Martella et al., 2013:607).

3.4.3.2 Emergent themes

Those categories resulted in an organisation of patterns in the collected data. The patterns indicated that I understood the complex links between various aspects of participants’ experiences. I was then able to formulate new themes that consolidated the findings about the challenges facing Grade R teaching and learning in rural schools.

Data were then organised for a qualitative data display by grouping the themes that emerged and to find the themes that emerged for final reporting. I was then able to interpret the collected data for reporting.

I took advice from Martella et al. (2013:237) to include my own thoughts, feelings and experiences throughout the investigation. This entailed using my own creativity in interpreting the participants’ stories and the field notes focusing on the research question. I used verbatim quotations from the participants’ interview transcripts
(Bertram & Christiansen, 2015:16; Patton, 2015:530). The integrated narratives of the participants were written under each theme to produce a readable and descriptive narrative account of the experiences about the challenges facing Grade R teaching and learning.

The original transcribed data were kept in a safe place and I used one hard copy for analysis (Johnson, 2014:591; Patton, 2015:525). After analysing the data, I returned to participants to verify the information provided. Thereafter, the results from the coded data were presented in the form of a narrative text. Analysis was done to ensure that the findings answered the research question: “What are some of the challenges facing Grade R teaching and learning in rural schools?” Table 3.2 presents the themes and categories identified during the analysis of data.

Table 3.2: Emergent themes and categories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Categories</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Qualifications and training</td>
<td>• The influence of Grade R teacher qualifications and training.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• The influence of HODs qualifications and training on Grade R teaching and learning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Content knowledge</td>
<td>• Teaching and learning strategies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Planning and content coverage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Barriers to learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenge and influence of school</td>
<td>• Poor admission policy implementation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>climate</td>
<td>• Lack of security in schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Lack of support from HODs and parents</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.5 QUALITY CRITERIA OF THE STUDY

In analysing the aims and objectives of this study on the exploration of the challenges facing Grade R teaching and learning and the influences of the challenges on effective teaching and learning in rural schools, the need for adopting quality criteria was a priority. I wanted to ensure that the study had been conducted in ethical manner for
authentic results. Quality criteria, as Anney (2014:4) posits, require researchers to ensure that the findings presented are relevant to the research question under investigation. The proponents of quality criteria suggest that the researcher apply credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability for trustworthiness of the study (Anney, 2014:4; Yin, 2014:45). My study applied the four criteria to provide richer and more complete data that provided more complete answers to the research question.

3.5.1 Credibility

According to Anney (2014:5), the researcher needs to adopt some credibility strategies when conducting a project, such as prolonged field experience, sampling, triangulation, member checking and peer examination. Therefore, I increased the credibility of my study by engaging participants to verify the truthfulness and correctness of the collected data (Birt, Scott, Cavers, Campbell, & Walter, 2016:4). After analysing and interpreting data, I sent back the recorded data to the participants to make comments, suggestions and changes where possible. I gave teachers one week to read the hard copy of the data and to return it. The prolonged field experience indicates that the researcher should be well orientated with the field where a research project takes place (Henry, 2015:25; Yin, 2014:45). In the case of my study I selected schools that I monitor in my district and I spent five days in each school (two days for classroom observations, one day for Grade R interviews, one day for HOD interviews and one day for document analysis).

The credibility of the study depended on the data and analysis that provided a rich explanation of what the study was intended to study (Ponelis, 2015:4). The collected data were verified by the participants and a colleague. The aim was to verify if the data answered the research question based on the challenges facing Grade R teaching and learning. All the data gathered from multiple research methods were recorded and coded according to the themes for quality analysis. I interpreted data in depth and supported this with direct quotations from the participants’ interviews as suggested by Patton (2015:530). Sufficient and detailed data provided a clear picture of what was happening in Grade R classrooms and what is needed to change the situation in rural schools.
3.5.2 Trustworthiness

I ensured that trustworthiness in conducting the study was achieved in an ethical manner and used data triangulation as advised by Tsai (2013: 5). Semi-structured interviews, structured observations and document analysis were used to ensure that the data collected was valid for the problem investigated. The collected data were examined by a colleague who had knowledge of Grade R curriculum implementation programmes. Themes, the research questions, the answers and the title of the study were the only areas the peer reviewer scrutinised. For ethical reasons, my colleague dealt with anonymised documents.

3.5.3 Transferability

Transferability was one of the criteria I maintained in this study. I provided a sufficiently rich description of research process by recording all the steps taken in analysing data to ensure that the data answered the research question on the challenges facing Grade R teaching and learning. Anney (2014:7) states that a researcher needs to make the study transferable for other researchers in similar situations. In making the process transferable, I ensured that data were supported by sufficient evidence from semi-structured interviews, structured classroom observations and document analysis. The collected data enabled me to answer some questions that were unforeseen about challenges facing Grade R teaching and learning in rural schools.

3.5.4 Conformability

The study also adopted a principle of conformability to ensure that the collected data correctly provided the information obtained directly from teachers who were the participants in the study (Elo, Kanste, Kaariainen, Polkki, Kyngas & Utriainen, 2016:6). Bertram and Christiansen (2015:27) argue that, for quality interpretivism, detailed descriptions of the data need to be provided and such data must be authentic and reflect the experiences of the respondents. For conformability of my study, I ensured that the information presented was original and confirmed by participants through proof reading.
3.6 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Researchers need to consider ethical practices by protecting participants’ human dignity in the field of research. Johnson (2014:89) emphasises that the researcher should use research ethics when deciding to conduct research using human beings. Some of these principles include informed consent, freedom to withdraw, confidentiality, anonymity and privacy (Johnson, 2014:133; Yin, 2014:78). The ethical considerations are strongly emphasised in qualitative research as a qualitative researcher intrudes into peoples’ lives (Khan, 2014; Ludwin & Frideres, 2014:22). Therefore, I applied these principles when interacting with teachers to obtain credible study results.

After obtaining an ethical clearance certificate from the University of South Africa (Appendix 1), I began the process of collecting data. I wrote letters requesting permission to conduct my research study to the Eastern Cape Department of Education and receive their consent (Appendix 2); the circuit manager and received his consent (Appendix 3); the school principals (Appendix 4) and received their consent (Appendix 5). After I received letters of approval to conduct the research project, I wrote letters to Grade R teachers and Foundation Phase head teachers (Appendix 6 and 7) requesting them to participate in my study and received their consent (Appendix 8). Letters were detailed, informing participants about their safety, the confidentiality of information and their right to withdraw if they felt dissatisfied without any aspect of the research. The participants were informed of all the risks factors, the benefits of the research project and told that the recorded data would be analysed and stored in a locked cabinet and destroyed at the end of study after five years (Flynn & Goldsmith, 2013:10; Flick, 2014:5). All eight participants consented to participate in my study. Since the study also included classroom observations, I also wrote letters (Appendix 9) requesting permission from the SGB to conduct the research in their schools. On behalf of parents, SGBs signed consent letters (Appendix 10).

After receiving letters of consent from participants, the Department of Education and principals, I began to draw up the research programme. The SMTs were provided with an outline of the research stating the procedures to be followed, the expected contribution of teachers and the purpose of the research study. I briefed all the eight participants individually on what the study was all about and about the process of
collecting data. I made clear that the information collected in this study had to be accessed by the researcher and the study supervisor for the purpose only meant for the study (Flick, 2014:5). The recordings were transcribed and names and schools of the participants were anonymised in the transcripts. At the end of recording and analysis of the data, I gave participants hard copies to verify the information they had provided so that they could make changes and add comments and recommendation where they felt the need to do so.

3.7 CHAPTER SUMMARY

In this chapter, the research methodology and its components were discussed in detail. These components included the qualitative research approach, data analysis and interpretation, the case study approach, data collection methods, sampling, quality criteria of the study and ethical considerations. The reasons for selecting these components were discussed. How the components were used in constructing evidence to support the narrative case studies to answer the research question on the challenges facing Grade R teaching and learning was explained. The practical implementation of this chapter is seen in the next chapter through the analysis of the narratives derived from the case studies on the challenges facing Grade R teaching and learning in rural schools.

In the next chapter I present the research results that originated from the eight case studies. The challenges facing Grade R teaching and learning in rural schools, the influence of the challenges on teaching and learning and the strategies that are used to improve teaching and learning in rural Grade R contexts are discussed.
CHAPTER 4:
PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION ON INTERVIEWS FINDINGS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter 3 of this study provided research methodology and design used to gather more data for my study. In this chapter, I present the research findings in the form of eight narrative case studies. The participants in these case studies are four Grade R teachers and four HODs selected from four rural schools of the Eastern Cape. The narrative case studies are based on the objective of exploring some of the challenges facing Grade R teaching and learning in rural schools; how the challenges influence effective teaching and learning and the strategies teachers use to meet the challenges. In this chapter, the case studies report on data collected through semi-structured interviews. Each case study reports on the school context, teacher profiles and the detailed discussions of the empirical findings on the themes that emerged during the process of data analysis. The research findings were analysed and cross-referenced to the reviewed literature and the theoretical frameworks in Chapter 2. The aim is to verify the quality and authenticity of information I obtained in the field of research with the related literature. The cases conclude with a synthesis of some of the major challenges facing Grade R teaching and learning. To ensure confidentiality of information given by the participants, pseudonyms for schools and participants were used instead of real names. The findings are presented into two sections, namely, Grade R interviews and HODS interviews.

4.2 THE CONTEXTS OF THE FOUR SCHOOLS

This section provides the overview of the four schools. These schools are situated in a rural and disadvantaged areas. In these areas, community members live in poor conditions and experience low income levels. The school context includes the historical background of the schools, number of teachers and school enrolment. Understanding the context within which people live and the influence of such a context on their behaviour is an important point of departure in these case studies (Creswell, 2013:211). This argument is also supported by Freire (1970:5) who believes that the person needs to know the environment and the society in which teaching and learning takes place. Similarly, Feza (2014a:5) highlights the importance of measuring progress
taking into consideration the history and contexts of events. Therefore, the following paragraphs report the findings from the context and history of the four schools.

4.2.1 Zamukulungisa Full-Service School: Ms Zondi

Zamukulungisa is a full-service school in OR Tambo Coastal District in the Eastern Cape Province in South Africa. "Full-service/inclusive schools are first and foremost mainstream education institutions that provide quality education to all learners by supplying the full range of learning needs in an equitable manner. They should strive to achieve access, equity, quality and social justice in education" (DBE, 2010:7). The school was established in 1979 to accommodate Grade 1 to Grade 3 learners only and later Grade 4 to Grade 7. The teacher was paid by the SGB. Another teacher was employed in 2009 and in 2011 she was paid by the DBE. In 2013, the school was categorised as a Full-Service School (FSS). This meant that the school also accommodated learners with barriers to learning. The enrolment increased to the extent that there were three classes for each grade. Ms Zondi highlighted that some learners travelled from their villages to the school. In 2017, the learner enrolment increased to 1048. The staff comprised of 27 teachers, including the principal, two deputy principals and four HODs. The size of the school gave me the impression that it was difficult to manage curriculum effectively with such a structure.

Ms Zondi mentioned that there were three Grade R teachers in this school but I selected only one to participate in the study. In the Foundation Phase, there were two HODs and twelve teachers. The other two Grade R teachers had less than five years’ teaching experience in Grade R. This background clearly highlights that the school enrolment is large and this poses challenge in addressing barriers to learning because class sizes are large. Ms Zondi also commented that there was an old jungle gym in the playground but the Grade R learners did not have access to it as it was used by older learners. She highlighted that the Grade R classrooms and the jungle gym were not fenced. This posed a challenge for Grade R resource materials. Overall, the school environment was not conducive for Grade R teaching and learning. Schools offering lower grades should be more attractive to motivate learners to attend.
4.2.2 Lingani Junior Secondary School: Mrs Mbelu

Lingani is a Junior Secondary School in OR Tambo Coastal District in the Eastern Cape Province in South Africa. According to Ms Mbelu, the school was established in 1980 and started with Foundation Phase. The school developed to the extent that, in 1992, Grade 9 and in 2005, Grade R were introduced the school. The language of teaching and learning in the Foundation Phase was isiXhosa and English in the Intermediate and Senior Phase. The school was comprised of nine teachers and including the principal and one HOD. At the time of this research, the learner enrolment was 355. It is evident from the enrolment that the school was small. The challenge mentioned by Ms Mbelu was a lack of security guard and poor sport grounds.

4.2.3 Khanya Junior Secondary School: Mrs Lindani

Khanya is a Junior Secondary School in OR Tambo Coastal District in the Eastern Cape Province in South Africa. The school is situated in a rural area near a small town. At the time of the research, the school offered classes from Grade R to Grade 9. According to Mrs Lindani, the language of teaching and learning (LoLT) in the Foundation Phase was isiXhosa and English in Intermediate and Senior Phases. Clearly the school adhered to the language policy which emphasis that Foundation Phase learners should be taught in their mother language (DoE, 2011a:21).

In addition, Mrs Lindani reported that there were 44 staff members at the school and this included the SMT which was comprised of the principal, two deputy principals, four HODs and three senior teachers. In the Foundation Phase, there were two HODs and twelve teachers. At the commencement of this research, the school was awaiting the employment of 18 teachers. When the DBE erected a new structure in 2006, learner enrolment was 1250. In 2017, the school learner enrolment improved to 2225. The SGB extended the school structure by building three blocks for Foundation Phase with eleven classrooms. There were two classrooms for Grade R and three teachers. The two Grade R teachers shared one classroom. This arrangement confirmed that there were not enough classrooms in the school.

The Foundation Phase enrolment was 1025 and included 175 Grade R learners. According to the HOD, there were 105 Grade 3 learners taught by one teacher. This was the largest class enrolment in the Foundation Phase. In the Intermediate and
Senior Phase, each grade had three to four classes. This observation clearly indicates that the school was overcrowded.

According to Mrs Lindani, the school obtained many awards in music and creative art festivals. This could have been the reason for the increased learner enrolment. Some learners were transported from areas around the school. The challenge of uncontrolled learner admission could affect teaching and learning in classrooms. Overcrowding deprives young learners of the opportunity to play (Mohapi, 2014: 100-101).

4.2.4 Veli Junior Secondary School: Ms Solani

Veli Junior Secondary School (JSS) is situated in OR Tambo Coastal District in the Eastern Cape Province in South Africa. Mrs Solani stated that the school is 10 km away from town. At the time of the research, there were 27 teachers permanently employed at the school. The SMT was comprised of the principal, two deputy principals and the four HODs. There were 10 non-teaching staff, made up of one administrative clerk, four learners and five food handlers. It emerged from the interview that learner enrolment stood at 1080 from Grade R to 9 then. Each grade had three classrooms, except Grade R which had only one class. Ms Solani, the Grade R teacher, indicated that because of busy roads around the school some parents did not want their children to cross the roads and this affected learner enrolment in Grade R. The parents should strive to have a preschool or day care centre around the school, although this is the role and responsibility of Social Development. Ms Solani also stated that most learners started Grade 1 without attending Grade R. In light of the above findings, the school and parents made no intervention to ensure that learners attended school before they attend Grade 1. This compromised effective implementation of Grade R programmes as well as the learner performance in upper grades (Mahan, 2015:26; Mohapi, 2014:101; Atweh et al., 2014:9; Whitman, 2015:20). This suggested more teachers needed to be employed.

The next section presents and discusses the profile of Grade R teachers.

4.3 THE PROFILES OF THE FOUR GRADE R TEACHERS

This section of the study presents the profile of the four Grade R teachers, which include age of teachers, number of learners taught in each school offering Grade R as
well as the experience of teachers. This background provided insight into the challenges that influence effective teaching and learning in Grade R in rural schools.

4.3.1 Ms Zondi

Ms Zondi mentioned that she was a 33-year-old Grade R teacher. She started teaching Grade R in 2009 as a volunteer. In 2010, she was employed on contract. She indicated that she was selected because of her experience in teaching Grade R. During the interview, Ms Zondi mentioned that she had 37 learners in her classroom. There were 18 boys and 19 girls. Regarding the teacher-pupil ratio, Ms Zondi affirmed that she was overloaded as she taught more than 30 learners in her class. She raised her concern that she was supposed to teach less than 30 learners because her class accommodated even those with learning disabilities. Asked about how the number of learners influenced teaching and learning, Mrs Zondi responded as follows:

_I have a problem with the number, since it is a full-service school. There are learners who need special attention than others. So, the number should be less than that because I cannot attend learners in the way I wish._

The above statement illustrates that overcrowding had a negative impact on learners with learning difficulties. Ms Zondi clearly understood that learners should be supported in learning. The overcrowded class showed that some concepts that form the basic knowledge and skills acquired in Grade R would not be taught well. The numbers of learners indicated that more Grade R teachers and classrooms should be provided by the SMT and the DBE as SASA encourage access to quality education for all learners (DBE, 2014c:26).

4.3.2 Mrs Mbelu

Mrs Mbelu was a 47-year old Grade R teacher. She started teaching Grade R in 2007 and was employed on a contract basis. Before she taught Grade R, she was a preschool teacher in a neighbouring school. At the commencement of this research, she had 10 years’ teaching experience. In responding to how learner enrolment affected teaching and learning in her class, Mrs Mbelu highlighted that there were too many learners in her class and this caused discipline problems and she found it difficult to control them. It appeared that Mrs Mbelu was unable to attract learners’ attention during lessons. She was chosen to participate in the study because of her experience
of more than five years teaching the Grade R. During interviews, she indicated that she was teaching 48 learners in her class which exceeded the prescribed teacher/learner ratio of 30 (Maponya, 2015:50; Mavundla, 2016:9).

4.3.3 Mrs Lindani

Mrs Lindani was a 57-year-old Grade R teacher. She started teaching Grade R in 2007. During the commencement of this research in 2017, she had 13 years’ experience. She was appointed to teach Grade R based on her knowledge and experience. During the interview, Mrs Lindani mentioned that she had 47 registered learners in her class. Before she taught Grade R, she was a preschool teacher in a neighbouring school. At the commencement of this research, she had 10 years’ teaching experience. Mrs Lindani had 48 learners in her class, 22 boys and 26 girls. Although Mrs Lindani had experience in teaching Grade R, the number of learners was above 30, which was a maximum number of teacher-pupil ratio (Maponya, 2015:50; Mavundla, 2016:9).

4.3.4 Ms Solani

Ms Solani was a 31-year-old Grade R teacher at Veli JSS. She started teaching at the preschool for two years before she came to teach Grade R at the school in 2010. During the time of this study, she was in her eighth year of teaching. Ms Solani was selected on the basis of her experience in teaching Grade R without breaking the service. She had 52 learners in her class. There were 28 girls and 24 boys.

4.3.5 Synthesis

In all four schools, teachers taught more than thirty learners in the classrooms. In their study, Taole and Mohapi (2013:1) confirmed that there were many Grade R teachers who taught more than thirty learners in classes. This could be a contributory factor to poor learner performance as Moalosi (2013:4) states that it is difficult to apply learning through play approach in big classes. This is supported by Maponya (2015:168) who highlights that overcrowding in South African classroom contributes to poor learner performance as educators cannot attend learners individually for scaffolding. The study revealed that Grade R teachers are between 37 and 60 and this indicates they were not invested with Grade R teaching and learning methods as they started teaching late in their careers and without qualifications. The challenge with large school enrolment indicates that more schools are needed (Mavundla, 2016:52).
4.4 THE RESEARCH FINDINGS FROM THE FOUR GRADE R TEACHERS

The findings are presented in three themes that emerged during the process of data analysis. Through interaction with four Grade R teachers, I noted the following challenges that appeared to influence Grade R teaching and learning. These themes are qualifications and training; content knowledge; and challenge and influence of school climate on Grade R teaching and learning.

4.4.1 Qualifications and Training

It is noted that the quality of ECE lays a solid foundation when teaching and learning is done by qualified and trained teachers (Atmore, 2012:14; Hwenha, 2014:2). It shows that qualification and training is extremely important in teaching and learning to improve learner performance. It emerged from the research findings that not all Grade R teachers were qualified to teach the grade. In the following paragraphs, I present the findings on qualifications and training from four Grade R teachers of the sampled schools.

4.4.1.1 Ms Zondi

The findings from the interview highlighted that Ms Zondi obtained Grade 12, Level 5 and Information Technology (IT) training. When this study began in 2017, she was doing a second-year Level 6 diploma. According to the requirements for Grade R teaching, a qualified teacher should possess a diploma. This suggested that Ms Zondi was underqualified. This study acknowledges that most Grade R teachers in rural schools were underqualified and unqualified.

When asked about her qualification and relevance to Grade R teaching and learning, Ms Zondi responded as follows:

My qualification is aligned with my work because everything that I learned from the institution is what I do in the classroom. I apply what I learned from my Level 5 early childhood training in the classroom.

In the above discussions, Ms Zondi believed that her qualification was adequate and the content and approaches she used were relevant to Grade R teaching and learning. She accepted that she had not yet completed her diploma but the knowledge and skills she obtained from the Level 5 modules helped to improve Grade R teaching and
learning. Her response showed that teachers’ knowledge and skills are important to bridge the gap for learners from disadvantaged communities (Andrich et al., 2015:1).

In her explanation, Ms Zondi started at the time when the DBE reviewed the curriculum in 2011 and as a result she was trained on CAPS in 2012. Her explanation confirmed that she had knowledge and understanding of CAPS implementation. I posit that training boast teacher morals on subject content. The dedicated teacher can teach concepts as if they were trained at college level.

4.4.1.2 Mrs Mbelu

Mrs Mbelu had passed Grade 11 and had an NQF Level 4 certificate. She studied NQF Level 4 privately. The Level 4 certificate suggested that she was not qualified to teach Grade R as the certificate was for preschool practitioners (Janse van Rensburg, 2015:4). In responding to how the qualification was aligned with Grade R teaching and learning, Mrs Mbelu stated that NQF Level 4 certificate helped her in teaching basic mathematics, languages and life skills. I noticed that Mrs Mbelu was not happy to talk about her qualifications. Her facial expression changed when I asked about her qualifications and I assumed that she was aware that she was unqualified. I note that low qualifications cause teachers to have low self-esteem and the quality teaching and learning is likely to be low as well. This suggests that Grade R teacher qualification status should be improved for quality teaching and learning (Mohangi et al., 2016:5). Underqualification make teachers feel threatened at the workplace.

The findings emerged from the interview highlighted that Mrs Mbelu enriched her knowledge and skills by attending training on Revised National Curriculum Statement in 2008, training on CAPS in 2012 and various in-service training programmes. In her explanation, the CAPS training workshops were based on barriers to learning, life skills study areas, language components and mathematics content areas. In all, Mrs Mbelu regarded training as important for teaching and learning for Grade R.

At the commencement of this study, there was another course offered by Takalane Sesame Project which Mrs Mbelu attended. The training was based on capacitating Grade R and preschool practitioners on how to use resources to make teaching and learning enjoyable through free play, instructional and guided play activities. Her understanding was that the training on Takalane Sesame for play teaching
methodologies added value to her knowledge and skills. This indicates that continuing professional development training is needed to teachers.

4.4.1.3 Mrs Lindani

Mrs Lindani obtained Grade 12 and National Professional Diploma in Education (NPDE). She studied her NPDE qualification through distance learning. According to the requirements for Grade R teaching, a qualified teacher should have a diploma but her diploma was not aligned with a Grade R qualification. It was a qualification for upgrading teachers who were already in the system. Mrs Lindani did not have any Grade R-related qualification. When asked about her qualification and its relevance to Grade R teaching and learning, she responded as follows:

Currently, I am doing Level 4. I have learned skills and knowledge on how to teach Grade R learners.

Mrs Lindani took time to respond to the question and showed no confidence in what she was saying. She took time in talking about her qualification. I used several follow-up questions to find out about the knowledge and skills she acquired for teaching Grade R. Mrs Lindani developed her little knowledge and skills on how to manage Grade R teaching and learning programmes by attending in-service training workshops offered by the DBE. The responses of Mrs Lindani raised more doubts which highlight that if learners are in the hands of unqualified teachers, they tend to experience problems in their learning (Hwenha, 2014:31). However, training has a positive influence on teaching and learning, especially when it is aligned with curriculum needs. According to the literature review, learners who are in the hands of unqualified teachers tend to experience learning difficulties and perform poorly in their academic work (Hwenha, 2014:31).

4.4.1.4 Ms Solani

Ms Solani had obtained Grade 12 and a Level 6 Grade R National Diploma. Ms Solani explained that she started to teach Grade R with a Grade 12 qualification. She indicated that she lacked skills and knowledge on how to teach Grade R and then she furthered her studies to pursue a Grade R teaching diploma. The qualification implied that she was a qualified Grade R teacher. It is evident that she had passion for Grade
R teaching. Her view supported Freire’s idea (1970:70) which states that teachers should be agents of change regardless of challenges they may experience.

Ms Solani was asked about the link between her qualification and Grade R teaching and learning content. In her response, she expressed that:

*The Level 6 Grade R Diploma empowered me with various skills and knowledge on how to handle young learners, manage Grade R class, plan lessons, assess learners and even to set up a Grade R classroom. I feel that I need knowledge and skills that are proper for teaching Grade R.*

Looking at the above statement, the skills and knowledge Mrs Solani highlighted are needed for Grade R teaching and learning practices. According to Ms Solani, her qualification had a profound influence on Grade R teaching and learning.

Ms Solani also added that she attended various workshops to capacitate herself with Grade R programmes. She gave an example of the Takalane Sesame training that she attended where she acquired knowledge on how to apply a play-based teaching method in Grade R classes. She also affirmed her concern that if she had a television in her class, learner performance would improve in emergent literacy. She was convinced that learners did not watch educational programmes at home. Ms Solani highlighted that she needed to engage learners in various listening and speaking activities.

### 4.4.1.5 Synthesis

In light of the findings, it can be concluded that most Grade R teachers were underqualified. The literature review confirms the above findings that only 10% of Grade R teachers are qualified (Hlupo, 2013 6). It appeared that Grade R teachers struggle with teaching and learning they are not trained for. Related to the qualification, teaching experiences helped some Grade R teachers to provide better teaching and learning practices. Although the DBE is trying to improve Grade R teacher qualifications, the programme appeared to be moving very slowly.

The following section presents and discusses teacher content knowledge in various aspect of teaching and learning practices as a second theme that emerged from the analysis of the interviews.
4.4.2 Teacher Content Knowledge

The reviewed literature stresses that teachers need to be empowered with content knowledge to be competent in imparting knowledge and skills in all levels of education including Grade R (Atweh et al., 2014:20). Thus, the following paragraphs explore some of the challenges facing Grade R teaching and learning in rural schools and how these challenges influence teaching and learning. The strategies teachers used to improve teaching and learning are also explored.

4.4.2.1 Teaching and learning strategies

This section presents findings on the strategies Grade R teachers use in teaching language, mathematics and life skills. The section also reports on some of the challenges teachers faced and how these challenges influence teaching and learning and how the teachers mitigated the identified challenges. I started with language discussions, then with mathematics and lastly with life skills.

- Strategies for teaching language in Grade R

- Ms Zondi

During the interviews, Ms Zondi showed a great confidence in how she taught language in her class. She indicated that she used the play approach towards learning. In teaching reading, she highlighted that she used story books, learners interpreted charts and pictures and with time learners read letters of the alphabet in words already learned in a story. Mrs Zondi also shared her teaching strategies in writing as follows:

Most of the time we start by moulding play dough to make a letter of alphabet. Then we go outside and write it on the sand. Learners then come to write the letters in their books.

The strategies highlighted are clearly reflected in the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement language document (DoE, 2011a:5). Using these strategies implied that Ms Zondi understood how to use strategies mentioned in the CAPS. To answer the question on challenges she experienced in teaching emergent reading in Grade R, she expressed her challenge as follows:
The lack of reading books for Grade R is a big challenge in teaching emergent reading. Learners have to share reading books, yet they do not have understanding of sharing books. Each learner wants to have a book. It would be better if all learners [had] similar books.

In the case of a shortage of reading books, Ms Zondi indicated that she grouped learners into small groups and dealt with one group at a time while other learners were busy occupied in other play learning stations. She stated that all groups had to rotate so that all learners had access to reading books. The play-based approach Ms Zondi used appeared effective in teaching reading and other activities in her class. According to her statement, she accommodated all learning styles in her class. The strategies used by Ms Zondi are acknowledged by Lou and Wium (2012:1) who emphasise that language should be taught by knowledgeable and competent teachers. The literature review confirmed the findings from interviews that there were still shortages of reading materials in schools for Grade R and learners had missed some of language content that are acquired before learners begin Grade 1. Freire (2000:58) perceives a shortage of reading material as a problem as it deprives learners of access to reading and quality education.

Ms Zondi also explained that she started teaching emergent writing by asking her learners to moulding play dough in the shape of a letter of alphabet and they then wrote the letter outside on the sand. In her explanation, she added that afterwards, learners wrote the letter in their exercise books where they traced the letter. Her understanding was in line with the strategies stipulated in isiXhosa Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement Grade R–3 (DoE, 2011a:10). This policy provides various strategies Grade R teachers need to use in teaching emergent writing. Ms Zondi affirmed that she did not have any challenge in teaching emergent writing.

Mrs Mbelu

During the interview, Mrs Mbelu explained how she taught reading and writing. These were targeted subject areas for this study. In teaching reading, she explained as follows:
I display posters with different topics on the wall because learners believe in the look-and-say approach. I also use a variety of books and songs about what is on the charts. I use pictures for learners to follow on what the story is all about.

The above statement implies that, Mrs Mbelu understood the materials she had to use for teaching reading effectively in Grade R. Her understanding was in line with Vygotsky’s idea which encourages the use of psychological tools as a means to accomplish a task (Vygotsky, 1978:25). Among all the tools used in teaching and learning practices, language was considered as the most valuable tool that helps the child to cope well in learning through spoken language with the assistance of the teacher.

In response to a question on what challenges she experienced in teaching literacy, Mrs Mbelu highlighted that learners did not have an interest in reading. In this regard, Mrs Mbelu appeared not to have applied the principle of scaffolding in making learners develop an interest in reading. Her practice confirmed that Grade R teachers have limited training and that has impacted literacy implementation (Mohangi et al., 2016: 1). In order to mitigate the challenge Mrs Mbelu experienced, Feza and Tlou (2018: 35) encourage Grade R teachers to give learners the opportunity to show their interest in what they want to do and teachers should then plan the teaching according to the interests of the learners. In the case of Mrs Mbelu, it appeared that she did not allow the learners to have fun by exploring and choosing the reading material they were interested in to instil love of reading.

To a follow-up question on what could be done to improve reading, she indicated that learners should be engaged in playing games and in drama. According to Vygotsky (1978:25), Mrs Mbelu mentioned appropriate strategies in introducing language to Grade R learners as he feels that learners construct meaningful learning when being engaged in social activities. In interviews, Mrs Mbelu was reluctant to clearly indicate how she used games and drama. That gave me the impression that she knew the strategies but she lacked skills on how to apply them.

Mrs Mbelu also highlighted the strategies she used in teaching emergent writing in Grade R. She mentioned that she first demonstrated how to write the letter in the air, then learners had to join her doing the same. She added that learners used play dough to mould the letter, identified the letter in words on the wall and later traced letters of
the alphabet in workbooks. Mrs Mbelu also mentioned that Grade R learners also copied words containing the letters they had learned. Her practice supported learner-centred learning. The strategies she used were aligned with CAPS. Although she understood the strategies on how to teach language, her teaching approach remained a challenge.

- **Mrs Lindani**

In the interview, Mrs Lindani reported that she used the learning through play approach in her lessons. She mentioned that she used pictures, big books and charts for teaching emergent reading. Mrs Lindani shared her teaching strategies as follows:

> When I use a big book, I start on cover page by asking learners some questions about what they see. I read page by page with them. Then learners sequence pictures to retell the story. I also extend the lesson to a letter of the week by engaging learners to find it from the words in a story.

Linking to the above, learners were engaged in picture interpretation which is the first strategy for teaching emergent reading in Grade R. The various activities mentioned on reading suggested that reading was recognised as an important component to improve literacy in Grade R. The above findings are in line with the literature (Gray & MacBlain, 2012:12) which states that reception learners need to recognise written symbols and the sounds and the sounds that are attributed to these symbols to be able to write.

In relation to a question regarding the challenges in teaching emergent reading, Mrs Lindani mentioned that some learners could not answer questions, sequence picture stories, or identify the letters of the alphabet they had learned. The above challenge is highlighted in related literature (Bruwer et al., 2014:21) which indicates that Grade R learners progress to Grade 1 with limited language use and communication skills at the required level of development. Despite the challenges on teaching reading, she understood some strategies for teaching emergent reading. On the question of what could be done to improve emergent writing in Grade R, Mrs Lindani emphasised that learners should be taught directionality first. In my view, Grade R teachers need further training on language teaching.

- **Ms Solani**
In the interviews, Ms Solani explained how she taught language in her Grade R class. She mentioned that learners needed to start reading words by sounding the letters of the alphabet. In her explanation, she reflected as follows:

_ I write a letter on the chalkboard and tell learners to pronounce the letter in the way I do. Then, I ask learners whose names begin with the letter to come forward. They call their names one by one. For example; Cebisa, Coceka, Cikoza. Learners also think about their friends and family members whose names start with letter sound C._

The findings proved that Ms Solani’s knowledge of teaching emergent reading and phonics was aligned to the strategies that are in isiXhosa Home Language CAPS policy document (DBE, 2011a:5). Her teaching strategies were aligned with the views of Freire (1978:18) who claims that teacher is no longer a depositor of knowledge and skills and learner merely a recipient in teaching and learning process. In this regard, Freire highlights that teachers should present the relevant content to the learners so that learners respond by answering questions and enquiring about the information presented to them. Similarly, Vygotsky (1978:28) agrees with Ms Solani’s strategy as he believes that the child can remember the concepts with ease when being hands-on in an activity. The findings show that Ms Solani focused more on writing than reading and that gave me the impression that she did not teach reading in line with the expectations of CAPS. If that is the case, that would reveal an imbalance in teaching Grade R language components.

- Synthesis

In view of the four Grade R teachers’ knowledge in teaching language, it can therefore be concluded that some Grade R teachers achieve competency in teaching language. In their responses, all Grade R teachers understood the strategies for teaching language but the challenge was on how to use play-based approach. The imbalance of language teaching was noted as some Grade R teachers focused on engaging learners in written work.

The following paragraphs present strategies used to teach mathematics in Grade R class.

- Strategies for teaching mathematics
• Ms Zondi

In teaching mathematics, Ms Zondi mentioned that she used concrete objects such as counters, beads, books with numbers, flash cards and number symbols to engage learners in practical activities through the learning-through-play approach. This understanding is aligned to the purpose of CAPS Grade R-12, which outlines that learners should explore information and be critical thinkers, (DBE, 2011b:4). Ms Zondi also expressed her understanding as follows:

*For example, I give three learners six toys to share. Each learner has to take one toy at a time and then take another one. Each learner counts how many toys she or he has. Or I give five learners 10 counters to share them equally according to their numbers and give the answer.*

The above strategy shows that teaching sharing activities using resources make learning more effective. The idea of teaching mathematics concepts in early grades is supported by the view that it influences learner performance in mathematics in the upper grades and subject choices in FET (Mkabela, 2016:34). It appears that if teachers can link theory with practice, Grade R learners will progress with a strong foundation in number sense.

• Ms Mbelu

In teaching mathematics, Mrs Mbelu pointed out that she had a challenge in teaching the concept of sharing in Grade R. She explained as follows:

*Mem ... it is difficult to teach sharing in Grade R. Learners fight because they want to own the resources you use for teaching sharing. It is easy to teach other concepts like measurement. For example; I take containers and fill them with water, soil or sand, call them in groups. Then put half, empty, quarter and the full one. Then ask them to choose which one is half, which one is full, which one has got little water or empty.*

According to Curriculum and Assessment Policy documents, Mrs Mbelu knew how to teach the concept “capacity” which is part of measurement, the content area of mathematics. I noticed that Mrs Mbelu experienced a challenge in teaching concepts that demand problem-solving technique. She lacked knowledge to use learning
through play approach to teach mathematics. This is a challenge as it is highlighted that when mathematics is not taught well at Grade R, learners will progress to Grade 12 with a content gap that may never be filled (Feza & Tlou, 2018: 39). In my view, sharing does not need many resources; rather, creativity is needed by the teacher as CAPS mandates teachers to apply it in teaching and learning (DBE, 2011b:4). The research findings support the findings of the ANA which indicated that Grade 1 learners could not divide twelve biscuits for three people (DBE, 2014:14).

- **Mrs Lindani**

The evidence that emerged from the interviews identified teacher content knowledge as the challenge that hindered teaching and learning. When Mrs Lindani was asked about how she taught sharing activities in Grade R, she indicated:

> When I use toys, I teach learners how to share. Grade R learners do not want to share the resources. I think they need enough materials for activities so that each table has a pack of material. I tell them that they have to learn to share in the class.

Mrs Lindani expressed her deep concerns about learners learning to share in class. She highlighted a need for resources to teach sharing activities. I can associate Mrs Lindani’s lack of knowledge in teaching sharing in Grade R with a lack of deep foundational understanding of mathematics (Ryan et al., 2014:4) from her training college as a reception-year teacher. It appeared that Mrs Lindani lacked strategies to teach learners sharing in an appealing and enjoyable way.

- **Ms Solani**

In the interview, Ms Solani reflected that there were some content areas she found difficult to teach such as 3D in mathematics. She indicated that she did not have any challenge in teaching the concept of sharing in Grade R. During the interview, I noted that she never taught the concept. She often expressed her understanding as follows:

> I integrate mathematics concepts when I plan my lessons. There are concepts which do not need much focus. I start with difficult concepts and teach the easy concepts towards the end of the year.
The above statement indicates that Ms Solani was uncertain about the content knowledge she had in teaching mathematics. Helmbold (2014:21) confirms that pre-primary teachers have no confidence in teaching mathematics. I aligned Ms Solani’s content knowledge with her qualifications: as indicated in Chapter 3, Table 3.1, she was unqualified to teach Grade R.

- Synthesis

The findings of the study established that some concepts in mathematics were not taught. It was evident that some Grade R teachers struggled to teach some mathematics concepts. Therefore, the teacher content knowledge put the teaching and learning of mathematics in Grade R at a low standard (Atweh at al., 2014:9; Feza, 2014b:13; Helmbold, 2014:21; Siyepu, 2013:1). In this case, Whitman (2015:144) recommends teacher training on mathematics concepts so that teachers can develop self-confidence in teaching all relevant concepts in mathematics. I propose that mathematics in Grade R teaching and learning should be monitored as it is one of the critical subjects that most learners fail. The concepts should all be taught according to their weight stipulated in the CAPS.

The following paragraphs present and discuss life skills teaching and learning strategies.
• Strategies in teaching life skills

• Ms Zondi

In teaching life skills, Ms Zondi indicated that she had a challenge in teaching creative arts. She expressed her feeling as follows:

_Sometimes other learners do not know how to colour accurately. They fail to follow instructions; for example, you say they must colour the certain part of a picture they colour the whole page. I observed that time for teaching life skills is limited._

Ms Zondi believed that she gave learners clear instructions on how to do an activity. She indicated that although she supported learners, time for teaching life skills is limited in the CAPS. In my knowledge, there are two hours per week for each study area in life skills. In our discussion on life skills teaching study areas, creative art and physical education, I found that the subject was inadequately implemented in her class. Ms Zondi added that she did not know even the value of physical education and she did not have an interest in sport. She suggested with concern that workshops were needed as she did not know even the activities that had to be taught in physical education. Ms Zondi’s lack of strategies and understanding in teaching life skills confirmed that life skills as a subject was given little attention in her school yet it provides the building blocks for improving learner performance in literacy and in numeracy (Mohangi et al., 2016:6; Moletsane et al., 2012:123). I believe that Ms Zondi did not read the CAPS properly because the document clearly indicates that life skills is a combination of other subjects that are offered in the upper grades (DBE, 2012:15, Sheldon, 2015:16). Therefore, the subjects should be introduced as early as in Grade R in the education system.

• Mrs Mbelu

The interview findings also revealed that Mrs Mbelu had a challenge in teaching the two study areas of life skills: creative arts and physical education. During the interview, she did not want to dwell much on the strategies she used for teaching the two study areas mentioned above. She only indicated that she took learners outside for physical education activities and engaged learners in drawing for creative arts activities. Mrs Mbelu did not indicate how she did activities with her learners. The related literature
indicates that life skills is not taken seriously as an important subject by teachers and even managers do not supervise it as it is a non-examinable subject (Chirwa & Naidoo, 2014:4). I concluded that these two study areas were not being taught well in class. My assumption is supported by the view that learner school readiness in Grade 1 revealed a poor development of the gross and fine motor skills of learners which results in low muscle tone and poor balance (Bruwer et al., 2014:18).

- Mrs Lindani

Responding to the question of how Mrs Lindani taught physical education, she stated that:

> It is where I take learners outside for playing, running, play jungle gym and kick the ball. But I need to have more jungle gyms, balls and other outdoor equipment.

It emerged from the interview that Mrs Lindani did not teach all the concepts in life skills. She explained that the number of learners was a challenge and that she had to spend a lot of time supporting them. In her concerns, she also reported that she could not follow the daily programme because other learners took time to grasp certain concepts in class. She highlighted that, in order to cover the content missed, she infused the concepts in other lessons. The research findings revealed that Mrs Lindani spent little time in teaching life skills. In my personal view, there are physical education activities that can be done without using expensive material. Mrs Lindani lacked knowledge and understanding that physical education help learners to develop gross muscles which are important for balancing and lifting some objects in the class. The reviewed literature recommends that implementation of life skills for supporting and strengthening language, mathematics and knowledge for social life needs to be considered (Bruwer et al., 2014: 18; Janse van Rensburg, 2015: 3; Wanyama & Quay 2014:6). Grade R learners should be engaged in free play which is not the case in Mrs Lindani’s class.

- Ms Solani

In the interviews, Ms Solani highlighted that she used the play-based approach in teaching life skills. She affirmed that she used the play-based approach in class with various teaching and learning materials. She added that when she taught, she grouped
learners according to their levels of learning. In her explanation, she gave an example that those who understood easily were grouped together and those who took time to grasp were grouped together. She highlighted that the strategy helped learners to cooperate freely. During the interviews, I noticed that Ms Solani did not want to be specific on how she taught life skills.

- Synthesis

In light of the four Grade R teacher findings, it can be concluded that Grade R teachers did not take life skills seriously in their teaching and learning practices. It was evident that Grade R teachers had a content gap in teaching life skills. Discovery learning which is the strategy to engage learners on hands on activities appeared not encouraged (Brunner, 1962:36). I hold the view that the DBE is focussing more on language and mathematics with little attention given to life skills. Teachers should consider the purpose of teaching life skills which is based on developing fine and gross muscles which enable learners to improve various social, physical, emotional, cognitive and academic skills.

4.4.2.2 Planning for Grade R teaching and learning and content coverage

According to Reche et al. (2012:4), planning involves the content that highlights the skills and knowledge to be learned and remedial plan to support learners in understanding the concepts. The planning is recommended by Soma (2011:41) who states that if classroom environment is planned properly, it becomes a very powerful tool and can be used as a knowledge-building instrument. Therefore, the following paragraphs report and discuss the findings on planning from the interviews with four Grade R teachers in rural schools.

- Ms Zondi

During the interview, Ms Zondi was asked a question on how she planned an integrated lesson. In her response, she explained that she designed a lesson according to a theme of the week. She gave an example that, if the theme was water, she planned the topics in the CAPS for mathematics and language that would fit into the theme and design her integrated lessons. Ms Zondi was aware that she had to follow daily programme in her planning. She indicated that she could not follow it and explained as follows:
Sometimes I do not follow a daily programme. For example, sometimes today I teach a lesson and tomorrow I find out that some learners [have] forgotten everything. I have to continue with that lesson until learners understand the concepts. That causes me not to adhere to a daily programme. Really, I do not focus much on a daily programme but on learner performance.

According to Helmbold (2014:12), well-planned teacher-guided activities result in good learner performance. In the case of Ms Zondi, it appeared that teacher-guided activities were not well planned. The above scenario indicates that Ms Zondi did not adhere to a daily programme which is a Grade R timetable. The strategy she used to mitigate the memory of learners showed that she did not orientate herself with a daily programme that should guide her to do all activities of the day properly (Mahan, 2015:26).

CAPS emphasises that Grade R planning should be aligned with a daily programme (DBE, 2011b:20). Ms Zondi maintained that because some learners were forgetful, she could not adhere to a daily programme. She felt that a daily programme prevented her from supporting her learners who experienced barriers to learning. According to Grade R prescripts, she should follow a daily programme. It appeared that Ms Zondi had a content gap in understanding the importance of a daily programme in teaching and learning. In reality, planning supports the teacher to scaffold teaching for learners according to their academic needs. It also makes teaching easy because materials are organised in order and in time for teaching and learning.

On the question of the extent to which her planning influenced content coverage, Ms Zondi responded as follows:

Sometimes I do not finish content coverage because of various activities that take me away from the class. For example, sometimes I attend a workshop for a couple of days. When I come back, I find that learners are absent and they take time to come to school if you were absented for a number of days. Meaning that lessons of that week are missed. I end up not finishing the content coverage because I have to start with those lessons missed.

The culture of absenteeism and of attending workshops was a challenge for content coverage to Ms Zondi. She did not have a recovery plan for the work she missed. It appeared that she was not aware that she could have infused similar topics when time...
for teaching those topics was missed. I can align the research findings with the literature review on language, mathematics and life skills content gaps which indicate that Grade R learners progress to Grade 1 with missed concepts (Brewer, 2014:11; Feza, 2014b:10).

- **Mrs Mbelu**

Related to the question of how she planned integrated teaching and learning, Mrs Mbelu indicated that she took one theme and planned integrated lessons of the week for all the three subjects that are done in Grade R. She expressed her planning as follows:

> Most teaching and learning in Grade R is integrated. For example, if you teach mathematics, language and life skills are there. If the lesson is about friends, you talk about the friends, number of friends and the colours of clothes they wear. The difference is on assessment, as each subject has its concepts for assessment and recordings. Assessment and recording are part of planning.

In providing her understanding of integrated teaching and learning, she mentioned that lessons in Grade R are theme-based. Norbury et al. (2015:8) confirm that Mrs Mbelu understood that assessment and recording are part of planning. The study highlights that content knowledge and assessment are indispensable. Integrated planning helps to cover the content if it is well planned.

Mrs Mbelu also mentioned that the lack of resources in some subjects like life skills made it difficult for her to plan lessons properly. Modisaotsile (2012:4) agrees that LTSMs enhance teaching and understanding of the subject content. Similarly, Lingam and Lingam (2013:1) confirm that teacher’s planning cannot strengthen and support teaching and learning if resources are not provided. The absence of resources makes planning incomplete because some activities cannot be included if they need resources. The exclusion of some concepts in planning deprives learners of opportunities to learn some concepts.

Mrs Mbelu also showed that the readers and big books that were supplied by the Department of Basic Education were challenging for Grade R learners and the pictures were not aligned to the text. Therefore, she had to adapt the level of readers for Grade R and make corrections in readers. In this regard, Taole and Mohapi (2013:7) claim
that the material provided to schools should be aligned with the curriculum and be written in simple language that is understood by learners and teachers. The challenge of readers in Grade R affirmed that reading was not properly done and this contradicted the CAPS which emphasises that reading should start with Grade R. Hlupo et al. (2013:2) highlight that the unavailability of resources is a common challenge facing reception year teaching and learning in rural schools. The study also indicates that learners might have little opportunity to access quality education because, in the reception year, learners depend on play and experimentation in their learning. According to Freire (1996:74-75), the lack of resources in rural schools is associated with a pedagogy of the oppressed which deprives disadvantaged learners of quality education. In my opinion, teachers should be engaged on how to design picture books, written symbols and posters to support learners in reading. In most cases, teaching is about teacher creativity and learners themselves can learn from their teacher to construct some of learning materials.

On the issue of content coverage, Mrs Mbelu explained that she covered all the concepts according to the CAPS. According to the CAPS, she had to plan forty theme-based lessons for the year. It appeared that her learners should be able to progress to Grade 1 without content gaps. Based on her statement, Mrs Mbelu planned lessons properly and followed daily programme according to the CAPS prescripts.

- **Mrs Lindani**

Mrs Lindani stated that she followed a daily programme as a guide on using CAPS for integrated planning (DBE, 2012:4). She explained as follows:

*I choose a theme from life skills CAPS policy document. Then I plan lessons for mathematics and language according to the theme of the week. I make it sure that isiXhosa home language and mathematics concepts integrate.*

The above explanation indicates that Mrs Lindani understood that in Grade R, planning is theme-based and it should be integrated. It appeared that she orientated herself with the content of a daily programme and the CAPS to ensure that activities were done properly. I noted that she understood the whole process of planning.

Mrs Lindani confirmed that she did not teach all the topics. She explained that the number of learners was a challenge and that she had to spend much time supporting
them. In my view, Mrs Lindani was behind in content coverage. As it was in Term 4 when the study commenced, it appeared that learners were already behind in content coverage and had to progress to Grade 1 with a content gap. Taole and Mohapi (2014:2) confirm that Grade R instructional planning is not done properly in some schools. Mrs Lindani should have infused similar topics to cover the content missed.

- **Ms Solani**

Ms Solani’s response in the interview revealed that for integrated planning she used the CAPS policy documents. She confirmed that she planned lessons according to the themes stipulated in the life skills CAPS policy document. In her example, she reflected as follows:

> When I teach a theme, for example, “me”. I ensure that mathematics and language are integrated in that theme. Learners learn parts of the body using home language. On the other hand, learners have to count parts of the body e.g. two eyes, two ears, ten fingers and so on. There are forty themes in the year. This means I must have forty lesson plans.

The above response is aligned with what is in the CAPS policy document. In the CAPS, the forty themes are set out for forty weeks of the year. Ms Solani clearly understood that in Grade R, the theme should cover the lesson planning of all the three Grade R subjects (language, mathematics and life skills). Planning is confirmed an essential by Siraj and Taggart (2014:33) as it is effective for teaching and learning as teachers can manage classroom routines, use resources effectively, use instructional time and care for individual learner needs.

Ms Solani confirmed that she did not cover the content because some learners were registered in Grade R without having attended preschool and these learners took time to grasp the content as they were not familiar with the environment. In this regard, related literature argues that parents in rural areas are over-dependent on social grants and therefore they cannot afford to support children’s education fully (Munje & Mncube, 2018:81). According to Freire (1987:204), education in a democratic country, like South Africa, is perceived as a human right and each individual should have access. It appeared that lack of preschool is still a challenge although South Africa been a
democracy for 25 years. This suggests that more preschools should be introduced in local communities.

Another challenge Ms Solani experienced was with learners who left school early for school holidays. These learners also came back later after the holidays. I relate these findings to the lack of communication between SMTs and SGBs as parent representatives to address the challenge. Munje and Mncube (2018:88) align the challenge with unpreparedness of teachers to effectively establish sustainable relationship with parents. They also should engage parents in various school activities for community partnerships. In order to cover the content missed, Ms Solani should have infused the themes of the earlier term in the next term. The claim of Ms Solani on content coverage is reviewed in the analysis of classroom observations and document analysis in Chapters 5 and Chapter 6.

- Synthesis

I noted that all the four Grade R teachers understood that planning was a key in their teaching and learning practices. Each teacher had her own excuses for being behind in content coverage. Finally, I can conclude that Grade R learners progressed to Grade 1 with content gaps because they missed some of the foundational concepts.

The following paragraphs report, discuss and interpret the research findings on resources in Grade R teaching and learning context in rural schools.

4.4.2.3 Lack of resources

To be effective, teaching and learning depends on the availability of relevant resources. Learners should be given access to resources for discovery learning. Recent studies reveal that, internationally, reception year classes in disadvantaged schools have a shortage of resources (Atmore, 2012:13; Mangwaya et al., 2013:3; Moyo et al., 2012; Taole & Mohapi, 2013:8). This suggests that quality education is compromised in disadvantaged rural schools. The following sessions presents finding from four Grade R teachers on the resources in their teaching and learning practices.
Ms Zondi

In the interview, Ms Zondi mentioned that she had few resources to assist her with teaching and learning activities. Ms Zondi was pessimistic that the shortage of resources had a negative influence on teaching and learning. She shared as follows:

_I cannot teach other lessons in the way I want. I do not teach other concepts properly. It is difficult to engage learners in practical activities, when you do not have resources to use. Learners in Grade R learn through discovery and experimentation._

The above statement showed that shortage of resources hampered effective teaching and learning in her school. The literature supports the view that if resources are available and used appropriately, learners grasp concepts and ideas and do not easily forget them (Mkhabela, 2016: 107). Ms Zondi clearly understood that Grade R learners needed materials to experiment and that discovery learning was key in early childhood teaching and learning (Vygotsky, 1978:5). I asked Ms Zondi if she attended any resource-making workshops. She once did but this was when she was still teaching at the preschool. Clearly, Ms Zondi could not apply what she learned in that workshop to her current environment.

In almost all discussions held with Ms Zondi, she indicated a shortage of resources. She mentioned that she did not have enough reading and maths materials. When asked what can be done to overcome the challenges of resources in Grade R, she emphasised that Grade R teachers needed to be involved in selecting the resources for teaching and learning. She explained that sometimes teachers received the same resources over and over instead of getting the new materials they needed.

In addition, Ms Zondi wished to have an opportunity to order her own teaching and learning materials. It appeared that Ms Zondi was not involved in decision-making about Grade R teaching and learning materials. It is important for teachers to participate in the selection of materials as implementers of Grade R programmes. Orientation towards the usage of materials also plays an important part because it equips teachers with skills and techniques for effective teaching and learning.

In order to deal with the shortage of resources, Ms Zondi indicated that she preferred to group learners when she taught a particular concept. The research by Lingam and
Lingam (2013:1) revealed that planning alone without resources cannot improve teaching and learning. This indicate that teaching and learning without resources is ineffective and is compromised.

- *Mrs Mbelu*

On the question of availability of resources, Mrs Mbelu stated that the shortage of resources was a serious challenge in her teaching. She expressed the challenge as follows:

*I do have indoor material although it is not enough. The school does not have outdoor play material altogether. I will use the outdoor materials effectively if they can be supplied.*

Mrs Mbelu confirmed that the school did not have outdoor resources to use for her Grade R class. This implied little or no opportunities for physical education activities. This is against what CAPS outlines, namely, that in Grade R, learners should be engaged in physical and motor development activities through play, movements and games (DBE, 2011c:8). These activities contribute to the development of positive values and attitudes in the social life context of the learner. Teaching and learning should be fun and enjoyable through manipulation of resources that motivate learners to attend school for a purpose.

Mrs Mbelu also agreed that she did not teach all the concepts in Grade R. The interview revealed that the shortage of resources frustrated her. She commented as follows:

*I do not teach life skills properly because of the shortage of outdoor material. I focus much on indoor activities. The lack of outdoor material makes me feel lazy to take learners out for physical education.*

The above statement shows that Mrs Mbelu was not competent and creative in teaching physical education. The findings highlighted that she could not use the few available resources effectively for teaching physical education. In her statement, it appeared that most concepts on physical education were not taught. This confirmed that Grade R learners would progress to Grade R with a content gap in mathematics and in language as most skills in these subjects are learned through physical education.
activities. In the interviews, Mrs Mbelu stated that she grouped learners for physical education by taking three groups at a time while others did other activities.

- **Mrs Lindani**

Similarly, Mrs Lindani affirmed that some lessons were not taught well because of the lack of outdoor materials. She highlighted that the SMT always mentioned that outdoor materials are expensive and the DBE provided an inadequate budget for Grade R programmes. Mrs Lindani established that the school relies on the resources which are bought by the DBE and on some that were donated by the Takalane Sesame team as reported by Mohangi et al. (2016:76). Mrs Lindani had a shortage of readers and lack of big books for shared reading. She emphasised that readers should be supplied so that all learners had access to the reading materials.

- **Ms Solani**

The similar case of a lack of resources was reported by Ms Solani. She highlighted that she did not have enough outdoor materials. Ms Solani was asked about the influence of the resources in teaching and learning. She stated that she had few indoor resource materials and she used them in various activities in language, mathematics and life skills. The indoor resource materials that were supplied by the DBE, donated by Takalane Sesame and the Education Opportunity Project supported Ms Solani in teaching and learning and learner performance had improved since these were made available. This showed that resources have a great influence on learner performance when the teacher is capacitated effectively. The resources stimulate and maximise learning opportunities through engagement in play activities (Mulaudzi, 2016:108).

In the interview, Ms Solani mentioned that she experienced a challenge in supporting learners in emergent writing. In her explanation, she highlighted that learners should be provided with various materials such as water paint, magazines to cut out pictures and pairs of scissors to develop fine motor skills for handwriting. She suggested that young learners needed to be engaged in various activities such as drawing, writing their names, numbers and letter formation relevant to their developmental levels. Seemingly, learners could not develop emergent writing skills properly in Grade R.
• Synthesis

The four Grade R teachers had a common challenge of resources, including outdoor in their schools. The findings revealed that some Grade R teachers had resources but they lacked knowledge and understanding on how to use them. This confirmed that in South Africa, there were schools provided with resources but teachers had no knowledge and skills to use them (Helmbold, 2013:197). Some of the language resources provided were not user-friendly as they had spelling errors. It is suggested that teachers should be provided with adequate resources which would be appropriate to Grade R age cohort (Taole & Mohapi, 2013:7). In addition, training through lesson demonstrations should be provided (Helmbold, 2013:197). These were strategies the DBE should implement to ensure that the challenge of resources is resolved.

4.4.2.4 Assessment

Assessment is an integral part of teaching and learning. According to Wagner et al. (2012:5), assessment helps teachers to identify gaps in teaching and learning practices. Therefore, assessment should be explored in order to ensured that it serves the purpose of supporting learners to improve their weaknesses and the teacher to improve her or his practice. The following paragraphs report on the findings on the challenges with assessment that might occur during Grade R teaching and learning.

• Ms Zondi

On the question of assessment, Ms Zondi highlighted that she applied continuous assessment in her class. She stated that she used a checklist to observe learners and she assessed each and every activity done to find out strengths and weaknesses for each learner. She highlighted that the purpose of continuous assessment was to give immediate support to learners who had learning difficulties. Her statement was aligned with the National Protocol for Assessment which emphasises that in Grade R informal assessment provides feedback to all stakeholders that are involved in the education of learners and it also help the teacher to improve teaching (DBE, 2011d:5). Ms Zondi understood the Grade R assessment principle which says that learners should be assessed continuously in every activity to track learner performance and to support those who were left behind in mastering the concepts.
When asked how her assessment influenced teaching and learning, she indicated that assessment enabled her to identify learners with learning barriers for additional support and intervention. Ms Zondi also stated that when learners were left behind, she had to teach the concept again. She indicated that she drafted assessment recording tools. In a follow-up question on this, she indicated that the tools provided by the DBE had very small spaces for writing names of learners. As a result, she preferred to draft her own. Ms Zondi claimed that her recording tools were aligned with the marks needed in the South African School Administration and Management System (SASAMS). Ms Zondi highlighted that because of limited space in her assessment recording tool she did not include all the concepts that were indicated on the tool provided by the DBE. This shows that Grade R teachers have a challenge with assessing informal tasks (Naidoo & Mkhabela, 2017:10). Lumadi (2013:1) states that teachers in their teaching practices need to understand and apply assessment principles, various assessment forms, tools and adopt reporting procedures. I noted that Ms Zondi was not really concerned about the knowledge and skills to be assessed. Thus, it is evident that learners would progress to Grade 1 with content gaps because some critical knowledge and skills were not emphasised. Recording tools should capture all the concepts to be assessed for authentic assessment. The assessment tool indicates content covered, knowledge and skills learned. Some concepts were not assessed according to her recording tool. It could be concluded that teaching and learning was not effective.

- **Mrs Mbelu**

Mrs Mbelu shared how she assessed learners as follows:

> I write down areas of weaknesses and strengths I observed. For special concepts, I take a small group of eight learners because I cannot assess all 48 learners at once. I observe learners who experience learning difficulties and support them.

The above discussions indicate that Mrs Mbelu was aware that assessment is based on understanding learner performance and is used to strengthen support to learners with learning difficulties. She also understood the importance of group work in assessment. Mrs Mbelu’s knowledge of assessment in Grade R teaching and learning was consistent with the requirements of National Policy pertaining to the PPR of the
NCS Grades R-12 (DBE, 2012:5). The policy specifies the processes and procedures for the assessment of learner achievements. Teachers should follow the CAPS for free and fair assessment.

- **Mrs Lindani**

Mrs Lindani explained her knowledge of assessment as follows:

> Assessment is part of lesson planning. I assess learner performance on what I have been teaching. In Grade R, assessment is informal. Assessment helps me to see the progress of my learners and to decide how to support them. It also helps me to evaluate my planning for future improvement on teaching and learning strategies.

Linking to the statement made above, Mrs Lindani understood that the purpose of assessment in teaching and learning is to track learner performance. She also recognised assessment as a form of evaluating her teaching and learning strategies used for Grade R learners. This implies that assessment benefits both the teacher and the learners. During the interview, Mrs Lindani indicated that she used a notebook to record learner performance. She highlighted that she used provincial recording tools that were in a weekly term planner document.

- **Ms Solani**

During the interview, Ms Solani confirmed that in Grade R assessment is done every day and whenever the teacher interacts with learners. She highlighted that most assessment is done through observations. She explained how she assessed learners as follows:

> I assess learners in small groups and sometimes as individuals, depending on the type of activity. I print assessment tools for the term and paste it in my notebook and mark learner performance with a pencil because today the learner does well but tomorrow the performance may change on the same concept. I have to erase yesterday’s performance and write the current one. I finally use a pen at the end of the term in preparation for the final mark schedule.

The above explanation indicates that Ms Solani understood that Grade R learner performance could not be observed and judged by one activity. She showed that
various activities should be done to strengthen knowledge and understanding of the concepts taught in Grade R. Ms Solani also stated that she felt comfortable when she assessed learners in small groups but the large class enrolment hindered her success. Ms Solani regarded large numbers of learners as a barrier to assessment.

On the question of how her assessment influenced teaching and learning, Ms Solani explained the importance of assessment as it reflects learner performance and the strengths and the weaknesses of the teaching strategies used. In addition, she indicated that recording learner performance helps to identify areas of weakness that needed to be attended to in supporting learners. She highlighted that she found it difficult to assess a big class in the way she needed to. Ms Solani affirmed that assessment in a big class does not serve its initial purpose which is to support learners. Although she engaged learners in oral activities and used workbooks for emergent writing activities, it was difficult to attend to all learners individually for support. She pointed out that some of the learners progressed to Grade 1 without being properly academically assessed.

- Synthesis

The study confirmed that Grade R teachers knew that they had to engage learners in various assessment forms. Various challenges were highlighted which included big numbers and tools that were incongruent with the prescribed CAPS assessment recording tools. These challenges show that Grade R teachers lack competence with assessment and that they have limited knowledge on assessment (Kanjee & Mthembu, 2015:143). The findings also revealed that Grade R teachers did not apply assessment principles which encourage fair assessment. Teacher should understand that assessment provides teachers with an indication of the quality of teaching and learning that took place and the opportunity to provide remedial programmes where possible. Learners’ progress is tracked continuously through assessment.

4.4.2.5 Content knowledge on barriers to learning

The DBE highlights that learners in the education system experience various challenges, some of which are observed in the early grades (DBE, 2014a: 6). Therefore, early identification of these challenges helps teachers to provide remedial interventions to support learners. The following paragraphs provide some of the
challenges facing Grade R teaching and learning on barriers to learning and how they were addressed to improve learner performance in classroom context.

- **Mrs Zondi**

Ms Zondi shared that some of her learners experienced cognitive difficulties and were not able to immediately grasp certain concepts. According to her, these learners were not able to follow teachers’ instructions. In order to deal with the challenge of learners with barriers to learning, Ms Zondi used time for free play activities to support these learners. Taking from her statement, learners with barriers to learning were given little opportunity for free play activities. It appeared that Ms Zondi lacked strategies on how to deal with learners experiencing barriers to learning. In free play, learners develop skills and knowledge for tackling some concepts in their own understanding. Grade R teaching and learning requires that learners be provided with equal opportunities to learn and explore. This view affirms what is highlighted in the EWP6 policy which indicates that what works for one learner may not necessarily work well for another learner (DBE, 2014b:12-14). This indicate that teachers should not use time for free play for remedial programmes.

Ms Zondi expressed that she would appreciate support from the DBE, in as far as barriers to learning were concerned. She expressed the following sentiments:

> **Yhoo! Miss.** Regarding barriers to learning, I will be happy if the Department of Education can assist us with strategies on how to handle these learners. Grade R practitioners are not invited to any of the workshops, yet they are expected to know how to support the learners with learning difficulties. They are also expected to identify these learners as early as in Grade R.

These findings confirmed that Ms Zondi did not possess knowledge of addressing barriers to learning and development. Ms Zondi emphasised that support was important to make her work easier. Her response agreed with Dakada et al. (2015:3) who argue that teachers must have skills and knowledge to identify barriers to learning that may deprive learners of opportunities to learn and develop at their own pace and rate. It is evident that as a Grade R teacher she was expected to do more, yet with very little support.
However, she understood that identification of learners with barriers to learning is key and that the process needed to begin during the early years of schooling. It is also evident that lack of knowledge on the side of teachers regarding barriers to learning contributes towards some of the challenges experienced by Grade 1 teachers. Grade R lays a solid foundation for later learning and it is important that the foundation is a strong one.

- Mrs Mbelu

Similarly, Mrs Mbelu also experienced challenges with addressing barriers to learning in her class. She mentioned that there were learners in her class who could not complete their activities and who struggled to handle pencils. She understood that Grade R learners needed to progress to Grade 1 with all the basic concepts in mathematics, language and life skills. Mrs Mbelu related the challenges to several factors, which included absence of a preschool in the area, lack of parental involvement in school activities, overcrowding and lack of resources. Abongdia et al. (2015:5) state that these challenges on barriers to learning are very common in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa and they are contributing factors in poor teaching and learning. This suggests that teachers in Grade R find it difficult to teach according to the needs of the grade.

On the question of how she addressed the barriers to learning in her class, Mrs Mbelu highlighted that such learners remained in class after teaching time, as a provision of added support and their parents were informed of the process. She also showed that she pleaded with parents to support them at home. Mrs Mbelu stated that her intervention strategies worked and learner performance improved as more parents became involved. The fact that she worked on her own intervention strategies suggested that she was committed to making a difference, despite the challenges identified. Her statement agreed with Freire (2000:130) who stresses that progressive teachers need to make things happen in classroom for the benefit of the learner, no matter what the situation is. In response to the kind of support she received from the SMT, she reflected as follows:

*In my school, I report learners with barriers to learning to HOD. I reported one learner whom I identified as he experienced barriers to learning and the HOD told me to try various activities to support the learner and record everything*
down. I sent the child to her for observation but she could not do anything. Since then I preferred to keep quiet and did what she suggested.

Seemingly, even the HOD experienced a challenge in supporting Mrs Mbelu to deal with barriers to learning in her class. Mrs Mbelu did not highlight any support provided by the DBE on barriers to learning. It appeared that the case of learners with barriers to learning was not attended to seriously by the school. In my perception, the School Based Support Team (SBST), a team that deals with issues on barriers to learning at school level, was dysfunctional. The findings of this study clearly showed that the support provided for learners with barriers to learning was limited.

- Mrs Lindani

Mrs Lindani reported that there were two learners who had challenges with hearing difficulties and speech problems in her class. In order to deal with these challenges, she highlighted that she used gestures and put these learners in the front of the group. This implied that Mrs Lindani partly implemented EWP6 policy on inclusivity which shows that learner diversity should be recognised in class. In reality, the strategies she used showed that they were based on her creativity. The EWP6 specifies the skills teachers need to apply to support learners with learning difficulties such as curriculum adaptation, identification and remedial programmes (Abongdia et al., 2015:3; DBE, 2014a:6). This would help teachers to support learners as Bruner (1960:79) indicates that, given sufficient support, all learners can tackle complex concepts.

Mrs Lindani also mentioned that the district officials who deal with special needs learners recommended her to keep these learners in class with the hope that, as time went on, the situation would improve. She showed that the intervention programme challenged her because she was not trained to teach these learners. She was not orientated on the basic skills she could apply to support these learners. Mrs Lindani presented devising strategies as a big challenge in supporting these learners in class. During the interview, Mrs Lindani also commented that she had attended a one-day workshop on barriers to learning that took only three hours and was given the document on barriers to learning as a guide for supporting learners. She affirmed that she never used the screening tool because she had to photocopy a booklet of ten pages for fifty-seven learners and there was no budget for Grade R at her school. Mrs
Lindani also claimed that there was no support of learners with hearing difficulties and with speech problems in the document, it was only about learners with learning difficulties in mathematics and language.

- **Ms Solani**

In the interview, Ms Solani indicated that some learners did not cope well in class although they were in the correct grade according to their ages. She observed that there were learners who could not differentiate a boy from a girl when both wore trousers. Ms Solani stated that she tried to explain by examples but it was difficult for learners to understand the concept of gender identity. She aligned her teaching of gender with a lack of fantasy area where there should be dolls in her class. This also talks to Ms Solani’s creativity levels because she could have used puppets and pictures to teach about gender in her class. I hold a view that the programme on barriers to learning is not given much attention in schools and by the DBE. It is this view that Chimhenga (2016:33) argues that many learners experience gaps in their academic progress and in their life because they did not receive adequate support from an early age according to their pace and ability.

Ms Solani also found that there were learners who turned the flash cards upside down when they read the letters of the alphabet and pictures. I followed up on how she coped in supporting learners with learning difficulties and she indicated that she could only attend to them after school. Ms Solani explained that she had conversations with parents of the affected learners and suggested some intervention programmes. Ms Solani was asked about the support she received from the DBE regarding barriers identified. Her response was that it was the first time she had taught learners who experience barriers to learning. She said that the circuit manager requested a list of learners who experienced barriers to learning and she hoped that she would get assistance but it appeared that the activity was only for record-keeping. Ms Solani indicated that she needed training to be capacitated about barriers to learning.

- **Synthesis**

Considering the findings on barriers to learning, it can be concluded that most of the Grade R teachers were not empowered with knowledge on how to identify and support learners with barriers to learning. The DBE seems to have forgotten that Grade R
teachers are the first people who should have skills and knowledge on handling learners with barriers to learning. The research findings confirmed a statement made by the ECDBE that Grade R teachers in the system lack awareness and skills to identify and address learner needs in teaching and learning practices (Brazil, 2012:17; ECDBE, 2015:7). The findings also supported the literature which suggests that teachers must have skills and knowledge to identify learners with learning difficulties (Abongdia et al., 2015:4). I noted that studies on barriers to learning on Grade R teaching and learning in rural schools are very limited. The programmes on barriers to learning need to be considered by the curriculum planners because they support curriculum implementation.

4.4.3 The Challenge and Influence of School Climate on Teaching and Learning

The effective school climate focuses on improving quality of teaching and learning. According to Maponya (2015:46), a positive school climate provides some basic needs that make the school atmosphere acceptable to all stakeholders. Some of these basic needs include safety and security, positive interaction among parents, positive teachers-learner interaction and classroom conditions. He elaborates that these needs strongly influence effective teaching and learning in schools. In this study, the challenges identified in terms of a positive school climate included admission policy implementation, teacher support and security in schools.

4.4.3.1 The challenge and influence of admission policy

This session reports about the lack of implementation of Grade R admission policy in rural schools. Admission policy implementation appeared to be a challenge in all four schools in this study. I noted that not all teachers were willing to disclose the implementation of admission policy in their schools. I associated teacher silence on admission policy with a report that there was a poor relationship between the SMTs and Grade R teachers in some schools (Hwenha, 2014: 21). According to SASA, Grade R teachers should teach a maximum number of thirty learners at the right age cohort which is 4½ turning 5 years by the end of June in the year of admission (DBE, 2014b:36; Maponya, 2015:56). The Grade R teachers expressed the challenges and their influence on teaching and learning as follows:
• **Ms Zondi**

Ms Zondi maintained that her school adhered to implementation of the admission policy. She highlighted that learners in Grade R were admitted at a right age cohort which is 4½ turning 5 years by the end of June. She indicated that her school did not accommodate underage learners. In her explanation, she stated that 37 learners were a big number for her as she could not attend to individual learners. Ms Zondi indicated that she was supposed to teach thirty learners. This understanding established that she was aware of teacher-pupil ratio highlighted in Grade R admission policy (DBE, 2014b:36). Ms Zondi expressed her feeling as follows:

> Since it is an inclusive school there are learners who need special attention than others. So, the number of learners should be less than that because I cannot attend learners in the way I wish.

It emerged from the data collected that Ms Zondi only focused on age cohort when she talked about the admission policy adherence. She also understood that admitting more than thirty learners in class was a violation of the policy. The failure of the SMT in administering the admission policy properly deprived Grade R learners from being fully attended to by their teacher.

• **Mrs Mbelu**

Mrs Mbelu stated that there was a group of learners who were kept in her class but they were not registered at school. It appeared that the admission policy was not correctly implemented in Mrs Mbelu’s school. Mrs Mbelu shared the following:

> Learners in attendance register are at the right age cohort and they grasp concepts very well. But there are underage learners that I am babysitting in my class. I did not include them in Grade R learner attendance register. These learners really disturb my class.

In light of the above, it appeared that Mrs Mbelu clearly understood the Grade R admission policy even when it was not practised at the school. The school did not adhere to the admission policy and this was evident when the Grade R teacher had to take care of underage learners. The preschool learners were supposed to have their own classroom and their own teacher. This suggested that the school experienced a
challenge with human resources and tried to use the resources available. The arrangement was challenging in the sense that Mrs Mbelu had to take care of the preschoolers.

- **Mrs Lindani**

Interpreting and implementing the admission policy was not a challenge in Mrs Lindani’s school. In her interview, Mrs Lindani expressed her understanding of the admission policy as follows:

*In my school, learners are admitted at the age of 4½ turning 5 years by the end of June. I am happy with the age of learners. Learners of this age do well in class. I enjoy working with this group.*

Her understanding was in line with the SASA (Maharaj & Williams, 2011:7) which states that learners learn best when admitted at the right age. She was enthusiastic in expressing her concern about teaching learners of this age. This suggests that the SMT adhered to the Grade R admission policy.

In an informal conversation with Mrs Lindani, she highlighted that parents were always informed about the age of Grade R learners they had to bring to school. She also indicated that there was a preschool within the school premises which was monitored and supported by the Department of Social Development (DSD). The presence of a preschool at the school positively influenced the implementation of Grade R admission policy. The above findings confirmed that there is a dire need of preschools in our schools and in communities.

- **Ms Solani**

During the interview, Ms Solani indicated that learners must be 4½ turning 5 by the end of June. It emerged from interviews that Ms Solani was clear about the age cohort for Grade R and was comfortable with it. With regard to the preschool matter, Ms Solani indicated that most communities who sent their children to her school were far from the school and the school was surrounded by small rivers. Consequently, parents did not want to open a preschool near or within the school premises. They were afraid that they would put their children at risk during the season of heavy rains. These challenges typified the appalling school context in rural schools and they negatively affect teaching
and learning in ECE. In addition, this neglect portrayed that ECE was not treated as a priority by the DBE. I argue that the school context may lead learners to start schooling very late in their age cohort and that may also influence high dropout rate in higher grades.

Ms Solani was asked how learner enrolment affected teaching and learning in her classroom. She stated that it was difficult to teach a big class, especially if learners had not attended preschool. Ms Solani further indicated that some groups of learners were supported by their parents in academic programmes and the other groups were not supported at all. According to her, it was the reason why learner ability changed year by year. In this regard, Selolo (2018:10) highlights that parental engagement in school matters has positive impact on learner performance and this suggests that schools must strive to sustain it.

In order to show her competence on how she handled big numbers, she reflected as follows:

*I try to handle big numbers by grouping learners according to their abilities and that works for me. My groups are very big. I make groups of ten and 9 and a preschool group. Sometimes, I find that preschool learners answer questions appropriately although they are younger than Grade R. I do not shift from Grade R content for preschoolers because I want to cover the content.*

In view of the above response, the big groups showed that teaching and learning was not very effective. However, as a qualified and experienced teacher, Ms Solani strategized on how to deal with the big number.

- Synthesis

The lack of preschools in rural schools was another challenge that affected teaching and learning in Grade R. Most Grade R learners had no preschool foundation. The Grade R teachers had to start their teaching practice with preschool work. The practice could affect content coverage for Grade R. The presence of preschoolers in Grade R could also affect the shortage of resources because material was distributed according to the number of registered learners. The findings acknowledged that children from disadvantaged rural communities obtain little or no quality early childhood programmes
(Sun et al., 2015:16). These children need high quality ECE because in their families they do not have developmental stimulation in the home.

4.4.3.2 Lack of security in school

Lack of security in schools was perceived as the worst factor that hinders teaching and learning. The DBE (2017:17) acknowledges that infrastructure, teaching and learning materials, learners and teachers are not secured in school premises and therefore fencing and security guards should be provided. The following sections report on the security findings from the four Grade R schools in the study.

- **Ms Zondi**

The findings from the interview highlighted that Ms Zondi’s school was well fenced and had two security guards. The school participated in co-curricular activities such as music and sport. Ms Zondi commented that the Grade R learners were not included in any co-curricular activities as the playgrounds were situated outside the school yard. Teachers and learners had to travel to the neighbouring senior secondary school for sport activities. It is evident that lack of basic facilities in rural schools plays a negative role in supporting teaching and learning (Khumalo & Mji, 2014:5). It is argued that there was a risk in conducting sport activities. Teachers and learners were not safe as learners were young and had to mix with older learners. The school decision not to involve Grade R in sport was against objectives of CAPS implementation which is based on preparing young learners to be physically and socio-culturally mature (ECDBE, 2012:47).

- **Mrs Mbelu**

Mrs Mbelu was concerned about matters of safety and security at her school. She mentioned that the outdoor area and Grade R class were not fenced. She also indicated that the little outdoor material she had was vandalised by older learners. Grade R learners did not have access to the outdoor area because older learners refused to allow them a chance to play there. She showed that older learners spoiled her sandpit by throwing dirty material such as papers and grass in it. She had to clean the sand pit each time she needed to use it for a class activity.
During the course of data collection, two burglaries were reported. Food, computers and stationery were stolen. Informal conversations with other teachers at the school indicated that there were numerous factors contributing to vandalism of outdoor material for Grade R learners and some could be attributed to lack of security and lack of parental involvement for keeping an eye on school property.

Mrs Mbelu also mentioned that the school playground was used by community youth during weekends. The youth could access the school playgrounds because the premises were not locked. It appeared that the SMT, SGB and the community stakeholders did not secure the property of their school. Simelane (2014:33) confirms that there is a lack of security in rural schools as some schools have no proper fencing and lockable gates and put learners at higher risk. Furthermore, he indicates that lack of lockable gates allows strangers to enter the school premises unsearched and learners abscond from school at any time of the day. Seemingly, the expensive Grade R materials that are supplied by the DBE and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) are not properly looked after at the school. Due to poorly kept classrooms and lack of security fencing, the school portrayed an unconducive teaching and learning environment.

- **Mrs Lindani**

Mrs Lindani indicated that the school was fenced with wire mesh and they had two security guards, one for the day shift and one for the night. In addition, she indicated that the community also patrolled day and night to ensure that the school buildings and materials were safe. The findings showed community engagement in the education of its learners. This is what Khumalo and Mji (2014:3) encourage in schools as they argue that parents should provide commitment to the education of their children.

In the school yard, Mrs Lindani also explained that the Grade R block was not fenced to separate it from the rest of the classrooms. She complained that older learners disturbed her during their lunch break and even stole the resources if the classroom was left unlocked. This illustrates that Grade R learners were not safe from being abused by old learners at school. Lack of separate Grade R infrastructure appears to be a challenge in schools. This shows that the DBE has not yet addressed the need for modern Grade R infrastructure in rural schools.
• **Ms Solani**

Similarly, the challenge of security around Ms Solani’s school emerged. Ms Solani indicated that during school holidays a lot of materials at the school were stolen and this mostly included Grade R materials. Theft and breaking in were common at this school and Ms Solani mentioned that it was because of a lack of a tight security system and the fact that security guards were not armed and often ran away to save their lives. The DBE (2017:11) confirms that poor fencing is a challenge that is facing schools and may decrease security benefits in schools. It is my personal view that the DBE is very slow in applying security measures in schools. The rate of theft is draining school budgets because there are expensive Grade R materials in these schools that are stolen and need to be replaced.

On the question of how she handled the challenge of the lack of security for Grade R materials, she indicated that most of her indoor materials were kept in the principal’s office as it had security gates and windows. She had to fetch material from the principal’s office every morning. Ms Solani highlighted that the school was unable to provide the same security for the Grade R classroom due to a lack of budget. Ms Solani expressed her concern about the safety and security of Grade R as follows:

> *If the government can fence the outdoor [area] so that it could not be used by older learners, it would be better. We had outdoor materials last time and [these] was vandalised by the older learners.*

The above statement suggests one of the interventions that could be done to protect the few learning materials that are available. The SMT appeared not to be concerned about the fact that Grade R learning materials were stolen very often. The lack of outdoor material clearly showed that teaching of some concepts on CAPS content would be compromised. In my view, the availability of outdoor material also motivates learners to attend school. In addition, learners develop social skills, gross muscles for sport activities and fine motor skills for handwriting.

• **Synthesis**

The empirical findings on security at schools imply that the DBE has not done enough to provide security at schools, especially in rural schools. The interviews in the four schools also revealed that parents in some communities are still behind in
understanding that the schools are for them. It might be because the communities are not well capacitated about the importance of school assets in the education of their children (Nkambule & Amsterdam, 2018:8). Teachers from three schools mentioned that their schools were fenced but Grade R classrooms had no separate fencing. Other studies have also shown that South African schools experience lack of proper fencing for safe and security (Madikida, 2016:60). The study revealed that one school had no security fencing around the Grade R outdoor area and vandalism was prevalent in her school. I hold the view that the lack of security at schools might have a negative influence on Grade R teaching and learning. It was recommended that schools should be fenced. The fencing would not only protect learners but teachers and the resources they need.

4.4.3.3 Lack of support

It is noted that teacher support personal is needed in South African schools for effective teaching and learning (Nkambule & Amsterdam, 2018:8). I also observed that the support Grade R teachers received for effective teaching and learning differed from school to school. During the interviews, Ms Zondi, Ms Solani and Mrs Mbelu indicated that they received little support from SMTs and parents. The other teacher, Mrs Lindani indicated that she received adequate support from her school. The reviewed literature indicates that everybody needs support, regardless of qualification but more needed to those who are unqualified (Reche et al., 2012:3; Taole & Mohapi, 2013:8). The following paragraphs report on the quality of support teachers experienced at their schools and the influence of such support on teaching and learning. This study looked at the support provided by the SMT and parents for Grade R teaching and learning.

- Support from SMT

- **Ms Zondi**

Ms Zondi was dissatisfied with the support she received from the SMT. Her response was as follows:

*I am going to say it as it is. I do not get the support. In most cases, SMT members always say they do not know this thing of Grade R. They are also not eager to find out what is happening … they always say they do not know Grade R programmes.*

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The reviewed literature concurs that there are poor relationships between the Grade R teachers and the SMTs in schools (Hwenha, 2014:21). Linking to the above discussions, Ms Zondi required support and did not get any. She explained that the SMT showed no interest in supporting Grade R teaching and learning and did not make any effort to understand Grade R programmes. Ms Zondi pointed out that teaching and learning in Grade R was not effective because the SMT did not understand the challenges that needed their attention. In terms of how she needed to be supported, she highlighted that she required exposure to workshops and that the SMTs also needed to attend these workshops and Grade R programme orientation sessions. According to Ms Zondi, SMT support was one of the main challenges she faced at her school. She felt that if the SMT could understand Grade R programmes she could be fully supported and that would improve teaching and learning. In my view, Grade R received little recognition in schools. The SMTs showed that they lacked knowledge and understanding of the purpose of Grade R which is to lay a foundation for upper grades learners. In addition, SMT did not adhere to White Paper 5 policy which mandated schools to introduce Grade R for the purpose of improving learner performance in disadvantaged schools (DoE, 2001:10).

- Mrs Mbelu

Similarly, the challenge that hindered Mrs Mbelu’s teaching and learning practices was the lack of support from the SMT. She shared the following:

*When I report a problem, the HOD takes it to the principal. The principal only responds to Grade R problems when the Department of Basic Education has to visit school. It is the visit by the Department of Basic Education that encourages the SMT to support me with material. For example, when the Department of Basic Education phoned that Takalane Sesame Team will visit Grade R for monitoring and support, SMT bought sixty chairs, carpet for activities and stationery. My learners were used to sit on the tins of paint but since then they sit on chairs. I hope if the Department of Basic Education can often visit school, my class will have more material.*

Linking to the point made above, Mrs Mbelu expressed that the principal showed little interest in supporting Grade R teaching and learning. She highlighted that her
concerns were only taken seriously when the departmental officials visited. The above finding confirmed a study which states that there are poor relationships between the Grade R practitioners and the principals (Hwenha, 2014:21). I align lack of support from the principal with little interest in making any effort to understand Grade R programmes. It seemed to be clear that the school principal did not take Grade R teaching and learning programmes seriously. The situation reflects that in some schools Grade R teachers struggled to get support from the principal. The interviews revealed the little support provided by the SMT for implementing Grade R programmes.

Mrs Mbelu also mentioned that she needed support on classroom layout. She showed that she had a challenge on where to paste some posters in her classroom. I conclude that Mrs Mbelu did not read the Grade R document carefully which guides teachers on how to organise the class for teaching and learning.

- **Mrs Lindani**

In contrary, Mrs Lindani highlighted that she received support from the HOD. She explained that the HOD regularly visited her class to observe her teaching, to check her teacher portfolio file and to assist with resolving some of the challenges and provide support where possible. She described her HOD as a mentor, a supportive, courageous leader who managed Foundation Phase with trustworthiness. Mrs Lindani emphasised that the support she received influenced her teaching and learning practices towards the improvement of teaching and learning. She pointed out that she continuously gained confidence in teaching. The literature affirms that support is needed in implementing curriculum changes (Taole & Mohapi, 2013:8). The support teachers receive from their managers has great positive impact on teaching and learning. It illustrates that teachers feel motivated, secured and cared for.

- **Ms Solani**

The challenge experienced by Ms Solani on support from SMT was similar to that of Ms Zondi and Mrs Mbelu. She mentioned that the HOD often said that she did not know the teaching and learning strategies that are used in the Grade R class. Ms Solani’s responses revealed that the SMT found it difficult to communicate with parents when she had a problem with a learner and when she needed anything that would support teaching and learning. The related literature argues that in rural schools, head
teachers manage ECD without training (Hlupo et al., 2013:6). The lack of support for teachers is aligned with a lack of departmental support for capacitating SMTs to perform their roles as managers of institutions (Madikida, 2016:59). It is clear that if the DBE does not capacitate SMTs to consider the value of all teaching and learning content in schools, teaching and learning will remain compromised. Therefore, the introduction of Grade R in the education system would be futile.

Ms Solani further highlighted that when she did not attend school, even if it was for a school programme, her colleagues in the Foundation Phase did not take care of her class. She indicated that the Grade 1 teacher had taught Grade R before she taught Grade 1 but would not assist her because she also had a large class to take care of. Seemingly, the situation of overcrowding was common at the school, thereby making it difficult for teachers to assist and support each other. This could be aligned with school leadership on how to establish relationship among teachers to instil a culture of humanity (ubuntu).

When Ms Solani was asked about the influence of support she received for teaching and learning practices, she mentioned that the lack of support encouraged her to work very hard. She added that her challenging work improved learner performance and parents appreciated her. In this regard, she supported Freire’s idea (1978: 65) that progressive teachers rise above the circumstances that are stumbling blocks in their teaching and learning practices.

When asked about additional support provided by the SMT to improve teaching and learning, Ms Solani responded as follows:

*If the school can improve Grade R budget for resources, I could cater for other resources such as toilet papers, furniture, outdoor and indoor resource materials. Every time I ask about the provision of such resources, the principal always tells me there is no money for Grade R materials.*

It is evident from the interviews with Ms Solani that Grade R teaching and learning at her school faces multiple challenges. These challenges hindered effective teaching and learning in Grade R and needed to be addressed. The review of related literature endorses the idea that the absence of supportive personal can create difficulties to
teacher development and change and may also negatively affect curriculum implementation (Omar, 2014:4).

• Synthesis

According to Reche et al. (2012:3), the above findings from four schools on lack of support by SMTs reflect that quality of school management personal plays an important role in guiding teachers in implementing educational policies for academic achievement. The literature acknowledges that there is inadequate leadership training for ECD managers to carry out their leadership roles (Campbell-Evans et al., 2014:2; Hlupo et al., 2013:6; Nkambule & Amsterdam, 2018:4). Therefore, SMTs are remiss in their responsibility to improve their monitoring and support for effective teaching and learning.

• Support from parents

The research findings revealed that parental support differed from school to school. The majority of Grade R teachers who participated in this study perceived that they received inadequate support from parents for teaching and learning. The following paragraphs present findings on parental support as one of the challenges that influenced Grade R teaching and learning.

• Ms Zondi

On the side of parents, Ms Zondi stated that she had no problem with them as they responded to learner challenges when called to attend them. Ms Zondi highlighted that parents even bought Grade R stationery when the DBE did not deliver it in good time. She stated that there were very few parents who did not participate in the education of their children in her class.

This shows that parents played their active role as SASA encourages parents to take part in the education of their children (DoE, 2014a:36). Froebel (2001:60) also encourages parents to support their children with resources. In his view, parental support strengthens relationships with teachers and encourages learners to attend school, which then improves academic performance. Although parents were supportive, it appeared that the DBE still have a challenge on supplying quality education in rural schools. According to SASA, learners from seven to eighteen years
are entitled to free education (DoE, 2014). The strategy of parental support showed that, regardless of the challenges in the DBE, parents wanted to see their children at school.

- **Mrs Mbelu**

Mrs Mbelu mentioned that a lack of parental involvement at her school was also a challenge in improving quality of teaching and learning. Mrs Mbelu highlighted that most learners in her Grade R class had not been to a preschool. She had to start with preschool activities before she started to teach Grade R content. In informal conversation with the HOD, I noted that there had been plans by community members to start a preschool; however, the project did not materialise. A site with a two-roomed structure had been offered but there were challenges with the payment of the teacher and this led to the closure of the preschool. In this regard, the majority of parents in rural areas are not working. Their source of living is based on social grants and on piece jobs. It was the responsibility of Social Development to build a preschool informed by the parents through the assistance of the SMT (Maponya, 2015: 24). There is a need from the DBE and Social Development to attend to the issue of preschool.

Mrs Mbelu also mentioned that parents seemed not to understand the role and the importance of preschool. This lack of understanding led to a situation where Mrs Mbelu was compelled to accommodate preschoolers in her class. These preschoolers required her time and she ended up not being able to handle them and only resorted to babysitting instead of teaching them. Mrs Mbelu was not happy about the preschool arrangement in her school. She believed that it was the responsibility of the school management to engage parents to set up a proper facility to teach and care for the preschool children. Maponya (2015:24) agrees with Mrs Mbelu in the sense that the principal was responsible for giving support to the teacher as an instructional leader. Nkambule and Amsterdam (2018:8) also suggest that every teacher needs support in South African schools. Principal and SGB are the key people to protect teaching and learning at schools.

She highlighted that there were a few parents who were cooperative in supporting their children with school-related activities and this had a positive influence on learner performance. In her example, she indicated as follows:
I notify parents about their children’s performance and ask them to support their children at home, with regard to certain difficult areas of learning. There was a learner who had a problem in language but through parental support her performance and school attendance improved.

The above statement indicates that the intervention strategy that Mrs Mbelu used was effective. She believed in creating a conducive atmosphere for learning and in providing equal opportunities for learning. The challenge of parental involvement in schools is noted in rural schools of South Africa.

- **Mrs Lindani**

Mrs Lindani reported a lack of parental support in the education of learners at her school. In her statement, she reflected as follows:

*Some parents bring learners late at the beginning of the year and even when they come from holidays. This leads to [some] topics being taught in the next term. It then becomes difficult to cover the content for Grade R.*

The above statement shows that parents do not understand that Grade R is the first year in the education system and that there is content that needs to be covered by the end of the year. Mrs Lindani associated learner absenteeism on cold and rainy days with the culture of schools in rural areas. This confirmed the findings which indicate that most Grade R infrastructure in rural schools is of poor quality (Khumalo & Mji, 2014:268). The absenteeism is against SASA which encouraged every learner to be at school from the first day of school calendar up to the last day (DBE, 2014a: 32). The solution is to improve the classroom environment as Grade R learners cannot learn in a classroom that is not safe and secure. Learners should be provided with transport so that they will become motivated to attend school all the year round. The harsh environmental conditions promote absenteeism.

- **Ms Solani**

In the interviews, Ms Solani highlighted that parents did not attend parental meetings. She added that parents did not come even when the principal called them regarding problems experienced with their children. In her explanation, Ms Solani affirmed that most parents of Grade R learners were young mothers. Some of these parents were
still at high school and some were working or studying at university. Most Grade R learners were under the care of their grandmothers and some were in the care of other relatives. Ms Solani also shared that most parents seemed to have left all responsibilities to teachers, as they did not support their children in teaching and learning activities. She indicated that parents only attended when the SGB was to be elected and in the last term when they were to collect learner report cards. It is clear that parents need to be encouraged through various activities to participate in school activities.

- Synthesis

In conclusion, in rural schools, parental involvement in learners’ s curriculum related programmes is still a challenge. Literature review confirms a lack of parent’s involvement in disadvantaged schools based on their level of education and lack of empowerment on educational matters (Abraham, 2013:18).

4.5 THE PROFILES OF THE GRADE R HEADS OF DEPARTMENT

In Chapter 3, Table 3.1 provides some of the information about each HOD. This includes experience, pseudonyms, race, position, context, training institution and qualifications. The following paragraphs present the profiles of the HODs from the four selected schools which include the information presented in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1: Profile of HODs and their schools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of HOD*</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>School</th>
<th>Number of teachers monitored</th>
<th>Learner enrolment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mrs Zuza</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>Zamukulingisa FSS</td>
<td>10 teachers</td>
<td>1 048</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms Silo</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>Lingani JSS</td>
<td>9 teachers</td>
<td>355</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms Ledi</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>Veli JSS</td>
<td>9 teachers</td>
<td>1 080</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mrs Mputi</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>Khanya JSS</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2 225</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Pseudonyms

The following paragraphs present the HODs’ profiles, qualifications and training, support and content knowledge that the HODs portrayed in terms of monitoring and support. The qualifications and experiences of the four HODs is presented in Chapter 3.1
4.5.1 Ms Zuza

Ms Zuza was a 57-year-old Foundation Phase HOD at Zamukulingisa Full-Service School. She started teaching in 1980 as a Foundation Phase teacher. She taught in five schools before she was appointed as HOD at Zamukulingisa in 2012. She highlighted that she conducted phase workshops at circuit level to support teachers in the implementation of CAPS from Grade R to 3. Ms Zuza’s qualifications showed that she was qualified to teach in the Foundation Phase and to serve in a management position. The experience she had and her active involvement in curriculum implementation programmes at circuit and district level were evidence that she understood Foundation Phase teaching and Grade R learning programmes. The number of teachers she monitored and supported in the phase was very big as she also had her own class and other administrative duties.

4.5.2 Mrs Silo

Mrs Silo was a 50-year-old Foundation Phase HOD at Lingani JSS. She started teaching in the Senior Phase in 1994 and taught physical science and mathematics. She was appointed as HOD for the whole school in 2006. During the time of this study, she had eleven years monitoring and supporting experience in Grade R. In her school, she monitored nine teachers. In her college of education, Mrs Silo specialised in mathematics and in physical sciences. These qualifications were not related to the Foundation Phase content.

4.5.3 Mrs Mputi

In her college of education, Mrs Mputi was trained as a mathematics and music specialist. She started teaching in 1993 as a mathematics and music teacher in the Senior Phase. She was appointed as Foundation Phase HOD in 2010. At the time of this study, she was 49 years old. She was a Grade 3 class teacher. From her qualifications, it was evident that Mrs Mputi did not qualify to teach in the Foundation Phase.

4.5.4 Mrs Ledi

Mrs Ledi was 52 years old. She started as a Foundation Phase teacher in 1980. She was appointed as HOD in 1992 and Grade R was introduced only in 2006 at her school.
She was in her 20\textsuperscript{th} year of monitoring and supporting educators at the commencement of this study. Mrs Ledi ’s qualifications indicated that she was a qualified Foundation Phase teacher with managerial knowledge and skills.

4.5.5 Synthesis

Looking at the qualifications of the four HODs in Table 3.1, only two of them possessed qualifications that were aligned to Foundation Phase teaching and learning. The interviews also revealed that all the four HODs supported no fewer than eight teachers in their schools (Table 4.1). The teaching experiences were suitable for monitoring and supporting teachers in their schools as all of them had more than five years teaching as HODs.

From the above discussions, I noted a challenge on monitoring the content of Grade R teaching and learning by HODs who had no content for ECD. In this regard, there is a need for further research to establish how Foundation Phase HODs monitor and support Grade R teaching and learning in schools.

The discussions below provide some of the challenges facing Grade R teaching and learning in rural schools and their influence on teaching and learning. This section also reports about the strategies HODs used to improve Grade R teaching.

4.6 THE RESEARCH FINDINGS FROM THE GRADE R HEADS OF DEPARTMENT

This section reports and presents the analysis and interpretation of the findings collected from the four HODs of the sampled schools. The HODs were interviewed to explore their knowledge and understanding about some of the challenges facing Grade R teaching and learning in their rural schools. The influence of these challenges had in teaching and learning and the strategies HODs used to improve teaching and learning were explored.

The four HODs agreed that they did not support Grade R teaching and learning in the way it was expected. I noted that the reason emanated from various challenges HODs faced which included the sizes of their schools, qualifications and even Grade R content knowledge. Khumalo (2016:129) highlights that HODs are curriculum managers whose responsibility is to look at the implementation of curriculum in the scientific sense of planning, organising, leading and control. The report on the HODs
is presented under the following themes: Qualifications and training, Content knowledge and School climate.

4.6.1 Qualifications and Training

The questions on qualification of HODs were aimed at determining whether the HODs’ knowledge was aligned with the content of Foundation Phase for monitoring and supporting Grade R. The following paragraphs explored the kind of support the HODs offered in contributing towards effective teaching and learning in Grade R. It emerged from the interviews with the HODs that most of them had no Grade R related qualifications. The HODs responded as follows:

4.6.1.1 Ms Zuza

In monitoring and supporting teachers I also use the strategies I learned during my training years as a teacher. So, I benefited when I became the HOD and practised the knowledge and skills I have. I have learned the strategies on how to support teachers in curriculum implementation. Although Grade R was not part of my training at tertiary, I acquired knowledge and skills through the workshops I attended for Grade R to 3 and discovered that the content of teaching and learning is aligned with the grade I am teaching but the difference is on integrated planning and teaching. I am confident to support Grade R.

The above statement indicates that managers should seek information so that they would be able guide teachers in implementing educational policies for academic achievement (Reche et al., 2012:3). The findings show that qualifications have a greater positive influence on monitoring and support in teaching and learning. As indicated in Ms Zuza’s response, her qualifications were aligned to the content of Grade R teaching and learning. In the interviews, Ms Zuza displayed great confidence in her work as an HOD and in supporting Grade R teaching and learning. It illustrates that if managers understand their role, they feel confident in supporting teachers in curriculum implementation. This shows that understanding of their job descriptions is very important.

4.6.1.2 Mrs Silo

On the other hand, Mrs Silo reflected as follows:
Qualifications affected me to the extent that I had to seek support from the
colleagues outside the school on how to support Foundation Phase because I
was never ... exposed to the programmes of the Foundation Phase. I am the
only HOD at my school. It is hectic to monitor and support Grade R because
teaching and learning, as well as the terminology used is totally different from
other classes.

In view of the above discussions, Mrs Silo acknowledged that her qualification was not
aligned with Foundation Phase. She indicated that her qualifications did not make it
easy for her to support Grade R teachers at her school because she did not have
background knowledge of what Foundation Phase content entailed. In such cases,
Taole and Mohapi (2013:8) affirm that support is needed by all teachers in
implementing curriculum changes, for qualified and unqualified. This implies that Mrs
Silo would struggle to support teachers in curriculum implementation in Grade R for
effective teaching and learning. Omar (2014:4) argues that a lack of SMT support may
leave teachers with gaps in how to manage curriculum implementation because they
may not know the actual teacher development programmes they need for teacher
empowerment. I agree that the managers should be appointed on the basis of their
expertise and qualification if the DBE really wants to improve teaching and learning.

4.6.1.3 Mrs Mputi

Similarly, Mrs Mputi also indicated clearly that her qualification was not aligned with
Foundation Phase teaching and learning content. She reflected as follows:

I only interacted with young learners at a distance while I was teaching at Senior
Phase. I learned more in the Foundation Phase while I am teaching here. I
cannot lie: it is hard to monitor and support Grade R integrated teaching and
learning programmes such as assessment and planning. Most of the time, I
accept what teachers say.

In light of the above discussions, I conclude that Mrs Mputi monitored and supported
Grade R without knowledge of Grade R teaching and learning programmes. In this
case, Mrs Mputi reflected that Grade R is supported by managers who are incompetent
and with little or no leadership support (Campbell-Evans et al., 2014:2). In my
perception, she was unable to monitor and support Grade R teaching and learning on
a regular basis. As she reflected, she was convinced by the Grade R teachers on what to monitor as she did not possess the relevant content knowledge. The literature review supports the perception that, in some schools, teaching and learning is not monitored effectively by the SMTs (Madikida, 2016:134). I argue that lack of monitoring and support contributes to poor learner performance. In Grade R, poor learner performance is observed while learners are doing Grade 1.

4.6.1.4 Mrs Ledi

Contrary to Mrs Mputi and Mrs Silo, Mrs Ledi indicated that her qualifications in primary education and educational management helped her to monitor and support Grade R teaching and learning because both qualifications were based in curriculum implementation from Grade 1 to 3. She explained:

*I understand that most Grade R teachers are not fully qualified, so they need more support. I spend more time with Grade R teachers as compared with other teachers of the phase.*

The above statement reflected that Mrs Ledi knew that her role and responsibility as HOD was to support curriculum implementation (Khumalo, 2014:122) in the Foundation Phase and to prioritise Grade R to provide a solid foundation for Grade 1. Mrs Ledi wanted to ensure that Grade R readiness for Grade 1 was properly supported. Her qualifications appeared to support her vision and objectives of CAPS about the purpose of Grade R learning content in the Foundation Phase which is based on improving learner performance in the phase and across the system.

4.6.1.5 Synthesis

The study revealed that Foundation Phase HODs were not all employed because of their competencies on content knowledge and understanding of the phase. They were promoted because of their number of years in the field. The literature confirmed that some HODs struggled to supervise curriculum implementation in schools (Khumalo, 2014:128). It is an indication that some HODs are not well equipped with knowledge based on change. Qualifications, therefore, play a major role in enabling HODs to fulfil their role of supporting and monitoring teachers in the phase. In this study, I conclude that HODs had limited knowledge to identify challenges facing Grade R teaching and
learning and it is possible they could not support Grade R teaching and learning effectively.

4.6.2 Heads of Departments’ Grade R Content Knowledge

It is important for SMTs to know and understand Grade R programmes in order to fully support teachers in the phase. For effective monitoring and support of Grade R implementation SMTs, in particular HODs, need to have sound content knowledge on policies, on curriculum content and on infrastructure. Their knowledge could help them to understand better the challenges that are facing Grade R teaching and learning. I assume that the quality of knowledge and skills learners should acquire for academic achievement might improve. However, the purpose of introducing Grade R in schools, which is to lay a solid foundation in the education system, could be fulfilled. This section presents findings on the HODs’ content knowledge and strategies they used for supporting Grade R teaching and learning.

4.6.2.1 Content knowledge on Grade R teaching and learning strategies

This section addresses the research questions on some of the challenges facing Grade R teaching and learning and the strategies that are used to improve learner performance in Grade R. In Grade R, learners are taught emergent literacy (language), emergent numeracy (mathematics) and life skills. The planning of these subjects is integrated. The HODs are required to support teachers in teaching the three subjects. This study focused on emergent reading, emergent writing, sharing in mathematics, physical education and creative arts. These are the subject areas identified as most challenging in the Grade R classes.

• Emergent reading strategies

The HODs were asked a question on the challenges Grade R teachers experience in teaching emergent reading. They came with different challenges that the Grade R teachers experienced in teaching emergent reading and writing and shared the strategies they used to support teachers.

• Ms Zuza

Ms Zuza reflected as follows:
I observed that teachers do not use the strategies in CAPS policy document properly to teach reading. This causes learners to experience difficulties in reading. In the CAPS policy document, strategies for teaching emergent reading are listed as well as the steps teachers can follow. When we prepare for language festival at school, I make it sure that Grade R learners participate at school at circuit level. Reading is a priority because it involves reading pictures and words, numbers and all these lead to writing. I always encourage teachers to use CAPS policy document in planning reading.

As reflected in the above response, Ms Zuza had content knowledge of what was expected from the Grade R teachers in relation to teaching reading. She had basic knowledge of the outcomes of reading in Grade R. What I noted was that Ms Zuza did not highlight how she capacitated the Grade R teacher to ensure that CAPS were used properly. I suggest that a language festival (a competition where learners demonstrate their knowledge in all components of language) might help teachers to improve their teaching and learning strategies. It might also encourage teachers to work hard to cover the content for the competitions. In Grade R, participation in a language festival should be in a form of play if teachers want to achieve positive outcomes. Play theorists encourage play-based methodology as learners believe in doing rather than on listening (Piaget, 1962: 181). In language festival learners attain new vocabulary, reading skills and tolerance.

- Ms Silo

Regarding the challenges on emergent reading, Mrs Silo explained:

*The Grade R prefabricated classrooms are small and the teacher finds it difficult to paste posters and charts on the wall to encourage incidental reading. Another challenge is overcrowding of learners in Grade R. I advised the teacher to take learners out of the classroom when weather conditions were favourable and do activities for shared reading. I also suggested that she needed to take a small group in some lessons for emergent reading.*

The discussion highlighted that Mrs Silo focused much on infrastructure and little on the challenges affecting content on emergent reading. She did not seem to have strategies to address the challenges that affected emergent reading content. This
showed that reading was not well supported although she knew which resources to use for emergent reading. These findings are in agreement with studies which indicate that some HODs were mandated to manage teachers without subject content (Nkambule & Amsterdam, 2018:8).

- **Mrs Mputi**

Mrs Mputi highlighted that in her school she discovered that Grade R teachers were not fully confident in teaching emergent reading. She stated that Grade R teachers selected some areas to teach in reading. They focused much on picture interpretation using posters, big books and phonics based on sounding letters of the alphabet. She observed that Grade R teachers ignored the most strategies that prepared learners to read posters and phonics which are in the CAPS policy document. As HOD, she had observed that Grade 1 teachers also lacked knowledge on what Grade R teaching and learning entails. She explained as follows:

*The Grade R teacher feels very pressured because the teacher in Grade 1 does not understand that Grade R learners are not forced to read. Reading in Grade R is approached differently than in Grade 1. In Foundation Phase meetings, I always orientate Foundation Phase teachers about Grade R teaching and learning strategies.*

Mrs Mputi understood that Grade R and Grade 1 teaching is different and has to be approached differently. She emphasised that Grade R classrooms were required to be print-rich environments where reading material is also kept safe. Her explanation about the challenges facing emergent reading in Grade R showed that she understood the need for reading. Mrs Mputi also noted that Grade R teachers missed some areas in reading. The suggestions she gave to teachers showed that she tried to support teachers to improve Grade R reading competency. Her observations of limited language use in Grade R which is noted when in Grade 1 is supported by Bruwer et al. (2014:21). These Grade R learners appear incompetent in communication skills when they start formal schooling. The HODs need to monitor and support teachers on basic skills learners need to have when they progress to Grade 1.

- **Mrs Ledi**
Similarly, Mrs Ledi highlighted that Grade R teachers lacked knowledge on how to teach emergent reading. She emphasised that teachers needed to use more posters, big books and a variety of reading materials. She emphasised that teachers needed to make it sure that learners had access to reading and that walls were required to be print-rich. Mrs Ledi confirmed that she supported the Grade R teacher with the skills she obtained at college for teaching reading to young learners. She maintained that she was not trained on how to teach Grade R. The interviews confirmed that Grade R teachers coped well in teaching Grade R reading through the support from the HOD and from other Foundation Phase teachers.

- **Synthesis**

Overall, all four HODs displayed a sound knowledge of teaching emergent reading in Grade R. They highlighted some activities that Grade R teachers were required to use. Their responses suggested various strategies to improve reading which included making a print-rich class, using a variety of reading materials and utilisation of CAPS policy documents for teaching and learning reading strategies. The challenge is on how to make Grade R teachers implement reading in their classes. The subject content knowledge is based on what and how to do it (Maponya, 2015:64). I noted that all the four HODs associated the Grade R reading strategies with those of Grade 1 to 3. In Grade R, reading is based on picture interpretation and spelling of words having letter sounds that were learned.

- **Emergent writing**

The HODs also responded on the question based on what challenges faced Grade R teaching and learning on emergent writing. In the interviews, HODs responded in various ways.

- **Ms Zuza**

  I observed that Grade R teachers do not teach learners properly on how to hold a pencil. They take for granted that learners will observe as they teach. In [the] CAPS policy document, the strategies for emergent writing are clearly indicated. I always advise teachers to engage learners in practical writing activities, to write letters on the air, on a sand tray and then transfer the writing to their exercise books.
- **Mrs Silo**

During the interviews, Mrs Silo highlighted that there were Grade R learners whose fine motor skills had not fully developed and as such they experienced challenges with writing. She emphasised the importance of individual support on this matter. She reflected as follows:

> Some teachers train some learners to be peer tutors, where one learner shows others how to write. These are learners who normally grasp easily and learn faster than others.

In my view, in Grade R teachers should teach learners all the suggested writing strategies that are in the CAPS. In Grade R, peer teaching is encouraged but the teachers need to facilitate such activities where learners learn from each other. The HOD herself needs to show her support to the teacher. The teacher cannot rely much on peer learners for teaching handwriting. Handwriting is a critical part of language that need a skill from the teacher. Learners learn by observing the behaviour of adults as role models. To me, teachers’ handwriting has an influence on learners’ handwriting skills.

- **Mrs Mputi**

The interview with Mrs Mputi revealed that Grade R teachers still struggle with handwriting skills. She indicated that during classroom observations, she noted that Grade R teachers mixed small and capital letters in words. She could only try to support teachers on this aspect when she had time. Mrs Mputi mentioned that she organised a manual on handwriting which has patterns of writing for Grade R to 3. She understood that Grade R learners were to be taught how to copy words, write their names, draw pictures, trace letters of the alphabet and engage in other activities that were highlighted in the CAPS policy documents. This showed that Mrs Mputi as the HOD understood her responsibility as a monitor of curriculum implementation. These findings are supported by Reche et al. (2013:3) who state that more support is needed to those who are underqualified. Nkambule and Amsterdam (2018:8) also stressed that personal support is the key for helping every teacher at school level.

- **Mrs Ledi**
In the interview, Mrs Ledi concurred with Mrs Mputi about the Grade R teachers who were not good at handwriting. She indicated that she always supported the Grade R teacher by drawing charts for her, which contained letters of the alphabet for teaching the right word formation. Mrs Ledi indicated that the attempt to support the Grade R teacher improved the handwriting of Grade R learners. She explained:

*I noticed while I was in Grade 1 last year that these Grade R learners were very good in handwriting. This means that the teacher had improved. Grade R teachers need to be trained thoroughly on handwriting. Although learners may not actually write like their teacher, they need to see the correct letter formation.*

Mrs Ledi indicated that she saw the Grade R teacher engaging learners in copying numbers and words, tracing words in workbooks and moulding letters using play dough. All the activities mentioned above are clearly explained in the CAPS policy document.

- **Synthesis**

The research findings from this study also revealed that all four HODs understood the content for writing to be taught in Grade R. This assisted in understanding the challenges that influenced the teaching of handwriting in Grade R. The HODs highlighted that teachers needed intensive support on handwriting as it affected word formation. The study also highlighted that Grade R teachers need support on how to teach handwriting.

- **Mathematics teaching and learning strategies**

HODs were also asked a question about the challenges that influenced Grade R teaching and learning in emergent mathematics and strategies used to improve learner performance. The aim was to explore their subject content knowledge and understanding of mathematics teaching as they monitored and supported teachers in their schools. All four HODs explained that they used the mathematics CAPS policy document to verify what needed to be taught in Grade R. The HODs experienced various challenges that affected Grade R teaching and learning in emergent mathematics.

- **Ms Zuza**
In the interview, Ms Zuza explained that the shortage of concrete materials for teaching mathematics led learners to recite numbers. She indicated that learners could not relate to numbers when asked to count physical objects. She advised Grade R teachers to use bottle tops and concrete materials available in the classroom. Ms Zuza believed that children learn better when the teacher uses concrete materials to explain certain concepts. She also noted that Grade R teachers did not engage learners in practical activities and this led to poor performance in activities that involved grouping and sharing. She confirmed that sharing activities were not done properly in Grade R.

- Mrs Silo

Similarly, Mrs Silo highlighted that the challenges with mathematics teaching in Grade R were a lack of space and concrete mathematics materials for activities. With regard to teaching sharing activities in Grade R, she indicated that she advised teachers to link school activities with the learner environment. She made an example:

> If mother buys one bread for the family, she has to cut it to ensure that each and every family member gets a slice. In this way, everybody gets to share the bread and they will receive equal pieces.

Mrs Silo emphasised that teachers need to link mathematics with learners’ daily experiences. The idea of Mrs Silo is supported by Vygotsky’s theory which emphasises that teaching and learning should be based on what learners already know and move to an introduction of new concept (Vygotsky, 1978:87). I noticed that her mathematics language on sharing in Grade R was linked to fractions that are done in higher grades. This confirmed that Grade R lessons prepared learners for readiness in formal schooling. In Grade R, no fraction activities are taught, instead, sharing which is linked to numbers is taught. Her profile revealed that Mrs Silo was a mathematics teacher in the Senior Phase for a number of years before she came to teach in the Foundation Phase. Her knowledge of mathematics language allowed her to explore various teaching strategies and to share these with the teachers. However, as HOD, she also acknowledged that she required more workshops on supporting teachers in relation to Grade R mathematics content knowledge. The findings are supported by the literature which indicates that training is required for qualified and unqualified teachers (Sun et al., 2015:16).
• **Mrs Mputi**

In the interview, Mrs Mputi pointed out that Grade R teachers experienced challenges in teaching mathematics using a play-based approach. She explained that teachers struggled to teach sharing because they did not use play-based approaches. In her explanation, she stated that learners were not given enough opportunities to do sharing activities using problem-solving techniques. In her school, she said that she advised Grade R teachers to use concrete materials in teaching mathematics. Grade R teachers needed to use the CAPS for mathematics and follow examples on how sharing activities needed to be taught. Mrs Mputi had Grade R mathematics content knowledge as she highlighted the play-based approach which teachers ignored in most Grade R activities. The findings are aligned with play theorists who believe that Grade R teaching and learning is effective when resources are utilised according to the age of learners (Bruner, 1962:33; Froebel, 2001:82; Piaget, 1962:32; Vygotsky, 1978: 67). It emerged from this study that play-based approach was not used much in Grade R classes.

• **Mrs Ledi**

According to Mrs Ledi, Grade R teachers experienced challenges with teaching numbers 4 and 7 in her school. She stated that during classroom visits she noted that when the teacher wrote number 7, she put a cross in the middle of seven. She explained:

> I do not know where teacher got number seven with a cross, because that number seven is not even in computers. I always ask the teacher to write a normal seven when I see it in her class. I think it gives learners a problem because they confuse number 4 and 7 with a cross in the middle.

Mrs Ledi indicated that the teacher took time to understand that the number “seven” was wrong. She accepted that she needed time to take the teacher through the CAPS to assist her with the content of Grade R. In her explanation, she agreed that she never saw a sharing activity in Grade R. Therefore, she could not say anything about how the teacher taught sharing in class. The above scenario illustrated that monitoring and support was not properly done in Grade R. I noted that both the Grade R teacher and the HOD had limited content knowledge in mathematics. There were possibilities that
Grade R progressed to Grade 1 with a gap in number sense. The case confirmed a study which indicates that Grade R progressed to Grade 1 with content gap (Feza, 2014b:12). The HOD needs to understand the basic concepts covered per content area. This is part of tracking content coverage in a grade.

- **Synthesis**

The four HODs highlighted various challenges that faced Grade R teachers and confirmed that these hindered effective teaching and learning of mathematics in class. Some of them included content knowledge, lack of utilisation of CAPS policy documents, play-based approach not being used effectively in Grade R classes and some concepts such as sharing not taught effectively. I also noted that the HODs who taught mathematics in the Senior Phase also lacked content knowledge for supporting Grade R teachers. This shows that qualifications and experiences are important in teaching and learning practices.

- **Life skills teaching and learning strategies: physical education**

The subject content knowledge of the four HODs was also explored in physical education and creative arts which are life skills study areas. Life skills is one of the subjects that strengthen implementation of language and mathematics in the Foundation Phase. In Grade R, teachers use life skills themes in planning lessons for language and mathematics. Therefore, HODs need to know and understand the content of life skills for monitoring and supporting Grade R teaching and learning.

The HODs were asked about the challenges Grade R teachers faced in teaching physical education and the support they provided for improvement of teaching and learning. I posit that HODs should know the subject content of life skills in order to support teachers in every aspect of teaching and learning. The four HODs responded as follows:

Ms Zuza responded to the question as follows:

*Physical education is not done properly because of the lack of outdoor resource materials. Teachers use only skipping ropes, hoops, bean bags and balls. Most materials for developing gross motor skills are not available.*
Mrs Zuza indicated that learners were only engaged in activities such as running, catching, skipping and balancing to overcome the challenge of the lack of outdoor materials. In my understanding, the school should improvise to organise other resources from the community as Froebel (1885 in Roszak 2018:18) suggests that teachers use natural and waste materials from their environment. The situation of the school is associated with a view that most teachers do not understand the importance of life skills in Grade R teaching and learning.

Mrs Silo also acknowledged that there was a lack of outdoor resources at her school. She further explained:

*The Grade R teacher does not engage learners in physical education. She always complains about the lack of outdoor resource materials. In her classroom there are hoops, skipping ropes, bean bags, balls and other materials that the teacher can use for physical education. The Grade R teacher uses time for physical education for other activities. I think she does not realise that she deprives learners the opportunities to be soccer stars and athletes of tomorrow.*

In the above discussion, Mrs Silo did not highlight how she supported the teacher to ensure that physical education was taught using the resource materials indicated. The interview revealed that she had little knowledge about the strategies she could use as HOD to support teaching and learning of physical education. It appeared that the school did not monitor physical education and lacked knowledge on how to improvise using physical materials to make sure that the study area was implemented. In my knowledge as a teacher, the school can organise such items as tyres and other materials which are not costly for making resources.

Mrs Mputi reflected as follows:

*Teachers often do not take physical education seriously. They do not understand that physical education develops gross motor skills. They always complain that they do not have resources to teach physical education.*

Looking at the above response, Mrs Mputi had little support on physical education implementation. She did not explain explicitly how she supported physical education after she observed that it was not taught. It is the role and responsibility of the HOD to see to it that each study area in life skills is taught effectively. This suggested that
Grade R learners were deprived of the opportunity for free play. Learners were also deprived of the opportunity to develop in language vocabulary, sport talents and many more skills that could be part of their careers.

Mrs Ledi concurred that Grade R teachers did not take physical education seriously. She explained as follows:

Despite the lack of outdoor resource materials, teachers will never tell you what they were doing outside with learners. They just tell you it is physical education but the activity which is done is not clear. I always demand lesson plans for such lessons and I struggle to get them.

Mrs Ledi did not explain how, ultimately, she mitigated the challenge as HOD. It appeared that she ended up not knowing what concept was taught in physical education. The findings concur with Badungela (2012:23) and Mohapi (2013:3) who suggest that the DBE should provide SMTs with instructional training for guiding teachers on monitoring curriculum implementation. I believe that this would assist in improving teaching and learning in Grade R.

• Synthesis

The responses from the four HODs showed that they were not confident to support the implementation of physical education in their schools. As managers of the Foundation Phase, they had all the responsibility to assist teachers to teach physical education in their classes. In the interviews, the HODs did not refer to any interventions they made to ensure that physical education was taught. I support the view that HODs have not been prepared for the introduction of Grade R and have been mandated to monitor the grade without having the relevant subject content knowledge (Magwanya et al., 2013:454). These HODs need to be taken through their responsibilities for Grade R teaching and learning.

• Life skills teaching and learning strategies: creative arts

The content knowledge of HODs was also investigated in terms of creative arts. All the HODs were asked to share their experiences regarding creative arts in Grade R. The purpose of the question was to explore the subject content knowledge of HODs in
monitoring and supporting teachers in teaching creative arts in Grade R classes. This study area has two hours per week for teaching and learning.

Ms Zuza explained:

*I do not think teachers understand the importance of creative arts in Grade R. They do not understand the long-term benefits of creative arts. Through creative arts, children can be interested in different careers. Teachers need more workshops to assist in teaching creative arts using recycled and available material.*

Mrs Silo shared the following view:

*Learners are not given an opportunity to practice their skills. Teachers underestimate learner potential. I think learners should be engaged in creative arts competitions so that teachers can take this study area seriously.*

On the other hand, Mrs Mputi reflected as follows:

*In our school, we do not have a problem in creative arts because all grades are engaged in creative arts activities. Creative art festivals start with Grade R. Learners are engaged in various kinds of music, drawings and dances. Learners make models using waste materials.*

Mrs Ledi stated:

*Even for myself, it is difficult to engage learners in creative activities. I do not know how can this be done in Grade R as creative arts is difficult even to Grade 1 learners. I see mostly learners singing and dancing only in Grade R. I do not focus much on what learners do on creative arts.*

- Synthesis

It appears that the HODs did not attempt to fully support Grade R teachers for teaching and learning but simply highlighted the challenges that affected Grade R teaching of creative arts. Although, the lack of resources is a challenge, the value of creative art did not appear to be recognised in schools (Wanyama & Quay, 2014:6). Only one HOD acknowledged that Grade R was engaged in a creative arts festival in her school. This meant that teaching and learning of creative arts was compromised in Grade R.
classes. The findings of this study reflected that Grade R learners miss many opportunities to develop their talents through the lack of creative art in their classes. This is a challenge that needs Grade R subject advisers, curriculum planners of life skills and other stakeholders to address to ensure that creative art is done effectively in Grade R.

4.6.2.2 Planning for Grade R teaching and learning and content coverage

This section of the study presents findings gathered from the four HODs on Grade R planning for teaching and learning. The planning for Grade R teaching and learning should develop learners’ cognitive, emotional, social, moral and physical abilities. For planning to be effective, it should involve the content that provides knowledge and skills the learner acquires to learn (Reche et al., 2012:4. The following paragraphs reports about the findings on how HODs know about Grade R teaching and learning content and content to be covered.

In responding to a question on how they supported planning for Grade R teaching and learning, the four HODs shared the following experiences:

- **Ms Zuza**

  *I always suggest that the three Grade R teachers plan together using CAPS policy documents. I orientated them on how to use CAPS policy documents for planning activities by unpacking the concepts they have to teach. I also make some suggestions when they submit their planning to me. The challenge, however, is that I do not have enough time to plan with them. Grade R CAPS policy documents clearly show the work that needs to be done on weekly basis.*

In the above discussions, Ms Zuza encouraged Grade R teachers to support each other through joint planning for teaching and learning. She trusted that teachers would be able to plan effectively when they worked as a team. The interviews suggested that Ms Zuza was passionate about her work and she knew that her roles and responsibilities were to support Grade R teaching and learning. The planned lessons links to the claim of Siraj and Taggard (2014:33) that planned teaching and learning determines that teachers could manage classroom routines, resources, instructional time and cater for individual learner needs. I posit that well-planned lessons make teachers’ work easy in classroom context because she knows when to do what and
how. The teaching and learning strategies are known in advance and the resources to be used.

Ms Zuza also shared that although she monitored and supported Grade R teaching and learning, she needed to attend more Grade R workshops. She understood that, as an HOD, she needed to know everything about Grade R teaching and learning. The finding supports Freire’s idea (1996:100) which indicates that it is the role of the progressive teacher to seek knowledge in order to transform the education of the disadvantaged learners. Her view is aligned with the literature (Badungela, 2012:45; Mohapi, 2013:1) which indicates that the DBE should provide SMTs with instructional programmes for guiding teachers on curriculum implementation. The HODs need to rise above their subordinates in terms of curriculum policy implementation. The knowledge would help the HODs to provide relevant teacher support and organise professional development programmes for teaching and learning to improve learner performance.

• Mrs Silo

Mrs Silo shared that Grade R teachers in her school planned lessons on a daily basis. She explained that every morning she checked lesson plans to see whether the teachers had planned properly and consulted the CAPS and related documents. She explained:

I make it sure that all the supporting documents are used and that the concepts are clearly defined for achieving the aims and to ensure that all subjects and content areas appears in a lesson. I also support teachers on how to cover the missed content for teaching and learning.

In section 4.6, Mrs Silo stated that she supported nine teachers. That raised a question on how she checked lessons for so many teachers every morning. She insisted that she managed to check the lessons, yet she also had a class. In the Foundation Phase, there are three subjects in Grade R and four subjects from Grade 1 to Grade 3. I noted that she was not willing to explain the challenge she experienced in monitoring Grade R planning. I associated the challenge with content knowledge as Reche et al. (2012:4) highlight that it is difficult for HODs to supervise teachers without complete comprehension of the planning that is expected from the them.
• **Mrs Mputi**

According to Mrs Mputi, Grade R teachers also planned as a group in her school. She reflected her understanding of Grade R planning as follows:

> The planning in Grade R is the same with other grades. If the teacher does not understand a certain concept, she has to be supported by other teachers. Sometimes one teacher can do a lesson demonstration to unpack the concept for other teachers. This can help some teachers to improve their teaching and learning practices.

In light of the above discussions, Mrs Mputi did not refer to any support on the planning aspect in her school. Furthermore, she explained that planning is the same in the Foundation Phase, yet in Grade R planning is integrated in the daily programme. This showed that Grade R teachers planned in the same way as Grade 1 to Grade 3 as Taole and Mohapi (2014:4) noted in their study. It was my assumption that the response from Mrs Mputi was based on lack of understanding of Grade R planning. My view is that it would be difficult for her to support Grade R teaching and learning if she had no content knowledge of Grade R integrated planning. The planning in Grade R should show the management of classroom routines, utilisation of resources, use of instructional time and how individual needs are catered for (Siraj & Taggart, 2014:33). HODs needs to familiarise themselves with Grade R teaching and planning for effective monitoring and support.

• **Mrs Ledi**

Mrs Ledi highlighted that Grade R teachers planned daily lessons. She maintained that she checked lessons every Monday morning before teaching and learning began. She also confirmed that teachers met every Friday to plan lessons for the following week. In her response, teachers were used to this planning strategy and this improved teaching and learning. She indicated that it was easy even to teach for the Grade R teacher when she was busy or absent from school. This showed that Mrs Ledi understood that planning is key in supporting teaching and learning. The knowledge Mrs Ledi portrayed is aligned with a view that no one can teach something she does not know (Spaull, 2012:88). It proved that learning new content is part of professional
development. A new position at work demands that a person is able to change as Frere (1970:73) indicates and emphasises that, regardless of the challenges, learners should be taught. The strategies she used were relevant to the CAPS policy which emphasised daily preparation.

- Synthesis

Regarding the challenges that HODs experienced in planning, the research findings revealed that the four HODs had similar challenges that affected monitoring and supporting Grade R teaching and learning. They highlighted various challenges that affected planning such as higher rate of absenteeism during unfavourable weather conditions in summer and in winter; workshops for various school activities that took place during the week; and Grade R learners starting school late after holidays and leaving school early before holidays. They added that the large learner enrolment was a big challenge in Grade R classes that affected content coverage.

The contributing factors on Grade R planning are aligned with the rurality of the school contexts. As I have experienced from working in rural areas, children in these areas are not interested in attending school. Khumalo and Mji (2014: 271) highlights that parents in rural schools often engage their children in household chores without advising teachers of this. Some learners travel long distances and that encouraged rate of absenteeism in lower grades (Mukeredzi, 2013:3). All these factors have a negative impact on learner performance. Learners miss some lessons and if teachers repeat lessons for them, surely that would affect content coverage. In my personal view, this is a major challenge that needs to be addressed by various stakeholders such as the DBE, the Council of Churches, local municipalities and all people who are interested in improving education in rural schools. The DBE should review the SASA of 2007 which emphasises parental involvement on learner attendance from seven years olds (Maponya, 2015: 97). It is the responsibility of every parent to see to it that learners attend schools which are relevant to their age cohort. The policies on educational matters should address Grade R matters because this is a grade within the education system.

The four HODs mentioned limited time for content coverage. Mrs Zuza and Mrs Ledi stated clearly that Grade R teachers were not able to cover the content or lessons missed. Interviews revealed that they encouraged teachers to engage learners in
various activities that would give learners the relevant basic skills and knowledge. Mrs Silo confirmed that she helped the teacher to design recovery plans where they infused similar concepts into one lesson. She acknowledged that Grade R teachers did not plan concepts in physical education properly and attributed this to the lack of outdoor resource materials. Mrs Mputi also emphasised that each teacher submitted a content coverage plan and a curriculum coverage report. She highlighted that the improvement plan was also checked to ensure that content coverage was done. She did not indicate the strategies she used to monitor the content coverage.

I noted that all the four HODs thought as if they referred to Grade 1 to 3 teaching and learning content. In Grade R, teaching and learning is integrated. It is not easy to cover missed content because the teacher cannot organise extra classes. In addition, the teacher cannot give a Grade R learner more class work activities to cover the missed content because memory span is limited. This aspect of content coverage needs a teacher who is passionate and invested with Grade R content knowledge to combine themes that are similar and teach them through a play-based approach. Although the strategy would not assist much on content coverage, the maximum basic skills and knowledge would be covered.

4.6.2.3 Content knowledge on addressing barriers to learning

The four HODs were interviewed on how they supported Grade R teachers in dealing with barriers to learning in their classrooms. It is noted that many learners experience barriers to learning and they are not well catered for in the mainstream (Chimhenga, 2016;33 Geldenhuys & Wevers, 2013:3). Therefore, HODs are required to understand remedial support programmes for learners with barriers to learning to be able to support teachers. All SMTs in schools are expected to know and understand the policy on inclusive education (EWP6) to be able to support teachers on addressing barriers to learning. The following paragraphs present the findings from the four HODs of sampled schools on supporting teachers in addressing barriers to learning in teaching and learning context.

- **Ms Zuza**

Ms Zuza highlighted that there were learners in Grade R who could not read or write and who experienced speech difficulties. Ms Zuza could not explain how she supported
the teacher in dealing with those learners. I noted that she was not happy to talk about barriers to learning. It was my assumption that she had no content knowledge on how to support teachers or learners in her class. This means she did not support teachers on this aspect of barriers to learning. It is assumed that is the reason the DBE observed learners experiencing various challenges which hinder their access to learning (DBE, 2014b:21). In this regard, Abongdia et al. (2015:4) suggest that teachers must have skills to identify barriers to learning to be able to support learners. It appeared that learners with barriers to learning in Grade R were not supported in Mrs Zuza’s school.

- **Mrs Silo**

Similarly, Mrs Silo reported that during her classroom visits, she noted that some Grade R learners seemed to experience emotional difficulties in the class. She mentioned that when asked questions or asked to do an activity, some would just cry. She also noted that these learners did not cope well in picture interpretation and in other class activities. Du Plessis (2014:488) explains that to support growth and development of learners with barriers to learning in rural schools, teachers should identify them so that they could meet demands of their academic journey. Mrs Silo indicated that she supported the Grade R teachers by reporting the challenges to the principal and to the SBST. The response showed that Mrs Silo understood the lines of reporting but did not have the knowledge and strategies to address barriers to learning herself. In my understanding, referral to other stakeholders is the last resort after all the support systems in the classroom have been undertaken. The strategy Ms Silo used did not support the teacher and assisting learners was a long process. The character of learners indicated that they had limited or no background of preschool teaching and learning content. My understanding is aligned with other researchers that preschool prepares learners to adapt themselves when they progress to Grade R (Gumpo, 2017:202).

- **Mrs Mputi**

According to Mrs Mputi, Grade R teachers were guided on how to complete learner profiles. These teachers were told to keep records of challenges that affected the learner as evidence. She further elaborated that the evidence helped in reporting about the learning difficulties experienced by learners to other stakeholders such as parents, the SBST and the District Based Support Team (DBST). Mrs Mputi also highlighted
that she encouraged teachers to attend the departmental workshops on barriers to learning. She emphasised early identification and addressing of barriers to learning in Grade R. However, I noticed that she did not mention any conceptual support she had provided for Grade R learners with learning difficulties.

Mrs Mputi relied entirely on transferring the matter to other people, rather applying her own knowledge and strategies to support the teacher. This illustrates that as an SMT member, she lacked content on barriers to learning. Rasebotsa (2017:41) clearly states that it is difficult for the teacher to implement the curriculum without the proper support. I believe that Grade R teachers and HODs should attend training on barriers to learning. The lack of knowledge teachers experience is a risk to learners because they will progress to next grades without being supported on the areas in which they experience challenges. Teachers need to have some skills on handling barriers to learning so that they would easily scaffold learning for learners.

• Mrs Ledi

In her school, Mrs Ledi identified Grade R learners who could not talk in class in term 1. She assumed it was because learners perceived school as a unfamiliar environment. She believed this could be due to a lack of exposure to preschool. Mrs Ledi shared that she supported the Grade R teacher with the strategies to be used to assist these learners. She explained:

*Teachers should provide an opportunity for casual conversations with learner; for example, asking them about their families and residence. These encourage learners to open up and feel accepted. Teachers should observe children carefully upon arrival at the school so as to identify learners with barriers before formal teaching and learning takes place. The baseline assessment report should be kept in learner [files] and I sign those reports because I want to be sure that teachers did screening of every learner in class.*

In my understanding, during the morning ring in Grade R in the first week of the school calendar, learners are orientated to the school environment and the teacher establishes a relationship with the learners. The strategy used by Mrs Ledi to support Grade R teachers was in line with the daily programme. The school becomes a barrier to a learner if the teacher jumps to the curriculum content without knowing her learners
and their needs. Motitswe (2014:104) clearly states that learners should feel a sense of belonging in class. I believe that the establishment of mutual relationships between the teacher and learners would minimise the anxiety of learners and they would feel secure. There will be no more barriers where learners could not talk or cry in the Grade R classroom.

Motitswe (2014:102) also suggests that the DBE should provide schools with learner support teachers for each class to assist grade teachers in supporting learners who experience difficulties in certain activities. Mrs Ledi also raised her concern that the DBE and Social Development need to ensure that there are preschools near to schools or within the school premises. I agree with Mrs Ledi that this could help to address some of the challenges experienced by Grade R learners.

- **Synthesis**

In light of the responses from the interviews, it is apparent that not all HODs understood that barriers to learning should be identified and addressed as early as in Grade R. Mrs Zuza appeared not to support teachers in dealing with barriers to learning. She did not possess the skills to support teachers in dealing with learners experiencing writing and picture interpretation in her school. The three other HODs showed that they engaged Grade R teachers on various activities that addressed barriers to learning. I noticed that all the four HODs experienced a gap in handling learners with learning difficulties. Therefore, they needed training so that they can support teachers in handling learners with barriers to learning programmes.

**4.6.2.4 Resources**

The interviews with the HODs revealed various challenges that Grade R teachers experienced pertaining to the lack of resource materials for teaching and learning. All the four HODs mentioned that the DBE and NGOs supplied indoor resources although they were insufficient. They confirmed that the lack of outdoor materials was one of the major challenges for teaching and learning in their schools. The responses from HODs are presented as follows:

- **Ms Zuza**
Ms Zuza emphasised that the small budget did not satisfy the needs of Grade R teaching and learning. She argued that if the DBE could improve the Grade R budget allocation for resources, teaching and learning could improve. Ms Zuza acknowledged that the quality of teaching and learning was not good because teachers had to improvise all the time. She explained as follows:

*The Grade R readers had incorrect spelling. The pictures were not aligned with the content in readers. So, we had to make corrections in those readers. That cost our time.*

Ms Zuza explained that she only supported Grade R with stationery and on how to use some of the resources that teachers were not familiar with. The findings from the HOD established a sense of ignorance by the DBE because the quality of material for Grade R was supposed to be evaluated before delivered to schools. This implies that Grade R teaching and learning programmes were not given much attention. In this case, the material was not supportive to Grade R teachers. The researchers point out clearly that the material should be user friendly and adequate for quality teaching and learning (Krishnaratne et al., 2013:39; Modisaotsile, 2012:4; Taole & Mohapi, 2013:7). Findings from my study suggest that the DBE needs to ensure that the Grade R materials distributed to schools are of good quality for quality teaching and learning. In the context of this study, Grade R teachers need to be supported with resources that would encourage incidental learning in their classrooms. The HODs should know the material delivered for Grade R as Mrs Zuza portrayed the understanding of Grade R resources.

- *Mrs Silo*

In her response on resources, Mrs Silo stated that her school did not have a large learner enrolment. Very few readers were distributed. She concurred that:

*Outdoor material was installed long time ago and was no longer available. [The] Grade R teacher always cried for outdoor equipment. She did not understand that Grade R budget for resources was centralised by the Department of Education.*

The case of special outdoor resources in the school appeared challenging. This could make teachers leave out some aspects of the curriculum. Khumalo and Mji (2014:264) concur that there is a shortage of resources for teaching and learning in South African
schools. It is my perception that, if the case of the shortage of resources persists, teaching and learning will never be of good quality in rural schools. The Grade R learners are highly affected because they learn by exploring resources. Teaching alone in Grade R without manipulatives does not make learning meaningful.

- **Mrs Mputi**

Mrs Mputi also experienced a lack of resources in her school. She shared her concern as follows:

*Learners do not have playgrounds and outdoor equipment. Safety and security is also a challenge in that the Grade R site is not fenced.*

The open space is very important for Grade R learners because it is where learners develop gross muscle for sport and for written activities. If the school does not provide learners with space, Grade R teachers would struggle in teaching other aspects of curriculum. The researchers confirm that the issue of resources is not given priority by the DBE or schools (Mohangi et al., 2016:76; Mukeredzi, 2016:92; Oluwafemi et al., 2014:123). I argue that teaching and learning in this 21st century demands learners to be exposed to various forms of resources. In addition, our learners, especially in rural areas, will always lag behind in all aspects of life if the issue of resources is not attended.

- **Mrs Ledi**

In contrast, the case of Mrs Ledi was different from the three other HODS. She highlighted that in her school, Grade R class was the only class that had more indoor material. She explained as follows:

*Grade R teacher has plenty of indoor materials but is not trained on how to utilise them. I often borrow the teaching and learning material from her for teaching Grade 1 mathematics and life skills. My teacher only needs training on how to utilise the resources. The Department of Education only delivered material but did not train teachers.*

The above scenario revealed that the DBE supported the school with resources but failed to train teachers which is the most important component for resource utilisation. It is clear that the lack of training makes teachers to handle the lessons in a complex
manner and sometimes leave other concepts. Helmbold (2013:197) acknowledges that there are schools in South Africa that have resources but no training has been given on how to use them effectively. The literature showed that poor results in education are related to the amount of resources available and the way resources are used (Elibariki, 2014:19; Mupa & Chinooneka, 2015:128). It appears that teacher orientation on resource utilisation should be provided to improve teaching and learning in schools. I believe that if Grade R teachers can sparingly use resources, learner performance in Grade 1 would improve because the foundation would be laid in Grade R.

- Synthesis

The responses of the four HODs indicated the importance of LTSMs in Grade R. In the interviews, the four HODs explained that the DBE distributed very few materials to schools and did not train teachers on how to use them. Teachers require training on the use of new material to be able to support Grade R teaching and learning.

4.6.3 The Challenge and Influence of School Climate on Teaching and Learning

This section presents the findings that emerged from interviews about the influence of school climate in Grade R teaching and learning context. Maponya (2015:88) indicates that positive school climate motivates teachers and learners to improve quality results. According to Maponya (2015:88), if programmes are managed according to government policies and there is mutual respect within the school, learner performance would improve and the school would be conducive to effective teaching and learning.

The next section reports on the implementation of the Grade R admission policy, support personnel for teachers and parental support. The following paragraphs present the findings from the four sampled schools on how the school climate influenced Grade R teaching and learning.

4.6.3.1 The challenge and influence of admission policy implementation

One of the questions posed to the HODs in the interviews was on the influence of learners’ age on performance in Grade R teaching and learning. This question aimed at exploring the knowledge HODs had about Grade R admission policy requirements. In my view, HODs as members of the admission committees need to know the admission policy and understand how it affects teaching and learning. I noted that all the four HODs understood the admission policy although some did not adhere to it.
During the interviews, the three HODs confirmed that they admitted underage learners in their schools. In their responses, they reflected as follows:

Ms Zuza expressed her sentiments as follows:

There are times when parents bring underage learners. They fake the age of their children. We only find out the truth when we track the performance of learners in the class.

In the excerpt above, it appeared that the school did not follow the procedures as stipulated in the SASA of 2007. This policy stipulates the requirements needed from parents for learner admission, such as a birth certificate (DBE, 2014a:134). The carelessness in admitting learners without following procedures is dangerous as parents can demand that their children remain in class. It clearly indicates that learners were not captured in SASAMS on their admission. In my understanding, SASAMS would detect all those learners who were underage. The SMT needs to follow processes and procedures to maintain relationships between the school and the communities.

Similarly, Mrs Silo highlighted:

I always advise parents to send their underage children to preschool but some just ignore this request. The principal was not very helpful in addressing the challenge of underage learners in Grade R. I finally resorted to keeping quiet because talking was not helpful.

The lack of support and poor relationships amongst the SMT members showed that the school did not recognise urgency to Grade R teaching and learning. The principal appeared lacking capacity to manage curriculum policies to improve learner performance in Grade R. This is why the school management personnel need guidance on implementing educational policies for learner academic achievement (Reche et al., 2012:3). It is my personal view that if HODs’ voices are not recognised by the principal, the Grade R teacher would struggle to get support from the school. Therefore, teaching and learning would be compromised in Grade R and across the phase. The parents would continue sending underage learners to school as they do not know the policy.
Mrs Mputi also shared her experience as follows:

*It is not easy to deal with admissions for Grade R because the parents as well as the principal do not understand the admission process. I had to convince the principal first and then the parents. I had to take learners from Grade R back to preschool which is within the school premises. I referred to the admission policy. It clearly stipulates that learners should be admitted at 4 ½ years and they should be turning five years by the end of June in the same year. Parents were then forced to take their children to the preschool before bringing them to Grade R.*

As reflected in the above excerpt, the Grade R admission policy was implemented in Mrs Mputi’s school and she was the one who made sure that the policy was adhered to. It emerged from Mrs Mputi’s statement that she had a good relationship with the principal of the school. In this regard, the role of SMT portrayed functionality of the school which is based on policy implementation. Madikida (2016:127) explains that the school is dysfunctional when components of curriculum management are ignored, such as learner performance which is the core business of the school.

Mrs Ledi also confirmed that there were underage learners who were not registered in her Grade R class. Mrs Ledi reflected as follows:

*It is not easy to say no to parents when they bring their children in school. Parents claim that the chief of the area wants to see children in schools. The principal finds himself pressurised to admit even underage learners. We were told not to register the underage learners in SASAMS. The Grade R teacher keeps them in class until they are ready for schooling.*

This implied that the school contravened the admission policy. Mrs Ledi highlighted that these learners added to the workload of the Grade R teacher and this negatively affected teaching and learning in the Grade R class. The Grade R teachers could find it difficult to support learners through scaffolding and the play-based approach (Aronstam & Braund, 2015:2; Helmbold, 2013:162; Vygotsky, 1967:15). It appeared that they were kept in the school just to pass time because they were seldom taught. The school did not have a clear structure as to how these learners were to be handled. In my perception, the SMTs failed to educate parents about Grade R age cohort to be
admitted. The SMT did not convince parents or help them to apply at the local preschool. I can conclude that the SMT lacked knowledge and understanding of the importance and the purpose of Grade R teaching and learning in the Foundation Phase.

The research findings indicated that of the four schools only one school adhered to the Grade R admission policy. The findings illustrated that the principals need to create a supporting teaching and learning environment that improves learner performance and teacher welfare (Maponya, 2015:26). The inability to adhere to the admission policy impacted on support in as far as Grade R teaching and learning is concerned. The school needed to find ways of how to manage the underage class and make sure that proper teaching and learning takes place.

4.6.3.2 Heads of departments’ relationship with parents

One of the questions posed to the HODs was about the strategies they used to engage parents to support Grade R teaching and learning. All four HODs reported that they held meetings with parents to discuss the challenges that faced Grade R teaching and learning. The biggest challenge identified was poor attendance of parental meetings. The HODs mentioned that parents did not come even when the school wanted to share important matters relating to their children. Selolo (2018:22) concurs that parents in rural schools do not want to attend school programmes and the reason for this is that they are illiterate. It is clear that parent-teacher relationships are compromised in disadvantaged school communities in South Africa (Mukeredzi, 2013:13). The HODs affirmed that they used various strategies to engage parents to support Grade R teaching and learning. These HODS responded as follows:

- **Ms Zuza**

  *In my school, parents are always invited to all events including sport games, music and creative art festivals to support their children. Very few parents attend.*

- **Mrs Silo**

  *At the beginning of the year I orientate parents about the Grade R programmes in a parents’ meeting. These orientations afford parents opportunities to...*
understand schoolwork and support them as required. I also share strategies on how to support learners with barriers to learning. Parents show little interest in the education of their children.

Similarly, Mrs Mputi reflected as follows:

There are notices sent to parents to let them to know about the programmes learners are engaged in and have to attend outside the district. In the Foundation Phase, I list all the activities that learners would do throughout the year so that they are prepared to support their children. Parental involvement in the education of their children is very low.

Mrs Ledi also experienced similar challenges with other HODs. She explained as follows:

In my school, parents always indicate that they are busy. Our duty as teachers is to teach. They do not expect us to call them for any program. But, they know that they have to attend when the school elects SGB members.

In the above cases, Nkosi (2014:68) confirms that teachers need to work hand in hand with parents to improve learner achievements. Similarly, principals should establish good relationships with SGBs in order to facilitate supporting Grade R teaching and learning (Maponya, 2015:24). The findings in this study highlighted that parents generally do not attend school programmes. It was only a few parents who responded positively to requests from schools. The situation in these rural settings can be associated with the fact that most learners stayed with grandparents and relatives who were old to attend school activities. Some of the parents were young and still at school, themselves, and this situation needs further investigation. I also argue that if parents are not empowered by the DBE through education departmental officials (EDOs) and SMTs, their participation in school matters will be limited. Parents are the main pillars for changing the school context according to their needs to improve the education of their children. Foundation Phase learners feel highly motivated in their learning process when their parents often visit school and attend functions.
4.6.3.3 Head of departments’ strategies to support Grade R teaching and learning

It emerged from the interviews that some HODs did not support teachers adequately. The lack of support emanated from various factors such as lack of knowledge, sizes of schools, qualifications and administrative duties of the SMTs. In Table 4.1, it was seen that all four HODs monitored more than eight teachers in their schools and were also class teachers. The sizes of their schools as mentioned in Table 4.1 indicates that only Lingani JSS had an enrolment of less than 1000 learners. This implies that most SMTs had a challenge of managing big schools and were experienced an excessive workload. The paragraphs below present the research findings on the four HODs’ support for Grade R teaching and learning in rural schools.

The findings revealed that Ms Zuza supported Grade R in her school although it appeared that her support was not enough. She shared her strategies as follows:

*I visit Grade R class once a term. The aim is to check effectiveness of teaching and learning. I start with planning, assessment tools the teacher use for recording learner performance and learners’ work. Then I observe a lesson to see how the teacher applies [the] play-based approach, utilises resources and presents the content. At the end, I give the teacher feedback in a form of support. There is a great change because the teacher improves all we talked about. I also suggest that teachers must meet, especially at the beginning of the year to remind themselves about what is expected from them to teach.*

In this scenario, the strategies Mrs Zuza used showed that she was really a mentor, coach and concerned with professional development of teachers as this is recommended for SMTs to do (Nkambule & Amsterdam, 2018:4). However, the once-a-term class visit is not sufficient for Grade R teachers who are unqualified and dependent only on workshops for capacitation. The monitoring and supporting strategy Mrs Zuza used could be associated with a big number of teachers she dealt with in her school and her additional work as a class teacher and SMT member. These findings are aligned with the study conducted by Bipath and Nkabinde (2015:10) who found that Foundation Phase HODs are overloaded with administrative duties and teaching responsibility as class teachers. This suggested that more HODs should be employed to give them an opportunity to provide quality support to teachers for teaching and learning. I believe that adequate teacher support personnel could provide knowledge
and skills for Grade R teaching and learning. The employment of HODs in schools should be aligned with the enrolment and that allow them to monitor Grade R teaching and learning effectively.

Regarding the strategies to monitor and support Grade R teaching and learning, Mrs Mputi mentioned that, in her school, the SMT allowed Grade R teachers to attend educational forum meetings and workshops organised by various sectors in the DBE such as curriculum and inclusive education. These workshops shared information and teacher development programmes conducted by various institutions of higher learning. She indicated that a group of lecturers also supported Grade R teachers on CAPS implementation. I noted that Mrs Mputi did not have her own strategies and relied much on outside people to support Grade R teaching and learning. This exhibited a lack of knowledge on curriculum programmes (Khumalo, 2014:57) and understanding of Grade R content because her experience should be sufficient to help her in monitoring the grade. The HODs as experienced teachers are required to apply their own innovative strategies in supporting teachers and leading by example. The proposed intervention is the training on monitoring and support curriculum implementation.

In the case of the number of teachers monitored by HODs, Mrs Mputi responded as follows:

*Monitoring Foundation Phase with twelve teachers is like monitoring the school. I am like the principal of the school. It is this reason that makes it difficult for me to focus more on Grade R teaching and learning. However, I manage to monitor each teacher through the support of senior teachers. I need one HOD to assist me. In this way, I might find time to monitor Grade R teaching and learning.*

The findings confirmed that Mrs Mputi could not monitor Grade R teaching and learning effectively in a way that was expected of her. It was also evident that she was not able to identify some of the challenges that faced Grade R teaching and learning (Reche et al., 2012:3) in striving to improve learner performance. The literature associates the problem with inadequate leadership training for ECD teachers which causes managers to feel reluctant to carry out leadership roles (Hlupo et al., 2013:6; Magwanya et al., 2013: 454). I can relate to the challenge Mrs Mputi experienced with her qualifications that were not aligned with Grade R and her experience in working at the Foundation Phase. In the Eastern Cape, in South Africa, Grade R teachers need intensive support.
because they were former preschool teachers, who have never been trained to be Grade R teachers. The HODs are the only close mentors on whom they have to rely for support measures in their teaching and learning practices. It will be a problem if both the HOD and the Grade R teacher are struggling with content knowledge.

With regard to the strategies to support Grade R teaching and learning, Mrs Ledi explained that in her school, as Foundation Phase teachers, they planned sessions for professional development. She shared their practices as follows:

*We have afternoon sessions for professional development once a month from 14h00 to 15h30 where we select one person to capacitate us on any challenging aspects. This is an opportunity for Grade R teachers to identify areas where they need support. Sometimes if the teacher has attended a programme at district office level the teacher has to teach the whole Foundation Phase teachers so that everybody in the phase should know the program and support it. I also hold phase meetings once a month to discuss progress, challenges and solutions. The programme is supportive as it engages all teachers to contribute towards effective teaching and learning.*

According to the excerpt above, Grade R teachers were given an opportunity to raise the challenges that affected teaching and learning. Clearly, Mrs Ledi understood her role and responsibility as HOD and that she needed to coordinate programmes to support teachers on teaching and learning. The findings confirmed that primary teachers in South African context, need to be given enough support for effective teaching and learning so that they would be expects in their teaching practices (Mohapi, 2014:100; Omar, 2014:4). In the Eastern Cape, I suggest that Grade R teachers need more support as this grade is taught mostly by teachers from preschools.

Mrs Ledi also decisively pointed out that it was difficult for her to monitor a big number of teachers in her phase as her school had big enrolment numbers. She expounded as follows:

*It is not easy to monitor and support Grade R because I have a class and other teachers to support. I only spend 30 minutes per term for classroom visits to see what teachers do in Grade R. This is obviously not enough. Sometimes*
when time allows me, I do informal visits with them just to share some challenges they experience. In most cases, we discuss curriculum issues in our meetings held once a month.

In my view, Mrs Ledi did not prioritise monitoring and support for Grade R teaching and learning. In her statement, she had no plan for monitoring and supporting teachers under her control. It appears that little support was provided for Grade R teaching and learning. According to Maponya (2015:19), SMTs need to know what is happening in classrooms by means of regular monitoring. The lack of support for Grade R teaching and learning may cause people to think that the grade is not important because of its low impact on Grade 1 learners. The reason for thinking so emanates from the fact that the purpose of introducing Grade R was to improve learner performance of disadvantaged learners. What matters now is that the teaching and learning of Grade R does not get full support from the Department of Education and even in schools.

In interviews, Ms Silo indicated that she monitored Grade R teaching and learning directly and indirectly. According to her statement, she observed teaching and learning in the classes and while passing in the corridors. Mrs Silo mentioned that she focused more on the teachers who experienced challenges in teaching and learning. My concern was about how she identified teacher needs effectively if she was not close to them. The way Mrs Silo monitored Grade R showed that she managed ECD without training. Hlupo et al. (2013:6) support the view that HODs think that the reception year can be taught and monitored by anybody. I can conclude that Grade R teaching and learning was not effectively monitored and supported by Ms Silo.

- Synthesis

In conclusion, Grade R teaching and learning was not supported properly in all the four schools of this study. This meant that the implementation of CAPS was compromised in these rural schools. The HODs' workload was a contributory factor to the lack of monitoring and support. The literature confirmed that Foundation Phase HODs often experience an excessive workload in their rural schools (Nkambule & Amsterdam, 2018:11). They were class teachers, teaching four subjects (isiXhosa home language, mathematics, English First Additional Language and life skills). I suggest that effective teaching and learning and improvement of learner performance take place when teachers are fully supported. Hwenha (2014: 21) states that lack of support leads to
practitioners’ (Grade R teachers) job dissatisfaction and they sometimes decide to leave the sector. Above all, interviews revealed that for Grade R teaching and learning, monitoring and support is limited in most schools. A lack of support personnel is a challenge in improving Grade R teaching and learning to the extent that some illiterate people may not see the reason for sending their children to Grade R but only to Grade 1. This could be easy because, currently we do not have a policy which mandates that Grade R is compulsory for schooling.

4.7 CHAPTER SUMMARY

The purpose of this chapter was to present and discuss the research findings from the interviews on exploring Grade R teaching and learning in rural schools. The study established that Grade R teaching and learning is affected by various challenges which include lack of adequate classrooms, security, resources, content knowledge on addressing barriers to learning, content knowledge on planning which influenced content coverage and lack of implementation of admission policy which influenced overcrowding. The study also revealed that some Grade R teachers and HODs had qualifications that were not relevant to Grade R teaching and learning. In the chapter, it was also highlighted that some Grade R teachers received little support from their HODs and this was due to the lack of content knowledge based on the learning programmes of the grade. The participants in the study also indicated a lack of parental support which has negative influence on learner performance. Taking all these challenges into cognisance, it can be concluded that Grade R learners would progress to Grade 1 with content gaps. This was contrary to the aims of the introduction of Grade R which was to improve learner performance in disadvantaged schools and prepare learners for upper grades. I can conclude that the school climate in rural schools is not conducive for Grade R teaching and learning.

The next chapter presents the research finding gathered from observations. The major findings are analysed and discussed according to themes that emerged from the interviews.
CHAPTER 5:
PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSIONS FROM OBSERVATIONS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter presented the research findings collected through semi-structured interviews. The purpose of this chapter is to present an analysis and discussion of the findings on observing Grade R teaching and learning in rural schools. The findings were collected from four Grade R teachers through classroom observations conducted in four rural schools. The chapter presents the findings on the school and classroom environment, teaching and learning strategies and the challenges observed during classroom observations. Field notes also provided rich data that were used in the analysis process. The findings from the four case studies are presented in the following paragraphs. The findings verified the data collected from the interviews.

5.2 THE RESEARCH FINDINGS

The research findings are presented and discussed under the two themes, namely:

- Theme 1: The challenge and influence of school climate on Grade R teaching and learning
- Theme 2: Content knowledge

The following paragraphs presents some of the challenges facing Grade R teaching and learning from the four selected schools.

5.2.1 The School Climate on Grade R Teaching and Learning

This section presents some of the challenges facing Grade R teaching and learning in rural schools and their influence on learner performance. There were three categories that emerged under the above theme: unconducive school environments, poor classroom organization and poor admission policy implementation. Mji (2014:264) highlights that school and classroom environment are important components of the teaching and learning context. The following paragraphs present and discussed the finding from the four sampled schools under the above-mentioned categories.
5.2.1.1 School environment for Grade R teaching and learning

• Zamukulungisa FSS: Ms Zondi

On my arrival at Zamukulungisa Full-Service School, I observed that the school infrastructure did not accommodate learners with physical disabilities. In my observations, the toilets also not cater for Grade R learners and the school yard was uneven. The school infrastructure showed that there was a need for Grade R toilets and ramps. The toilet sizes for Grade R need to be age-appropriate and at the same time be separated from the rest of other learners at school for health purposes and prevention of abuse by older learners. The DBE (2014a:36) indicates that there should be one toilet per 12 Grade R learners. The above findings confirmed the literature which indicates that the support provided by the DBE are insufficient for the needs of Grade R in rural schools (Atmore et al., 2012:14; DBE, 2014a:36).

I observed an old jungle gym in the playground as Ms Zondi commented during interviews and the Grade R yard was not fenced. The jungle gym appeared unstable to the extent that learners might not be safe when using it. During break time, older boys and girls from the upper grades used the jungle gym. The findings indicated that the school environment was not conducive for Grade R learners to carry out their different learning activities. The resources for Grade R teaching and learning was not safe in the school premises. The big school enrolment which included secondary classes appeared not to accommodate space for Grade R learners’ play opportunities. The lack of open playgrounds within the school showed that Grade R learner activities which involved physical education were not done properly and some skills for learner development were missed, such as gross motor skills.

I also observed that learner discipline was a challenge and this could have been because of overcrowding in school environment. In some classes, learners just walked out of class without asking permission from the teacher. In my informal conversation with the HOD, I realised that some of the learners had barriers to learning. This was evident through learner behaviour. The HOD stated that some learners just went to the kitchen and demanded food from the meal servers before time. According to the HOD, the behaviour of those children also influenced the behaviour of others. I can conclude that the school environment was not conducive for Grade R teaching and learning. Teachers should be trained on how to control the behaviour of the learners with
learning difficulties. The school climate should be maintained to avoid affecting other learners.

- **Lingani JSS: Mrs Mbelu**

I observed that the school yard was fenced with old, rusty barbed wire. The outside environment was not attractive to Grade R learners. I also noticed that learners used the same toilets used by learners of the upper grades. The school environment appeared not to be appropriate for Grade R learners. This shows that learners in disadvantaged schools attend schools with a challenge of poor and inadequate infrastructure (Maponya, 2015:66). I established that pit toilets were provided very far from the classrooms. This was a challenge as Magwaya et al. (2013:5) point out that ECD toilets should be set aside for young learners and be near to the classrooms.

The Intermediate and Senior Phase classrooms were very old cement block buildings and the Foundation Phase classes were prefabricated classrooms. The school paint was old and peeling off and most classroom windows were broken. The school did not look attractive at all. There was a borehole for water tap constructed near the Foundation Phase prefabricated classroom block. The school playgrounds were clean but there was no outdoor play equipment.

It was evident from the lack of outdoor material that Grade R learners missed some of life skills activities that could support them in learning mathematics and language. It appeared that learners consequently progressed to Grade 1 with content gaps as observed by Bruwer et al. (2014:18) and Janse van Rensburg (2015:3). The content gap these learners had would remain up to their upper grades because in the next level, teachers focused on the grade content. Sometimes the content gap could lead to a high dropout rate in the upper grades. Therefore, it is important to ensure that learners progress to the next grade with all relevant content. My belief is that the attractiveness of the school through the availability of resources and buildings improves learner attendance. Surely, learner performance would improve and the purpose of the introduction of Grade R in the system would also be achieved. It is my belief that young learners appreciate attractive things and develop a feeling of ownership about them.
• **Khanya JSS: Mrs Lindani**

I observed that all classrooms for Intermediate and Senior Phase were built with bricks and were appropriate classrooms for teaching and learning. I also noted that the school playgrounds were uneven and with clustered uncut grass. There were twenty toilets that served learners from Grade R to Grade 9, ten for girls and ten for boys. I observed that there were no special toilets for Grade R and the available toilet seats did not cater for Grade R learners. This posed a challenge for Grade R learners. There was no Grade R outdoor play area. I learned through informal conversation with other Grade R teachers that the outdoor equipment was vandalised by learners in the upper grades. The school environment showed that there was a need for maintenance and cleaning of playgrounds for learners to play. The poor condition of the playgrounds indicated that sport and physical education opportunities were limited. The school enrolment was 2 225 from Grade R to Grade 9 yet the yard appeared very small to accommodate such a big number. It appeared that it was very difficult for teachers to control learners during break time. I argue that Grade R learners were not safe and could not play well in that congested school environment. The school environment indicated that Grade 8 and 9 were supposed to be transferred to nearby a senior secondary school, although the numbers would remain high. The status of Grade R in such a big school needs further investigation.

• **Veli JSS: Ms Solani**

At Veli JSS, the Intermediate and Senior Phase classrooms were built with face bricks. The Foundation Phase had prefabricated classrooms. I observed that the site of the school was small to accommodate playgrounds and for learners to play properly. The school buildings were close to each other with small passages between the buildings. The space for free play was limited for Grade R. The play theorists totally reject the absence of space for Grade R to play (Bruner, 1962: 32; Vygotsky, 1978:40). This was a challenge because learners in Grade R need to play. Play is one of the activities that makes school more interesting and also encourages learners to attend. The lack of space deprived learners of an opportunity to develop gross muscle skills, to socialise and to develop cognitively.

It emerged from observations that the Foundation Phase learners could not participate in sport activities because the school used community sport grounds which were far
from the school. The Grade R learners used pit toilets which were used by all learners at the schools. The school enrolment numbers 1080 (see Table 4.1). The findings of this study established that school environment was unconducive for Grade R teaching and learning.

• Synthesis

The above findings on school contexts revealed that the school environment was not conducive in all four rural schools in the study. The evidence from observations revealed that infrastructure and school yards were a big challenge for young learners. I also noticed that Grade R learners were taught in prefabricated classrooms which are not suitable for young learners during unfavourable weather conditions. It appeared that school context in rural schools might affect teaching and learning as there were some activities that could not be done properly. The school environment did not provide play opportunities to young learners which is the best activity for developing learners’ ability to learn as recommended by various play theorists (Bruner, 1961:105; Bandura, 1989:34; Froebel 1885 in Roszak, 2018:18; Piaget, 1962:181; Vygotsky, 1978:57). I also argue that the school environments in all four schools were not attractive to motivate teaching and learning as young learners need open spaces and equipment for playing.

5.2.1.2 Classroom organisation

The Grade R classroom should be more fully resourced and well organized for effective teaching and learning. This section presents the classroom organization provided by four teachers in schools for Grade R teaching and learning.

• Ms Zondi

There was a big chalkboard installed in front of the class which Ms Zondi used for most of her lessons. She had one steel cabinet and wooden cupboard for keeping learners’ work and her files and these were still in a good condition. The CAPS was packed in one of the cupboards and the DBE workbooks were packed according to school terms in another cupboard. This showed that Ms Zondi had administrative skills on how to keep documents in order. Filing is important because this is where most evidence is kept.
The original copy of the daily programme was posted on the wall and next to it was a hand-drafted timetable. The hand-drafted daily programme supported the research findings that in rural schools, SMTs require Grade R teachers to have formal timetables and treat learners like Grade 1 to 3 (Mahan, 2015:26; Taole & Mohapi, 2014:5). This indicated clearly that the SMTs had little knowledge and understanding about Grade R teaching and learning programmes and did not adhere to curriculum policy of the grade. However, a daily programme for Grade R guides teachers in their planning and teaching and learning practices.

There were also classroom rules on the wall which learners recited every day during the morning ring. A learning station for creative arts was near the door. There was also a very small learning station for a corner library with a few reading books. There were no other learning stations. The classroom gave me the impression that there was an imbalance in teaching and learning of Grade R content. Language and mathematics corners were not available where learners could recognise written symbols and sounds through play (Gray & MacBlain, 2012:12). This confirmed the literature which indicates that Grade R learners progress to Grade 1 with content gaps in language and in mathematics (Mkhabela, 2016; 29; Mohangi et al., 2016:12; Mutodi & Nqirande, 2014:67). In Grade R, for incidental learning, walls should be print-rich with number cards, flash cards, posters and some learners’ work. The wall should present lessons taught and those that are not yet taught.

The observations also revealed that most indoor materials were kept in boxes behind the door and some in the principal’s office. Through informal conversation, Ms Zondi indicated that she was not trained on how to utilise the distributed resources. This implied that in Ms Zondi’s class, Grade R learners were not given an opportunity to explore play materials. I agree with Atmore (2012:44) who suggests that when new resources arrive at schools, teachers should be orientated on how to use them for effective teaching and learning. The packed resources should be used to assist with knowledge and skills development on concept application. Learners should be given an opportunity to manipulate them for discovery learning.

There were a few charts and posters with Grade R themes that were displayed on the wall. The most basic charts such as weather charts, birthday charts, days of the week and a list of learners were not displayed on the wall. Theme tables were not available
to draw learners’ attention on the theme of the week. This suggested that the purpose of a print-rich wall was not emphasised. It was evident that the classroom layout or organisation was still a challenge.

In the classroom, I also noticed that there were seven plastic tables and forty-two chairs. This seating arrangement indicated that there was a shortage of tables. The lack of furniture affirmed that handwriting could not be done properly. This confirmed the findings that the shortage of basic resources has a negative influence on learners reaching their full potential (Hlupo et al., 2013:2). In addition, the findings revealed that issue of resources in Grade R is not given much attention (Mohangi et al., 2016: 76; Mukeredzi, 2016: 92; Oluwafeni et al., 2014: 123). I argue that high quality teaching and learning appears has a long way to go if it is to be achieved in rural schools. In Grade R, furniture is the most important resource to be provided and should be age-appropriate. Handwriting and drawing activities need learners to have space and furniture so that they could stretch their arms according to the side they use for writing (left of right).

- Mrs Mbelu

I observed that the furniture was not a challenge to Mrs Mbelu in her classroom. There were 18 plastic tables and 60 chairs in Mrs Mbelu’s classroom. Clearly the furniture was sufficient to accommodate all learners. The furniture was suitable and appropriate for Grade R but the space for handwriting and drawing activities was a challenge since it was a small prefabricated classroom. Mrs Mbelu used the chalkboard for most of her lessons. I also observed a flannel board at the back of the class which displayed a daily programme, weather chart, birthday chart, a list of learners, flash cards and a few small pictures that were drawn by learners. The observation revealed that Mrs Mbelu used the available space effectively for teaching and learning regardless of the challenges she experienced. In this regard, Mrs Mbelu portrayed the qualities of a progressive teacher as described by Freire (2000:89) who emphasises that teachers should work hard for the benefit of disadvantaged learners.

I noticed that the Grade R classroom layout did not show that Mrs Mbelu used the guidelines she obtained in her training. The material in the corner library was not well organised to make it more attractive. There was a very small learning station for a corner library with 20 graded readers, four big books and very few flash cards. All the
materials in the corner library and on the wall, were in isiXhosa home language. It also appeared that reading was not encouraged in the Grade R class. The view is not in line with Froebel’s (1885 in Roszak 2018:18) concept of gifts which encourages learners to be exposed to written text to improve language. Froebel 2001: 67) and Freire (2000:56) also suggest that teachers should make their own resources for reading, and not wait for the DBE and NGOs to supply them.

The materials confirmed that Mrs Mbelu adhered to the language policy which states that teaching and learning in the Foundation Phase should be in home language (DBE, 2017:11). Mulaudzi (2016:103) reminds us that, to be able to apply the play-based approach, Grade R teachers need to set up activity areas in their classrooms to improve emergent learning or they will struggle to provide quality teaching and learning. The findings of this study confirmed that Mrs Mbelu was not creative or passionate about her classroom attractiveness.

I noticed that Mrs Mbelu did her classroom cleaning by herself. She tidied her classroom every afternoon. There were no cleaners at the school and all the teachers had to clean their classrooms. Learners also assisted in cleaning their classrooms. Mrs Mbelu preferred to do cleaning by herself because when she requested older learners to assist, some Grade R materials went missing. Mrs Mbelu displayed commitment in caring for her class and learners. The above scenario revealed the state of Grade R in rural schools which is low-quality and not encouraging (Magwaya et al., 2013:8). The situation of Mrs Mbelu could be aligned with the school context where there were no caretakers to take care of cleaning classrooms. Schools need to have people to clean classrooms. In rural schools, there are situations where teachers find themselves doing jobs that are beyond their scope and these situations lead to job dissatisfaction.

Mrs Mbelu also had one small carpet for storytelling, shared reading and resources for mathematics activities but she could not use these to the fullest due to lack of space and the large number of learners. Mbelu had to shift tables and chairs when using the carpet for a small group of learners. Mohapi (2014:3) confirms that teachers do not have enough space for introducing different learning activities in classrooms. In the case of space, Mulaudzi (2016:102) suggests that teachers can change classroom layout on weekly basis for learners to access emergent learning in all concepts to be learned. In my observation, it is very difficult for the teacher to apply the strategy
suggested by Mulaudzi if the prefabricated classroom is packed with materials and too many learners. Grade R infrastructure should provide adequate space for constructing learning stations. It is not easy to detect the low quality of teaching and learning that takes place in a congested classroom.

Mrs Mbelu could not post heavy pictures on the wall of a prefabricated classroom as they fell. Seemingly, the prefabricated classroom was not suitable for teaching and learning and she found it difficult to use various teaching strategies in her class. Her classroom was a bit more attractive compared with the physical appearance of the school. For teaching and learning to be effective, space should be available for playing, writing and construction. The findings confirmed that in rural schools, teachers still have a challenge with infrastructure. The findings suggest that a sound and adequate infrastructure to support effective teaching and learning in schools is desperately needed (Maponya, 2015:66).

• **Mrs Lindani**

On my arrival at Khanya JSS, classroom observations revealed that Mrs Lindani had 57 learners in her class, 32 girls and 25 boys. In the interviews, the 10 preschool learners were not mentioned. It appeared that Mrs Lindani did not want to reveal the situation of management and leadership in her school. The Grade R classroom was equipped with 15 plastic tables and 60 plastic chairs. Learners were seated at tables which were arranged in groups of four and all learners had chairs. The seating arrangement confirmed that the furniture was sufficient and was appropriate for Grade R learners. This supported the view that the DBE should supply classrooms with suitable equipment to improve learning experiences (Mavundla, 2016:33). In Grade R, the height of the chairs should allow the learner to sit with both feet flat on the floor. The height of the table should also allow the learner to rest both forearms on the table.

The classroom had indoor materials which were kept in big plastic boxes and packed against the wall. Seemingly, learners had little or no access to the material. There was also little variety in the posters and charts for the three Grade R subjects (mathematics, language and life skills) on the wall. The basic charts which included birthdays, weather and list of learners for identifying their names were displayed on the wall. The purpose of a print-rich wall was not emphasised. The classroom situation confirmed the
research findings which indicate that learners in rural schools lack access to resources which are important to support them with concept development (Mavundla, 2016: 41).

The creative arts area was allocated near the door of the classroom. There was a very small corner library with a few reading books, puzzles and workbooks. The space for more learning stations was also limited. There was a big chalkboard installed in front of the class which Mrs Lindani used for most of her lessons. She had one wooden cupboard for keeping learners' work as well as her files. The copy of a daily programme was on the wall, next to teacher's small wooden table. The classroom was neat inside and outside.

There was a stainless-steel water basin on the classroom veranda which learners used for washing their hands before eating and when they came from the toilets. I noticed that all Grade R learners washed their hands in the water basin and they used one towel for drying hands. However, there was no soap provided for hand washing. Seemingly, health practices showed that health was comprised.

The findings on classroom context showed that Grade R at Khanya JSS was supported in terms of furniture and resources. The challenge I noted was that the teacher did not display the resources for learners to access them for learning. I aligned Ms Lindani’s classroom layout with her qualification, NPDE, which was not for Grade R teaching and learning. The absence or lack of resource utilisation showed that play-based approach was minimised in teaching and learning which is an approach that make learning fun and enjoyable.

- **Ms Solani**

In Ms Solani’s classroom, I observed a group of seven preschool learners seated in their own chairs brought from home. Although learners were not in their appropriate grade, parental involvement in the education of young learners was appreciated. Ms Solani’s classroom accommodated 59 learners with few Grade R play activity areas. The enrolment was above 30 which is the prescribed maximum number of learners for a Grade R class (DBE, 2014b:21; Maponya, 2015:33). In the two days, I spent in the classroom, I experienced that the prefabricated classroom was very hot on hot days. Learners fell asleep and it appeared that they did not attend school on cold days because there was no heater in the class.
It was evident that the classroom was not conducive for effective teaching and learning. Learners and teachers should be provided with safe environment free from any hazards. The teaching and learning environment should be equipped with resources such as heaters and air conditioning to make classrooms suitable for teaching all year round. These findings confirmed that in terms of infrastructure Grade R learners in rural schools were still neglected (Gumpo, 2017:58; Mavundla, 2016:14).

I also noted that there were 11 school benches with wooden desks and learners were seated in groups of five. The desks were arranged in rows. The furniture in the class was not appropriate for Grade R learners. In my view, Grade R learners need to sit at plastic tables that are arranged in groups and that are appropriate for their age. I noticed that learners had to stand up when writing because of the height of the desks. Observations revealed that learners were not seated comfortably in the classroom and teaching and learning were compromised. Khumalo and Mji (2014:3) argue that the negative influence of the absence of adequacy of resources makes teachers handle subject content in a complex manner that does not excite learners. The lack of appropriate furniture directly causes back pain for the learners, problems with writing posture and even with pencil grip. The incorrect seating poses a challenge to the teacher in supporting written activities.

Ms Solani used a desk as her table. She had an old steel cabinet for keeping her files and for CAPS. Next to a steel cabinet, there were two boxes for keeping learners’ portfolio files and DBE workbooks. The teacher had to use very old furniture as no other furniture was provided by the school or the DBE. The old furniture for the Grade R teacher showed that Grade R teachers were still not properly recognised in their schools. Teachers spend much of their life at school; therefore, they need to feel at home so that they can dedicate themselves to doing their work. The classroom environment makes the teacher feel herself at work and develop self confidence in her job. I agree with Maponya (2015:67) that school climate and a conducive classroom have a strong influence on motivating teachers and learners towards better academic achievement.

There were boxes at the back of the classroom with indoor materials. The labels of indoor material indicated that some were supplied by the DBE, some were donated by the Education Opportunity Project and others by Takalane Sesame Lego Foundation.
Most of the materials were donated by the NGOs. I noted that a variety of posters, charts and pictures were packed in a big box behind the door. There were very few posters that were displayed on the wall. Ms Solani stated that on windy and on hot days the posters fell down. On a flannel board at the back of the class was a daily programme, a list of learners, a weather chart, a birthday chart and mathematics flash cards. Observations revealed that the classroom environment was not conducive for Grade R teaching and learning. There were no learning stations (areas) which are important in Grade R for learning through play. The findings highlight that emergent and incidental learning in Grade R was compromised. The lack of infrastructure in rural schools influenced teaching and learning negatively (Nkosi, 2014: 11; Mavundla, 2016: 33). I argue that, if the material is kept in boxes and this continues as a culture, this will not improve learner performance in rural schools. The available resources should be used for developing learners’ ability to construct knowledge and skills in their learning process.

- Synthesis

In all four Grade R schools, the observed classroom layout or organization appeared not to be a priority of the teachers. The Grade R classrooms were not attractive to the extent that incidental reading could be promoted. Although infrastructure was a challenge, I can align the poor classroom layout with teacher content knowledge and understanding the importance of well-organized classroom for the benefit of the learner.

5.2.1.3 Poor admission policy implementation

The SMTs are mandated by the DBE to monitor and support the implementation of policies in schools. In all four schools, I noted that SMTs did not adhere to the Grade R admission policy. In all four visited classrooms, Grade R teachers taught more than 30 learners in their classrooms. The situation was in violation of the admission policy for Grade R which states that teacher should teach a maximum of 30 learners in classroom (Maharaj & Williams, 2011:7; Maponya, 2017:167). The following descriptions highlight how the admission policy affected teaching and learning in the schools.
Ms Zondi

In Chapter 4, Ms Zondi did not mention that she had a group of preschool learners in her class. It is evident that Ms Zondi was not comfortable to talk about learner admission at her school. There were preschool learners who were not in the learner attendance register. Ms Zondi accommodated 47 learners in her class, including the preschool group. It is evident that the school did not adhere to the admission policy. The number of learners was above 30 which is the prescribed maximum teacher-pupil ratio in Grade R (DBE, 2014a:36). The 10 preschool learners were a class that needed their own teacher, as well as their own learning space. I learned that the children in the preschool group were children of some workers at the school. I observed that preschools in the village were far from the school. Ms Zondi indicated that the SMT was aware of the challenges of underage learners placed in Grade R but failed to address it. This is a difficult situation to handle in rural schools where the majority of families survive on a social grant. The keeping of preschoolers in classroom without being taught is not acceptable as activities are not developmentally appropriate for them. Gumo (2017:60) indicates clearly that preschool learner activities should be well planned and organised to develop their potential.

The findings revealed that Ms Zondi was teaching two grades under one roof, namely, Grade R and Preschool. Taole and Mohapi (2013:3) condemn a system of teaching two grades under one roof and indicate that it does not lead to either grade achieving better learning outcomes. This study posits that there is a lack of support from the SMT. The school management personnel did not adequately guide teachers in implementing educational policies for improving learner performance. In the case of the overcrowded Grade R class, I assume that neither Grade R nor preschool learners benefited from teaching and learning.

The challenge of poor policy implementation led to the challenge of furniture in the Grade R classroom. Learners were seated in groups of five and six at each table meant for four. Although Ms Zondi’s classroom was built by the DBE, it was small and could not accommodate the Grade R play learning areas. This supports the argument that play is not recognised to any great extent in South African rural reception year classrooms (Ogunyemi & Ragpot, 2015:2). In my understanding, if play disappears from Grade R classrooms, no effective teaching and learning can take place because
it is the only approach that can improve learner performance (Gray & MacBlain, 2012:12; Vygotsky, 1978:57). The Grade R classrooms should be built to accommodate all teaching and learning programmes. I perceive that the DBE does not specify clearly to the schools the quality of the classrooms required to achieve the goals of implementing Grade R in the first place.

- **Mrs Mbelu**

I observed that Mrs Mbelu had 48 learners in her class, 22 boys and 26 girls. There were also eight under-aged learners seated at the back of the class. Mrs Mbelu thus had too many learners in her class. During the interview, she answered that she taught 48 learners. She also highlighted that there were also eight preschool learners added. Her classroom accommodated 56 learners which exceeded the teacher-learner ratio for Grade R. The number of preschoolers in class added further overcrowding.

Mrs Mbelu’s learners were inattentive and that hindered teaching and learning in her classroom. She appeared to struggle with engaging learners fully in the activities that she planned. It appeared that Mrs Mbelu was unable to attract learners’ attention during lessons. She also took time to reach some groups in the class because of limited space to move. The findings show that Grade R space for teaching and learning should be adequate for learners to allow teacher-learner interaction (Mulaudzi, 2016:103). The overcrowded Grade R class was clearly problematic (Mohangi et al., 2016:74).

I also noted that the shifting and rearranging of tables and chairs affected teaching and learning time. Mrs Mbelu spent more than five minutes arranging the class before starting the lesson. This suggested that the large class enrolment and the small size of the classroom had a negative influence on teaching and learning to the extent that the teacher could not follow the daily programme. Some of the concepts of the day were not taught because of time spent in organising space and in maintaining discipline. In my knowledge and understanding as a teacher, Mrs Mbelu would not be able to cover the content for the year. The number of learners in Grade R classroom and the preschoolers appears a big challenge need to be attended by the DBE for improving teaching and learning. The overload directly influences job dissatisfaction to teachers and passion to deal with young learners.

- **Mrs Lindani**
Poor admission policy implementation was also observed in Mrs Lindani’s classroom. Regarding the teacher-pupil ratio, Mrs Lindani taught 57 learners in her class. The observations also revealed that most indoor material was kept in boxes and not used. In my observation, she had space for a few learning stations but she did not use it. Seemingly, she did not improvise and showed no creativity in arranging her classroom layout. This suggested that the materials did not contribute much to strengthening the implementation of CAPS. In Mrs Lindani’s class, Grade R learners were not given an opportunity to explore play materials.

During the morning ring, I noticed that Mrs Lindani found it difficult to control disruptive learners in her class. Some learners took advantage and played while she used the whole class approach. She spent much time disciplining these children and she appeared unable to suppress her emotions as she continuously shouted at them. I observed that she could not finish what she had initially planned for the day.

I noticed that learners were cooperative and demanded a lot of teacher attention. The challenge was that Mrs Lindani could not attend to all groups properly because of the large number of learners in class. The lack of discipline led to a much more disruptive class and this could be attributed to overcrowding. The overcrowded classroom also made Mrs Lindani appear to lack classroom-management skills.

The influence of overcrowding meant that learners did not receive timeous feedback on their activities. She focused on few groups of learners. This shows that the DBE needs to employ more teachers and provide infrastructure to avoid overcrowded classes for effective implementation of the play-based teaching approach. The findings established that teaching and learning in large and overcrowded classrooms does not yield acceptable results (Mulaudzi, 2016:39). Therefore, Grade R learners require enough space for learning through play to be effective and with proper planning (Gumpo, 2017:59; Mohapi, 2014:1). The planning can be proper but the lack of resources, big class sizes and lack of infrastructure make planning futile. Teaching and learning cannot benefit learners in big classrooms to any great extent. This situation may leave learners unprepared to start formal schooling in Grade 1 with adequate basic knowledge and skills.

- *Ms Solani*
Ms Solani taught 52 Grade R learners and had to take care of seven preschool learners. This shows that the school did not adhere to the Grade R admission policy implementation. Poor admission policy implementation had a negative influence on effective teaching and learning in Grade R class. Observations affirmed that the prefabricated classroom were not conducive for accommodating inclusive classes in rural schools. They were too small to accommodate the large number of learners comfortably and to organise all the Grade R activity areas. These prefabricated classrooms did not accommodate learners with physical disabilities. The educational policies emphasise that school environment should accommodate all learners and be disability friendly (Gumpo, 2017: 59).

- Synthesis

In summary, all four schools were overwhelmed with large numbers of learners and small classrooms which showed that teaching and learning was not effective. The study showed that there was a lack of admission policy implementation in some rural schools. Overall, lack of admission policy implementation means that teaching and learning is far from the expected quality in rural schools. However, in rural schools, Grade R should contribute much to all learners to improve academic performance in upper grades. Teachers should support learners individually, provide learners with space for play and use a range of teaching and learning strategies in class.

5.2.2 Teacher Content Knowledge

In Chapter 2, Lemmer and Meier (2015:4) highlight that the purpose of Grade R curriculum is to close content gaps for learners from disadvantaged communities to improve learner performance. In order to close the content gaps, Freire (1996:155) emphasises that progressive teachers need to devise strategies to make teaching and learning effective into the classroom regardless of the challenges teachers experience. This section therefore presents the findings on content knowledge teachers demonstrated during lesson observations. The section also presents the findings on how content knowledge influenced content coverage in Grade R classroom and the strategies teachers used to mitigate the challenge of content coverage.
5.2.2.1 Teaching and learning strategies

Classroom observations revealed that Grade R teachers used various strategies in teaching language, mathematics and life skills in their classroom contexts. I observed integrated teaching and learning in their lesson presentations. The following paragraphs present the findings obtained from the four Grade R classroom observations on how teachers interacted with learners on expected content implementation. The challenges teachers experienced and strategies they used were observed and reported.

- Language learning strategies

- Ms Zondi

I observed one lesson for 20 minutes where Ms Zondi engaged a small group of seven learners in reading words, using a play-based approach. The teacher used a workbook activity for learners to identify wild animals by their names using isiXhosa home language. Learners spelled words and counted the number of letters in words. They identified words from the flash cards and matched them with words below an animal on a chart. The following words were on flash cards:

Table 5.1: Words taught and spelled by learners in Grade R in term 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Words learned</th>
<th>Syllabification</th>
<th>English meaning</th>
<th>Number of letter sounds in words</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ingwenya</td>
<td>i-ngwe-nya</td>
<td>Crocodile</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Idada</td>
<td>i-da-da</td>
<td>Duckling</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Icilikishe</td>
<td>i-ci-li-ki-she</td>
<td>Lizard</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inyoka</td>
<td>i-nyo-ka</td>
<td>Snake</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Mrs Zondi taught learners to spell by sounding letters in words. The lesson was about reading and not about animals. The words included almost all letters learned in previous terms. During my reading lesson observations, I noticed that Ms Zondi engaged learners in various activities in groups of five to eight learners and that learners participated and were cooperative. I observed that not all learners participated in the lesson and the teacher focused more on those who raised their hands and were very fast in responding to questions. The lesson continued for 20 minutes.
The findings show that it is difficult to teach overcrowded classes in Grade R as the play-based approach needs open space and that deprives learners an opportunity to manipulate objects (Moalosi, 2013:4; Taole & Mohapi, 2013:1-4). I noted it is difficult to support learners individually and that shows that teaching and learning is ineffective (Chimbenga, 2016:33; Moalosi, 2013:4). Teaching and learning is effective when all learners participate and are supported according to their individual needs. In Grade R, learners are in the process of learning and need support to develop their full potential. Teaching Grade R learners in overcrowded classrooms makes learners feel bored and inattentive.

I also observed a lesson on shared reading where Ms Zondi used a poster about wild animals. She engaged learners in picture interpretation through questions and answers. She asked the following questions in isiXhosa. The English translations are provided for readers of the thesis:

Table 5.2: Questions asked about poster

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>English translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Zingaphi izilwanya ezikhulu</td>
<td>How many big animals are in the picture?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ezisemfanekisweni?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zingaphi ezona zincinane kakhulu</td>
<td>How many small animals are in the picture?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>emfanekisweni?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sikhala njani isilwanyana ngasinye?</td>
<td>What sound is made by each of the animals?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sesiphi esona silwanya usithandayo emfanekisweni, nika isizathu?</td>
<td>Which is your favourite animal in the picture and give a reason?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Linking to the above, learners answered questions properly. The last question invited different answers. Some learners indicated that their favourite animals were not in the picture. One of them said “I do not like wild animals because they are dangerous” and her reason was based on television news, where people are killed by wild animals. Learner’s response supports the idea (Freire, 1970:10) that learners are not recipients but participants in their education. Based on learners’ participation, Ms Zondi realised that she had to engage Grade R learners in listening and speaking to develop their higher order thinking skills. Ms Zondi believed that language is a tool for promoting
children’s abstract thinking through social interaction with adults and other children (Vygotsky, 1978:87). The teaching and learning approach and the content were aligned with the aims stipulated in the CAPS which indicate that learners should be engaged in higher order thinking (DBE, 2011a:5) so that they could cope well in upper grades. Content and the teaching and teaching approaches cannot be separated. Teachers need to plan in order to achieve the content of the prescribed curriculum and engage learners through dialogue. This helps learners to improve vocabulary and listen skills.

In another classroom observation lesson, learners did a DBE workbook activity where Ms Zondi read the question for learners as follows. The English translations are provided in brackets.

*Khangela unobumba u b uze umamele isandi njengokuba ubiza la magama ukhwaza.* (Find letter b and then listen to the sound as you read the words aloud.) *Uze ubhale igama.* (Then write the word.)

The workbook activity contained the following words:

**U**boy (wool); isi**b**ane (lamp); **b**aleka (run); **b**omvu (red)

There were pictures above those four words that gave learners a clue. It was an easy activity as all learners did it well and in little time. The way learners did this activity showed that they were used to those kinds of activities. Ms Zondi’s approach supports the view that LTSMs enhance teaching and understanding of the subject content (Lingam & Lingam, 2013:1; Modisaotsile, 2012:4). Ms Zondi’s understanding of the strategies for teaching reading and writing confirmed that she understood the content in the CAPS language document very well. Atmore (2012:14) and Hwenha (2014:31) argue that the quality of ECE depends on teaching and learning done by trained ECD teachers. The teaching strategies showed that she was trained on CAPS. She only needed to improve on offering individualised support to different learners. Ms Zondi’s knowledge and strategies could be aligned with her number of years teaching Grade R and additional training she received. It appeared that, although she faced the challenge of a big classroom, she applied the strategies she had learned from workshops for teaching language in her class. This study showed that teachers should strive to focus on strategies that are prescribed for the grade in the CAPS. The use of
resources also benefits learners in mastering the concepts. It also helps the teacher to master the concept.

- **Mrs Mbelu**

  The classroom observations provided evidence that Mrs Mbelu used various strategies in teaching reading. She gave learners flash cards with words to spell and then to match those words with words and pictures on the chart. I noticed that learners spelled the words properly without pictures attached to them. Each learner in a group picked up a flash card with a word to spell and pasted it on a chart. There were seven learners in a group but there were eight spelling words. The following table presents the words spelled by Grade R learners in term 4.

  Table 5.3: Words spelled by Grade R learners in term 4

<p>| | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Inyoka</em> (snake)</td>
<td><em>Ingwenya</em> (crocodile)</td>
<td><em>Icilikishe</em> (lizard)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Idada</em> (duck)</td>
<td><em>Ukhozi</em> (eagle)</td>
<td><em>Ihobe</em> (dove)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Ulovane</em> (chameleon)</td>
<td><em>Inciniba</em> (ostrich)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the above activity, Mrs Mbelu’s aim was to engage learners in reading. Learners were enthusiastic during the lesson and wanted to take extra words. Learners divided themselves and solved the problem of one extra word. The teacher gave them opportunities to explore their problem-solving skills. Mrs Mbelu’s teaching strategy supported Freire (2000:52) who believes in a problem-posing pedagogy which promotes teacher-learner interaction in the classroom. This strategy is aligned with the aims of CAPS highlighted in Chapter 2 which emphasises that learners need to be engaged in activities involving higher order thinking (DoE, 2011a:5).

Mrs Mbelu also engaged learners in independent reading activity. She gave learners different wordless picture books to read independently. She thought that all learners were at the same reading level for picture books. I noticed that some learners were bored and did not participate in reading those wordless picture books; they wanted readers with pictures and words. Mrs Mbelu’s lack of communication with learners resulted in five of the seven learners leaving the wordless picture books on the table and taking books with words and pictures. They read words below the pictures independently by spelling them. Some learners called their friends to read with them. I
noticed that another two learners had no interest in reading and they enjoyed paging through picture books without reading. Mrs Mbelu referred to this challenge during the interviews. I noticed that Mrs Mbelu did not understand that learners do not operate at the same level.

In this regard, teacher and the learner should be active participants in teaching and learning context (Freire, 1978:57). Teachers should communicate with learners in terms of books to be read in class. Teachers need to understand that, although Grade R are of the same age, their abilities and interests are not the same. It should be understood that learners operate at different cognitive levels and teachers should have that provision in their planning for activities (Bruner, 1962:32; Piaget, 1962:181; Vygotsky, 1978:40). Time for free play and for independent reading should be considered by Grade R teachers as they give learners an opportunity to do activities of their choice.

The reading activities above affirmed the young learners’ love for reading and emphasised the importance of support. It appeared that Mrs Mbelu did not create enough opportunities for reading activities and that learners were restricted in choosing their own books to read. It is also evident from the classroom observation that the reading corner was not used effectively to instil the love of reading in learners. I agree that scaffolding would not be effective if teacher-learner interaction is rigid (Moalosi, 2013:4) as Mrs Mbelu’s class appeared. This study proved that there are activities learners can do independently (Moalosi, 2013:4; Siyepu, 2013:3; Vygotsky, 1978:47).

I also observed the morning ring where Mrs Mbelu interacted with learners using various teaching and learning strategies. During the morning ring, she emphasised greetings, health check and introduced the theme of the week and learners recalled events, weather and mental activities. Learners answered questions in full sentences. This lesson was aimed at developing listening and speaking skills as well as language vocabulary. The strategies she used were aligned with the CAPS. The study supported a view that learners should be critically literate in order that they could produce new knowledge that would benefit them in their daily lives (Freire, 2000:72). In the South African context, the plan is that by 2030, Grade R learners would view language as the foundation of lifelong learning provided that teachers engage learners in reading.
CAPS indicates in language policy document that picture interpretation, drama, poems and music should be part of the content.

The learner attendance register was part of the morning ring activities. Learners did not pay attention to this activity, even when it was an obvious everyday activity. It was evident that the learner activity on the attendance register was not done in a fun-filled way. Mrs Mbelu could have used varied activities that require maximum participation of learners, such as grouping them according to their birthday months, sizes of shoes, body height and other interesting activities that are highlighted in CAPS (DBE, 2011b:8). She only asked learners to respond with yes or no. Mrs Mbelu’s learner attendance register activity did not support the view that children’s play begins with positive social interaction with a skilful adult (Bandura, 1972:45; Gray & MacBlain, 2012:76; Vygotsky, 1978:87). I believe that, in Grade R, if lessons are approach in an unstructured way, it is difficult to win the attention of learners. Play approach should always be applied for effective teaching and learning of any concept development.

I observed Mrs Mbelu’s teaching and learning strategies in emergent writing activities. A group of seven learners completed words by writing letter “K” in their workbooks. I noticed that learners were competent in writing the following words;

**Isikere (scissors) ikama(comb) ikeyiki (cake) ikepusi (cap)**

I noticed that almost all learners could write the letter with confidence. In this activity, learners were guided by pictures.

Mrs Mbelu was very creative in teaching the letter sound and recognition. She used songs that were relevant to the theme of the week and to make the lesson enjoyable and encourage all learners to participate. I observed a lesson on storytelling, which was about hare and elephant. She started by saying:

“**masiqhwabe sonke sithi qhwa qhwa qhwa; masiqhwabe sonke sithi qhwa qhwa qhwa (let us all clap) qhwa qhwa qhwa.**”

All learners joined in the short rhyme. Mrs Mbelu began to narrate a story about a hare and elephant while learners paid attention and answered closed and open-ended questions about the story. This shows that teacher creativity is the key in any lesson. The language demands teacher creativity because it involves drama, body movement,
expression of feelings and gestures and these develop learners’ self-esteem in class. Through language competency, learners develop confidence across other subjects. Learners are cooperative when the lesson is in their mother language and linked to their cultural background (Freire, 2000:58; Vygotsky, 1978:57).

- *Mrs Lindani*

In lesson observation, Mrs Lindani read words naming the parts of an elephant from the poster. The words were as follows:

Table 5.4: Words and syllables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Words in syllables</th>
<th>English translation</th>
<th>Number of syllables</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>l-ndlo-vu</td>
<td>elephant</td>
<td>Three claps</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U-m-si-la</td>
<td>tail</td>
<td>Four claps</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U-m-bo-ko</td>
<td>elephant trunk</td>
<td>Four claps</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The above activity indicated that learners counted words in syllables by clapping hands each time they sound words. Mrs Lindani pointed at the words and not at the pictures when reading. Learners also break up and clap the syllables for their names. The activity appeared enjoyable and all learners participated. In my observation, lesson was CAPS aligned. It was one of the reading activities highlighted in CAPS (DoE, 2011a:5-10).

Teaching and learning strategies were also revealed in an emergent writing activity. Mrs Lindani taught learners how to write letters in the air, on sand and then in their books. These strategies are recommended by Freire (1996:28) who believes that they are basic strategies teachers need to engage learners on before they start formal schooling. Then, learners could be engaged in sentences but in Grade R, they could copy full words. In this study, learners used various tools for emergent writing such as paint brushes, wax crayons and even their fingers. The research findings showed that learners experienced difficulties in differentiating the letter b and d and p and q. Mrs Lindani demonstrated the writing of the letters based on the home language CAPS policy document and the Grade R to 3 handwriting guidelines document. The lesson reflected that Mrs Lindani did what Vygotsky (1967:16) called scaffolding which is the strategy that is used by the teacher to help the learner to improve her or his ability to
solve a problem and to tackle more complex interpretations. Sounding of words that are similar in shape demand that Grade R teachers need to use various strategies to teach the concept and be patient. These letters need to be taught separately to avoid confusion for learners.

Another lesson on writing the letter **K** was observed. Mrs Lindani explained to learners that when writing the letter “**K**” you vertically draw a long stick (*bazobe intonga ende emileyo*) and join it with two short slanted sticks in front, one slanted upward and one slanted downward (*idityaniswe neentonga ezimbini ezixwesileyo ezimfutshane ngaphambili enye ijonge phezulu enye ezantsi*). She demonstrated how to write “**K**” in the air using her finger. Then she asked learners to identify a letter sound “**K**” from a word *umboko*. The sequential steps she took in teaching the letter sound showed that she understood the CAPS policy document on emergent writing in Grade R class clearly. Rousseau (2015:151) posits that teacher’s extensive subject knowledge of the material provides the best learning opportunities in classroom context. The strategies used in this activity show that if the teacher is clear about how to introduce the material, the learning can be scaffolded for each learner. Language also demands teacher creativity to support utilisation of resources. Learners show maximum cooperation when the lesson is in their home language.

- Mrs Solani

Ms Solani also involved the whole class in shared reading. She started a lesson with a song. The aim of the song was to gain learners’ attention.

> *Lixesha lebali hlalani ngendawo zenu! It’s time for a story, take your seats!*

She repeated the song until learners settled down. Ms Solani read the title of the story “*uyazi na*” (do you know) and asked learners to join in reading the title. She started reading from the cover page by asking the following questions:

> *What do you see in the picture? What else do you see in the picture? What is happening in the picture?*

She read a story and engaged learners in answering questions. Some questions in mathematics involved number of words in a sentence and in the title. Ms Solani’s aim was to apply mathematics across other subjects. Learners responded positively to all
the questions asked. At the end of the story, learners were asked to put the pictures in sequence, according to the events in the story. Each group was given a pack of A4 pictures to do the activity. For the advanced groups, Ms Solani read short sentences written on strips of paper and learners pasted them below the pictures. The story was left on the wall for revision and to instil incidental reading.

Ms Solani presented the lesson in an enthusiastic way and learners enjoyed the lesson. The literature confirms that Ms Solani used a problem-posing pedagogy method which favours the discovery of information through critical thoughts and free communication (Freire, 2000:46). The problem-posing method accommodates both teacher and learners. In light of this lesson, it can be concluded that when the lesson is planned, teacher can engage learners according to their levels of development and receive maximum learners' cooperation. Various teaching and learning strategies can be used to scaffold learners. Learners can also learn from each when working in groups. Although the lesson was enjoyable, it was difficult to control and support learners in big groups in a big class.

On the first day of classroom observation, during the morning ring, Ms Solani grouped learners according to the five school days of the week. There were eleven learners in each group. Group one was named Mvulo (Monday), group two Lwesibini, (Tuesday) Group three Lwesithathu (Wednesday), group four Lwesine (Thursday) and group five named Lwesihlanu (Friday). She then marked an attendance register where learners came according to their group names. Learners enjoyed the lesson. She changed group names and learners each day.

The strategy Ms Solani used is commended by Koen and Abrahim (2013:2) who believe on the use of real-world examples as a context in authentic teaching and learning environment. I believe that learners need to spend time in real-life contexts that provide them with knowledge and skills to develop in totality. Although the strategies were relevant to CAPS, for the group work to be successful, a small number of learners is needed (Naidoo & Mkhabela, 2017:12). As a teacher, the number of learners in a group should range between five and eight so that they will be able to acquire teamwork skills and to be engaged in critical thinking skills which are important for problem-solving.
On the second day of classroom observation, Ms Solani engaged learners in a variety of activities during the morning ring and used different teaching and learning strategies. She asked all learners to show their lunch boxes and grouped them according to the colour of their lunch boxes. Learners counted members of each group. Ms Solani asked learners which group had more and fewer members. She was teaching the concept ‘few and many’ as prescribed by CAPS. The morning ring activities appeared meaningful to learners. In my view, a well-planned lesson instils discipline in learners. I noted that she maximised learner engagement in the learning process which was one of the aims of CAPS in the Foundation Phase. The use of various strategies in Grade R class to accommodate diverse learning styles and abilities through real-world activities is highly recommended (Naidoo & Mkabela, 2017:10). The well-planned lesson involves the content, skills, knowledge and remedial plan to support learners (Reche et al., 2012: 21). The morning ring lesson developed counting and sorting skills and were meaningful to learners. Teaching and learning can be claimed as effective because it covered the content, knowledge and skills relevant to Grade R learners and lesson was learner-centred.

Ms Solani also guided learners with questions on an activity about the weather of the day. She asked:

_Injani imozulu namhlanje? (How is the weather today?)_

_Ucinga ukuba kuzakwenzeka ntoni emalanga? (What do you think will happen in the afternoon?)_

Learners responded positively with different answers. The above findings showed that learners were familiar with weather conditions on television and on the weather chart posted on the wall which had icons that indicated weather conditions. From Vygotsky’s theoretical perspective, language in this lesson is seen as a tool that teacher used in communicating subject specific vocabulary (Vygotsky, 1986:187), which, in this case, was weather. The lesson suggested that listening and speaking should be practised in Grade R class as it is the most language component that help the learner to cope in learning processes. It is noted that if the lesson is in the language of the learner teaching and learning becomes more effective.

- Synthesis
I can conclude that the four Grade R teachers of sampled schools demonstrated a sound knowledge and skills on how to teach language in the grade. The challenge they experienced was the lack of space and large numbers of learners that affected their teaching strategies. They showed how to teach integrated lessons and they followed the daily programme. Lessons on how language involved mathematics and life skills activities were demonstrated. The following sections present how mathematics was taught in Grade R class.

- Mathematics teaching and learning strategies

- Ms Zondi

Ms Zondi demonstrated teaching and learning strategies in mathematics lesson by introducing the number 8 (eight). The number was mixed with numbers that learners had learned from Term 1 to Term 3. She asked learners to count forward and backward from 1 to 10. She picked one learner in each group to count from 1 to 10. She asked learners to demonstrate writing numbers from 1 to 8 in the air and on the chalkboard. A group of learners stood in a queue. Each learner wrote a number in the air before writing on the chalkboard. There were two learners from different groups who had a problem in writing number 4 and 7 on the chalkboard. Ms Zondi then asked other learners to explain how to write numbers using their fingers and pretend that they were writing on a piece of paper. The two learners were asked to point out the numbers on a wall chart. They pointed out the numbers correctly but they could not write them down. Most learners counted properly in groups and as individuals.

In the above lesson, Ms Zondi used whole-class teaching instead of the play-based approach. Resources were very limited in her lesson; as a result, the lesson was little over-structured and she did not consider that learners do not learn at the same pace. Vygotsky (1978:57) insists on pacing learners according to their level of development for scaffolding. Chikutuma and Mawere (2013:9) highlight that the play-based approach gives learners an opportunity to explore the learning environment by utilising resources. I can conclude that the structured approach Ms Zondi used meant that learners might experience learning difficulties in mathematics as she could not offer individual support. Learners with barriers in writing numbers should be engaged on hands-on activities that involve moulding numbers using play dough, tracing numbers, use puzzles, cutting papers and building the number. These materials are available
almost in Grade R classrooms. Learners do not forget the concepts they were engaged in them.

I also observed another activity where Ms Zondi called a few learners in front and gave them flash cards with pictures and numbers. Each child raised a flash card on hand and learners on the floor read pictures as well as the numbers. Ms Zondi asked learners the following questions:

* Mingaphi imifanekiso ekumakhadi kaSindi? (How many pictures are on Sindi’s flash card?)

* Mingaphi imifanekiso ekumakhadi kaNozi? (How many pictures are on Nozi’s flash card?)

* Leliphi inani elibhalwe emantla kwikhadi likaLinda? (What number is written on top of Lindi’s flash card?)

I found that all the answers given by learners were correct. Another lesson on mathematics activity on number range 1 to 8 was observed. Ms Zondi called three learners and gave them different numbers of pegs and flash cards. Each learner had to clip pegs on flash cards according to the number of pictures. Learner 1 clipped three pegs on a flash card having three pictures and the number 3; learner 2 clipped six pegs on a flash card having six pictures and the written number 6. Learner number 3 clipped eight pegs on a flash card having eight pictures. Ms Zondi reminded learners where they had to start counting. This refers to directionality. She was aware that she had to use various strategies in teaching the concept to accommodate different learner abilities, as was evident in introducing the number eight with other numbers learned in previous terms. According to Ms Zondi, the lesson was planned to develop number sense 1-8.

In my observation, there were other activities Ms Zondi could have added to develop number sense such as sharing, adding, matching, many or few and one to one correspondence as there were many manipulatives in her classroom. Learners could have constructed knowledge when they interact within their social environment (Vygotsky, 1978:87). The play theorists also maintain that a lack of space and big classes could hinder the teacher from engaging learners in various activities and from assessing learners properly (Chimhenga, 2016:33; Moalosi, 2013:2;
This confirmed Hoadley’s study (2014:3) which claimed that learner feedback is of poor quality in rural schools. The claim could be aligned with teaching big numbers which make it difficult to support each learner effectively so that the feedback about the learner performance would be authentic. The findings of this study confirmed that there are Grade R classes which still accommodate big numbers and that teaching and learning consequently becomes ineffective.

- **Mrs Mbelu**

I observed a mathematics lesson demonstrated by Mrs Mbelu where she gave learners flash cards with different pictures to cut out. These were numbered 1 to 10. They matched flash cards with pictures and with numbers. I noticed that learners were familiar with cutting and matching activities. They cut out all the mathematics flash cards, sorted and matched numbers and words following the instructions provided. Learners seemed to have mastered the number sense. The learner performance in the activity acknowledged that in developing a child’s cognitive thinking in the classroom, teachers need to adopt various strategies that are highlighted in Grade R mathematics CAPS (DBE, 2011b: 5-10; Feza, 2013:4). This study confirmed that teachers can improve learner performance if they focus on the strategies stipulated in the CAPS for mathematics. The CAPS has all the strategies to teach the concepts. The strategies need thorough planning which involves resources to be organised, activities to be designed based on knowledge and skills to be achieved.

- **Mrs Lindani**

Mrs Lindani demonstrated a mathematics lesson where learners were asked to demonstrate how to write numbers in the air and on the chalkboard from left to right starting from number one to number nine. Mrs Lindani called each learner to write numbers on the chalkboard. Learners responded positively. Then, learners explained how to write each number in isiXhosa. I noticed that Mrs Lindani emphasised that language is used across other subjects. The lesson was for mathematics but listening and speaking and handwriting strategies were practised. The lesson showed a flow of integration which is the focus of a daily programme. The learner engagement is encouraged by theorists of play who argue that in reception year learners believe in doing rather than being instructed (Bandura,1977:14; Vygotsky, 1986:56).
This study agreed with the proponents of Vygotsky’s theory that mathematics concept knowledge is improved when it is presented in the language of the learner (Feza, 2013:4; Longman, 2014: 108; O’Brien, 2014: 4-5; Ryan et al., 2014:31). Language appears to be the most critical subject even in Grade R and it needs to be taken into consideration by curriculum planners. I posit that if learners can be competent in their home language they may deal with mathematics concepts with ease and the purpose of Grade R in the Foundation Phase would be achieved. Learners should learn mathematics language in their home language.

- **Ms Solani**

The lesson in mathematics that involved concept 10 was taught by Ms Solani. She asked learners to count from 1 to 10 in isiXhosa and learners counted as follows: nye (1), mbini (2), ntathu (3), ne (4), ntlanu (5), ntandathu (6), sixhenxe (7), sibhozo (8). Learners were asked to make sibhozo (8), lithoba (9) and lishumi (10) using play dough. The whole class was engaged in this practical activity. In my observation, Ms Solani did not use various strategies or engage learners to use more resources in her lesson. Learners were limited in manipulating the resources. In my opinion, the lesson suggested that when learners engaged in a problem-solving technique, they should be provided with various resources to strengthen concept development. Learners need to be engaged in activities such as to identify the number on charts or in written text, group objects and write their number and many more activities that are related to numbers. Learners in Grade R need to be problem-solvers and teacher should apply a problem-solving approach as proposed by Freire (1970:10) and Bruner (1962:32) in teaching practices.

During lesson observations, I also noticed that Ms Solani engaged learners on free, guided and instructional play activities. I observed her dividing learners into five groups of ten and giving each group an activity to do. The group were too big. In my understanding, a group should have five to eight learners. The following are examples of the activities that were done:

*Group 1: Learners were given a box with Lego Duplo bricks to make a nest of birds.*
Group 2: Learners were given wordless picture books to read in pairs and talk about what they saw in the books.

Group 3 and 4: Learners were given Lego Duplo bricks to do anything they wanted to do.

Group 6: Teacher gave learners Lego Duplo bricks to sort objects according to shapes and colours.

Ms Solani asked all the groups to report back on the activity they had done. Group 5 explained that they sorted green circles, red squares and yellow triangles. Group 2 reported that they saw Neno, Kupukeji and Kami but did not tell what they were doing. Group 1 learners reported that they made a nest of a bird but others said the nest of the bird was not like that and it is made with grass. Ms Solani intervened by explaining that some birds’ nests are sold in shops and others are made by birds themselves. The learner dialogue in the above lesson confirmed that learners should be given an opportunity to construct knowledge from their cultural context as early as in ECE (Gray & MacBlain, 2012: 12; Nordlof, 2014:9). In addition, Naidoo and Mkabela (2017:5) support Ms Solani’s strategy of dividing learners but into small groups. They suggest that more time can be used in engaging learners in activities within the classroom. The challenge is with having big group of learners because some learners do not participate and they disturb those who are willing to learn. The grouping of learners also needs teachers who are equipped and competent to work with big numbers. Some learners, especially those who are shy, do not gain anything from being in a big group.

At the end of the mathematics lesson, Ms Solani sang a song that told learners that the lesson was over. The song went as follows:

“siyakoqa! siyakoqa! siyakoqa!” (We tidy up! we tidy up! we tidy up!)

In another observation lesson, I noticed that some learners in groups did not participate and Ms Solani did not pay them any attention. I also observed that the group activities included creative arts, independent reading and mathematics concepts. Physical education was not included in any the activities. During a follow-up conversation, Ms Solani indicated that the limited space in her class and the school premises made it difficult to engage learners in physical education activities. I noticed that she was not accustomed to improvising space for physical education. I aligned this with a lack of
understanding of the importance of physical education in strengthening literacy and numeracy teaching and learning in Grade R class.

- Synthesis

The literature confirmed that most South African learners are behind in achieving most of the curriculum and that causes them not to reach the educational benchmarks (Spaull, 2016:19). I argue that access to quality education in rural schools appears at a long way off if content coverage is not monitored. It appeared that Grade R learners would progress to Grade 1 with content gaps. Monitoring of content coverage by knowledgeable SMTs on content can make a change on Grade R teaching and learning.

In summary, all four Grade R teachers showed competency in teaching numbers in mathematics. They demonstrated a sound knowledge of integration in all the two subjects. The only thing I noticed was an imbalance in teaching mathematics content areas. All the sampled teachers focused much on the content area which deals with numbers, operations and relationships. The findings are associated with teachers’ lack of content knowledge in some mathematics concepts (Mkabela, 2016:35). The resources for teaching numbers were not much used. In all the sampled schools, there were indoor materials that can be used for mathematics computation. The lack of resource utilisation limits learners in exploring more information in mathematics. I think it could be a reason why the ANA results for learners in Grade 1 showed that they could not do simple sharing activities (DBE, 2014b:17).

The following paragraphs present findings on teaching and learning life skills in Grade R classroom.

- Life skills teaching and learning strategies

Life skills is recognised as a subject that prepares learners to develop holistically. It also strengthens language and mathematics implementation. The findings from the four Grade R teachers are presented as follows:

- Ms Zondi
Ms Zondi demonstrated her teaching and learning strategies in the life skills study area which is creative arts. She gave learners an activity in workbooks to colour a picture of a dinosaur. The instruction was as follows;

*Dibanisa amachokoza ukuze uzobe isilwanyana esingasekhoyo. Faka umbala emfanekisweni wakho (Join the dots to draw an animal that no longer exists. Put the colour on your picture.)*

In this activity, colours were given numbers; for example, yellow was number 1, blue was number 2, green was number 3, brown was number 4. Learners had to find the place in the picture where the number was written and put in the colour. Learners did not observe the colours they had to use. Only 10 learners out of 37 did this activity correctly. According to Helmbold (2014:108), well-planned adult guided activities result in good learner performance. It implied that teaching and learning was not well planned and became ineffective.

According to my observation, Ms Zondi did not provide clear instructions on what learners had to do. She did not demonstrate the activity before giving learners instructions. She felt embarrassed to find that learners used wrong colours in wrong places. In my view, the teacher did not take drawing seriously. Learners were not provided with any background to the activity. Teacher-guided activities should be planned. Teachers need to demonstrate the skill they want learners to practise. In drawing activities, learners should be taken step-by-step in doing it. As Bandura (1977:14) indicates in his theory, learning in Grade R takes place through observation. It would mean that once learners observed something, they would demonstrate their cognitive perception (Bandura, 1983:103).

Ms Zondi’s teaching and learning strategies were also observed when she engaged with learners to complete a drawing activity in the learners’ workbooks. The question in the workbooks said:

*Gqibezela ukuzoba la mabhathane. Yenza amachokoza ukuze amaphiko afane. (Complete by drawing these butterflies. Draw dotted lines to make the wings the same.)*

Ms Zondi asked learners if they noticed any exceptional facts on the butterflies. The first butterfly had a blue wing with three yellow circles and then learners had to
complete the plain second wing with three dotted circles following the pattern of the first wing. The second wings of the other three wings were plain and had no dotted circles. Learners had to look at the number of circles and colours used per wing to be able to draw the second wings. Learners completed the activity up to the fourth wing. Only five out of 37 learners completed the second activity with success. Their drawings were neat and they used colours appropriately to ensure that the second wings were the same as the first wings.

In light of the above activity, Ms Zondi emphasised the importance of following instructions given. In my view, she had no purpose with the activity. It appeared that she only wanted to keep learners busy. Reche et al. (2012:4) uphold the view that proper planning involves the content that highlights the skills and knowledge to be learned and the remedial plan to support learners to understand the concept. It was difficult to predict the skills and knowledge which Ms Zondi planned to achieve. I affirmed that she experienced a challenge in planning life skills content as the CAPS indicates that effective teaching and learning requires thorough planning of activities which include resources to make learning fun. I can conclude that life skills subject was not well taught in Grade R at Zamukulungisa FSS. Life skills is a subject that needs planning of its own. There are life skills resources teachers should use for planning in order to support mathematics and language implementation. Koen and Ebrahim (2013:2) highlight that life skills require teachers who are competent to apply and transfer content knowledge effectively.

- Mrs Mbelu

In a creative art lesson, Mrs Mbelu gave learners wax crayons and plain A4 paper to colour parts of an elephant. The instructions were “Here are the crayons and pictures of elephant; colour this picture.” In this activity, among 48 learners, only fifteen who answered the question correctly. This showed that the instructions were not clear to most learners. Kanjee and Mthembu (2015:142) suggest that teachers need to be clear about the content they should assess and the questions to ask. The findings proved that Grade R teachers have limited knowledge and skills regarding basic principles on assessment (Deacon, 2016:9). I assumed that these learners who performed well had background knowledge on drawing activities. Some learners could identify a grey colour of an elephant in the poster and used a grey crayon for colouring. This meant
that they had good colour perception. Others were very fast with their drawings but used colours that were the colour of an elephant. It is emphasised that assessment needs to take into consideration children who may need additional learning support (Demircan & Olgan, 2012:2; Riley-Ayers, 2014:9). Mrs Mbelu did not attempt to provide any extra support to these learners. It appeared that Mrs Mbelu did not take drawing activities seriously. These learners required greater support. In my observation, Mrs Mbelu had a content gap in teaching creative arts, therefore she needed further support on life skills. Through creative arts skills, learners are able to develop fine motor skills which support them in writing. Teachers’ role is to attend to the planning of the activities and take into cognisance that creative art is a pre-skill to writing.

In another creative art lesson, learners were given play dough to mould a model of an elephant. Mrs Mbelu demonstrated how learners were to carry out this activity. She guided learners on how to roll play dough until it became soft for moulding a model of an elephant. Then, she continued guiding learners on how to mould each part of an elephant until the elephant model was completed and displayed on a theme table. I noted that learners performed better when they were supported. The findings showed that learners performed well when they were guided and received clear instructions in their home language (Feza, 2013:4; Longman, 2014:108; Ryan et al., 2014: 4; O’Brien, 2014:4). In addition, it appears that learners learn better in small groups.

I also observed a free play activity where learners were given a box of Lego Duplo bricks (construction play material) with various shapes and colours to make whatever they wanted. Three learners built towers with a strong flat baseband. Mrs Mbelu asked them to explain how they did that. Learners indicated that they started to build a strong flat base to prevent their towers from falling. This implied meaningful play as they could use objects for a purpose. The observation revealed that learners were immersed in a challenging activity that demanded their higher-order thinking skills. The lesson supported the theory of constructivism which states that learners are not empty vessels but they need the opportunity to construct their own knowledge and understanding of the concept being learned (Mulaudzi, 2016:34). The study proved that when learners are given resources, they are able to discover information by themselves (Bruner, 1960:47). Learners portrayed that they had the potential to manage themselves when given tasks to do and to take responsibility and accountability.
I noticed during the classroom observations that some learners did not participate in the activity and were left unattended by Mrs Mbelu. The play teaching methodology was also not very effective in her class. There was little support and monitoring provided to groups. Mrs Mbelu worked with seven groups, each consisting of seven learners. This posed challenges in that she could not attend to all groups properly. Classroom observations, however, confirmed that Mrs Mbelu was trained on how to group learners for free play, guided and instructional activities. I noticed that she lacked classroom management as learners were noisy and moving around the classroom, making the class disruptive. She always had to raise her voice when she needed learners’ attention. Some learners did not focus on what they were instructed to do; instead, they chose their own activities. It appeared that even if teachers are trained large numbers will remain a challenge in rural schools if not addressed.

In one of the lessons I observed, Mrs Mbelu composed a song relevant to a theme of the week, which was based on an elephant (Indlovu). The song was as follows:

**Table: 5.5 The song about wild animals**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Izilwanyana zasendle!</th>
<th>Wild animals!</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Izilwanyana zasendle!</td>
<td>Wild animals!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ezinye zikhulu!</td>
<td>Some are big!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ezinye zincinci!</td>
<td>Some are small!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ezinye zinemisila!</td>
<td>Some have tails!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ezinye zinamhlo makhulu!</td>
<td>Some have big eyes!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ziyoyikeka! Ziyoyikeka!</td>
<td>They are scary? They are scary!</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The song described wild animals including an elephant. Mrs Mbelu asked learners some questions about animals and learners responded. She composed a song that was related to a theme to develop learner vocabulary. Learners were engaged in a simple tune and actions to sing a song. In this song, learners were engaged in integrated learning. The song was part of performing arts activities. Language was used extensively to give learners an opportunity to communicate through acting out a song. The maths concepts *zikhulu* (*big*) and *zincinci* (*small*) were also taught in a song and were modelled. The lesson supported the views of Vygotsky and Piaget who believe that language in early grades should reflect the basic language concepts.
learner acquires from immediate home environment (Piaget, 1962:33; Vygotsky, 1978:57). In my study, Mrs Mbelu showed creativity to unpack the concepts and this supports the finding by Sheldon (2014:16) who proposed that Grade R teachers should be competent in teaching life skills to meet the targets of CAPS in the upper grades. Teachers will be competent when teachers fully implement life skills so that learners get daily practice in the classroom context. In addition, if life skills could be recognised as a subject like mathematics and language in schools, mathematics and language will improve. The skilful teacher understands that when introducing a new theme, she should begin with a song or rhyme that is related to a theme.

During classroom observations, Mrs Mbelu also instructed learners to complete various workbook activities and to do drawing activities in their exercise books. She also took learners through instructional activities that involved bead work, making of models using play dough and emergent reading. The lesson showed that Mrs Mbelu had an idea on how to scaffold learners in teaching and learning process as Vygotsky suggests it for effective learning (Vygotsky, 1978: 40). Some learners portrayed an understanding of an activity. These learners finished their work with no time. This proved that their fine motor skills developed because it was in term three. The study revealed that some learners were ready to progress to Grade 1.

The challenge was on the majority of learners who could not draw anything in their drawing books. The findings on learners who could not draw links to the claim of Bruwer et al. (2014:18) that in South Africa Grade 1 learners who were evaluated for readiness showed poor development of gross and fine motor skills and become slow in completing activities. This suggested that Grade R teachers need training on how to teach life skills effectively. In Grade R, teaching and learning is evaluated by the quality of learners on readiness in Grade 1. Teaching and learning is effective when the majority of the class cope well and are fully supported. The majority of learners cope well when they are active participants in their learning as Bruner (1961:66) recommends.

Mrs Lindani;

I observed that Mrs Lindani instructed six groups of eight learners to do various activities. Learners were engaged in bead work using different colours to make patterns of two; in moulding a model of an elephant using play dough; in making the
letter K with play dough; drawing paths from an elephant to a tree; and the last group used construction materials for free play activity. Mrs Lindani wanted to ensure that all groups rotated to all learning stations.

The strategy was good as all learners had to participate in class. The strategy was meant to catered for different learner needs in her class. However, I noticed that the strategy was not effective in an overcrowded class. This confirmed the findings by Taole and Mohapi (2013:3) which indicated that play-based approach is not applicable in big classes. It was very difficult to present a wide range of activities in an overcrowded classroom. As a result, learners who needed individual support were ignored because of the size of the class was not conducive. Teachers may not see the negative impact of the strategy of using a wide range of activities simultaneously up until they record individual learner performance. In Grade R, learners should be supported in small groups and the outcome of teaching and learning would be positive.

- **Ms Solani**

Ms Solani also demonstrated her teaching strategies on life skills lesson where she taught about the domestic birds. She introduced a theme of the week which was about *iintaka zasekhaya (domestic birds)*. Ms Solani showed learners the different kinds of birds on a poster. Learners participated positively as most birds appeared familiar to them. She asked learners to mention examples of domestic birds they know (birds that are found at home) such as *inkukhu (chicken)*, *irhanisi (goose)* and *ikewu (duck)*. The aim was to assess previous knowledge of learners. Learners were asked to point at the birds on a poster. Ms Solani engaged learners in learning about characteristics of birds and asked them questions regarding their feathers, number of legs and eyes and their beaks. The learner performance in the observed lesson confirmed the research findings that teaching and learning that accommodates content from learners’ environment and cultural experiences tends to achieve better learning outcomes (Vygotsky, 1978:59). Vygotsky (1978:59) emphasises that previous knowledge of the learner should be considered as a knowledge base in teaching and learning. I agree in that if the content is aligned with what the child already knows, barriers to learning will be minimised. Piaget (1972:32) also stresses that learners’ previous knowledge should be used to link the new knowledge teacher wants to impart to the learner.
Learners then recited a rhyme about birds. Learners were told to clap hands three times if the animal or bird called by Ms Solani can fly but if the animal or bird cannot fly learners would not clap hands. Teacher started:

*Bhabha bhabha (Fly Fly!)*  *Intaka iyabhabha (Bird flies!)*  *Inyosi iyabhabha (bee flies!)*  *Ihagu iyabhabha (Pig flies!)*  *Ihashe liyabhabha (Horse flies!)*.

Some learners made mistakes and clapped for animals that could not fly. Ms Solani’s aim was to assess learners on the characteristics of birds. Mrs Solani also portrayed a sound creativity in designing a rhyme which prompt learners to think and participate in lesson. The study finds that it is important for teachers to plan lessons that use examples that are within the context of their learners. The challenge was a lack of space as learners could not move freely when reciting the rhyme. The small classroom situation and overcrowding made it difficult for learners to do activities that demand body movements. The study clearly established that overcrowded classrooms become a barrier to learning and make teaching and learning ineffective (Mulaudzi, 2016:160).

• Synthesis

The findings of the four sampled schools showed that life skills as a subject was not adequately taught in rural schools. Physical education and creative arts were the study areas which received least time in teaching and learning practices. The Grade R teachers lacked knowledge and understanding that most academic skills are invested in life skills activities. It is my personal perception that the challenges that affect language and mathematics will not be resolved until life skills is recognised as a subject with activities to support these two critical Foundation Phase subjects. I argue that learners will continue experiencing challenges in writing, colouring and cutting activities, will be slow in completing activities and in developing language vocabulary and will present untidy work (Bruwer et al., 2014:18; Feza, 2014b: 5; Janse Van Rensburg, 2015:3). The availability of quality resources including infrastructure and well-trained teachers will make a change.

5.2.2.2 Utilisation of resources in classroom context

In Chapter 4, the findings on the shortage of resources and the influence on teaching and learning was presented. The four observed Grade R classrooms showed that there was a shortage of resources for teaching and learning. Modisaotsile (2012:4) confirms
a decline of standard of education in South Africa because of the shortage of resources. The findings on the shortage of resources in South African rural schools are supported by Khumalo and Mji (2014:270). In this section, I present the findings on the utilisation of resources in classroom context from the four sampled schools.

• Ms Zondi

Ms Zondi mostly used workbooks. The other indoor material that were in her classroom included Lego Duplo bricks (construction toys), story mat, pegs, maths flash cards and wordless story booklets which were still in short supply and had been received from NGO in the second last term. I noted that Ms Zondi did not engage learners much in manipulating resource material in teaching and learning. When she introduced the letter b, she should have used flash cards and then taken the learners to a workbook activity. The flash cards and puzzles were available but were not used. In another lesson when she taught mathematics, she also had flash cards with numbers 1-10, some of which were on the wall. Learners were not referred to those flash cards. There were also learners who struggled with identifying and writing 4 and 7 but the materials were not used to scaffold learning. The lack of use of resources was also observed in life skills lessons when Ms Zondi engaged learners in drawing activities that were in workbooks.

I observed that Ms Zondi did not do independent reading in her class. Learners were not given time for independent reading. There was a corner library in the classroom with a few books but learners did not use them. During an informal conversation, Ms Zondi explained that she used the materials when she taught the whole class. She stated that she used the materials when teaching letters of the alphabet in words, teaching a story and other activities such as drawing. She elaborated that learners tore and spoiled the materials so she could not let them use these materials on their own. It is evident that Ms Zondi did not provide opportunities for independent reading. This was not in accordance with the CAPS which indicates that learners should be given access to various materials to read independently (DBE, 2011a:15).

In lesson observations, Ms Zondi did not engage learners in practical activities. Ms Zondi did not practise the theory of play in her classroom which Bruner (1960:79) recommends as a key vehicle for the promotion of learning in the Grade R classroom because learners discover new things as they construct new knowledge through play.
Lack of utilisation of resources could be a contributory factor on poor learner performance in Grade R. Resources support learners to understand concepts better and become motivated in learning. In Grade R, teachers can collect waste matter and teach concepts effectively. The lack of using use of resources in teaching and learning may cause various challenges to learners such as poor perception in drawing, lack of mathematics language, late development of fine motor skills for handwriting and many more skills learner need for learning (Feza, 2014a: 10; Bruwer et al., 2014:18).

• **Mrs Mbelu**

During the time that I spent at the school, I did not see Mrs Mbelu engaging learners in any physical education activities, yet there were materials such as skipping ropes, hoops, balls and bean bags in class. Observations confirmed that the opportunities for learners to be engaged in physical education activities were limited. The findings of this study showed that learners had few opportunities to access quality education through play and experimentation (Hlupo et al., 2013:3). In my perception, Mrs Mbelu lacked knowledge and understanding that play is the key vehicle to promote learning and development of the child in totality (emotionally, physically, cognitively and socially). Vygotsky (1978:86) also highlights that play is fundamental to some academic achievements. Therefore, teachers need to orientate themselves with the theory of play and practise it in their classrooms for the benefit of the learner.

I also noticed that, for creative arts, there were buckets of powdered paint and paint brushes that were kept in a box but not used. In informal conversation with Mrs Mbelu, I found that she had undergone training in physical education and creative arts and was given the CAPS for life skills that would guide her on how to teach those study areas and which resources to use. Mrs Mbelu ignored all the information provided for teaching creative arts and even the materials. I aligned this ignorance of not teaching creative arts with her laziness and the lack of monitoring content coverage in her school by the SMT. The learners were deprived of the opportunity to exercise pre-writing for formal handwriting in later grades. In this regard, workshops with lesson demonstrations and post-workshops training and monitoring in classroom should be done (Taole & Mohapi, 2013:7). The importance of creative arts should be emphasised in workshops as time for this study area is scheduled for two hours a week. Teachers should respect that Grade R learners learn by exploring, discovering and doing. These
forms of activities are important for learners’ development, cognitively, socially and physically.

- Mrs Lindani

With regard to resources, I observed that the Grade R class had a lot of material kept in boxes for creative art area, performing art and fantasy area. Some of the material boxes were sealed and very few materials were displayed in the classroom. The material kept in boxes portrayed a lack of monitoring by the SMT and at the DBST. These two bodies should take note of the packed materials and devise strategies to ensure that they are used for the purpose of strengthening learner performance.

During observations, it also emerged that the few reading materials that were available were not frequently used in the way outlined by the CAPS home language policy. I also noticed that Mrs Lindani could not improvise by making her own equipment. There were no creative art materials in class that were made by the teacher or learners. According to CAPS content, Grade R classroom should be well resourced to encourage incidental learning (Maponya, 2015:97). The lack of resource material utilisation suggested that teachers lacked training on how to use the resource materials and to understand that resource materials have influence on concept development.

The Grade R classroom should display materials made by the teacher and learners by using waste materials (Helmbold, 2014:47; Park, 2016:128). The unavailability of such creativity is bound to compromise the play approach for effective Grade R teaching and learning.

I also noted that Mrs Lindani did not use the available material much in her lessons. The Grade R site and classroom should be welcoming outside and inside with suitable resources. In Grade R learners should be engaged in activities in which they have to use lots of manipulatives. Material should be displayed in the classroom and learners be given an opportunity to access them for practising skills learned and to come up with new skills through a trial-and-error approach. In this regard, Roszak (2018: 153) and Quinn (2013:1), proponents of Froebel’s theory, indicate that teachers can develop their own resources for teaching and learning by using waste material and various natural resources such as stones, leaves and sand.
• **Ms Solani**

In Ms Solani’s class, I noted a variety of indoor material such as posters, charts and pictures that were packed in a big box behind the door. I saw that there were few fantasy area materials provided. I also noted that Ms Solani in her lessons focused much on using Takalane Sesame material supplied by the NGO. The materials that were kept in sealed boxes were not used at all. There were very few posters that were displayed on the wall. It appeared that incidental reading was not encouraged in Grade R class. While she was teaching weather in the morning, the weather chart was not used at all. The findings confirmed a decline in the standard of education in rural schools of South Africa because of the shortage of resources such as those mentioned above (Taole & Mohapi, 2013:5). In addition, Helmbold (2013: 197) indicated that in some schools which were well resourced, material was not used due to a lack of training. In this case, the very simple materials were not used.

I align lack of resource utilisation in teaching and learning with the quality of qualification and of training Grade R teachers obtained, as most were unqualified. The methods of teaching and learning they used appeared to be structured teaching and learning which does not demand resources. The play-based teaching and learning strategy demands that teachers use resources in lessons. The teacher should use a variety of resources according to the concept taught and the ability of learners. Mupa and Chinooneka (2015:128) highlight that the availability of resources and the way they are utilised predict learner performance. In South African rural schools, I argue that learners will continue underperforming in Grade 1 due to a lack of exposure to resource manipulation in Grade R. This confirmed the findings from the interviews that the DBE distributed indoor materials to schools without training Grade R teachers on their use (Taole & Mohapi, 2013:7). I agree with Atmore et al. (2012:44) who propose practical orientation of teachers on resource utilisation.

5.2.2.3 Language of teaching and learning

Language of teaching and learning is important in early grades as learners learn better in the language related to their sociocultural background. Botman (2014:238) acknowledges that, to be effective, teaching and learning depends on language recognition. In my view, language recognition is when teachers and SMTs adhere to the language policy in schools and implement the policies. The following paragraphs
present the findings from the four Grade R teachers on how language is implemented in their respective schools.

- **Ms Zondi**

During classroom observation, Ms Zondi used isiXhosa as the language of teaching and learning in her class. All the three subjects, namely; mathematics, life skills and home language were taught and learned in isiXhosa. The few print materials on the wall were all written in the language of teaching and learning. This implied that Ms Zondi adhered to the language policy which states that learners in the Foundation Phase should be taught in their home language (DBE, 2011a:6). Ms Zondi also portrayed competency in language when she engaged learners in language activities where they developed higher-order thinking. The findings support an idea of Louw and Wium (2011:1) and Hadebe-Ndlovu (2016:8) who emphasise that in class, the home language should be used as tool to improve learner performance. In Grade R, language is a cultural tool to mediate concepts in classroom activities (Gray & MacBlain, 2012:12; Vygotsky, 1978:57) in preparation for upper grades learning.

- **Mrs Mbelu**

Classroom observations revealed that Mrs Mbelu also adhered to isiXhosa as a language of teaching and learning throughout in her classroom activities. I observed that posters, even those she crafted by herself, were written in the language of teaching and learning. Mrs Mbelu also created a song which was about *izilwanyana zasendle* (*wild animals*) and she recited this with learners in isiXhosa home language. The song had mathematics concepts that were recited in isiXhosa such as *zincinci* (*small*); *zikhulu* (*big*). I commend the fact that language was used extensively to give learners an opportunity to communicate in the form of play by acting out a song. I found that the policy on home language practice for Grade R teaching and learning in class was implemented effectively.

- **Mrs Lindani**

With regard to language, Mrs Lindani adhered to language policy throughout her lessons. In mathematics lesson, she asked learners to explain concepts in their home language which was isiXhosa. Mrs Lindani wanted to ensure that isiXhosa home
language was used across all subjects in Grade R. The charts on the wall were written in isiXhosa home language.

- **Ms Solani**

In the case of language, I observed that Ms Solani mixed English and isiXhosa languages in teaching and learning. I noticed this challenge when learners counted themselves in their groups. They counted in English and said: *one, two, three, four, five.* Learners were supposed to count in isiXhosa and say: “*nye, mbini, ntathu, ne, ntlanu*”. I also found that sometimes when learners answered questions on numbers they said “*ziyi-four, ziyi-two, ziyi-three*” instead of saying “*zine (four); zimbibi (two); zintathu (three)*”.

I also noticed that the rhyme recited as a warm-up for a story telling activity was not in line with the language of teaching and learning, which is isiXhosa. The rhyme was as follows.

> **My mother said! Theeeeeeeembi! Make me some porridge! Using your right hand! Using your left hand! Using your body!**

I can conclude that Ms Solani did not adhere to Grade R language policy of teaching and learning. The language policy indicates that learners in the Foundation Phase, including Grade R, should be taught in their home language (Pretorius & Spaull, 2016:71). This study looked at how language influenced teaching and learning in classroom context to improve learner performance. The literature stresses that if two languages are used in Grade R class learners will experience challenge in learning some concepts (Soma, 2011:73). The literature suggests that home language as a language of teaching and learning should be emphasised (Hadebe-Ndlovu, 2016:8) and the resources such as posters, pictures and toys be written in home language (Soma, 2011:37). In my view, language in Grade R can be a barrier than be a tool for learning if the use of home language is not adhered to. Some learners did not pronounce the English words correctly in the rhyme. They confused sounding of English words with isiXhosa words. This showed that two languages confuse learners and may end up not mastering any language. Teachers should be monitored and corrected on language use in Grade R teaching and learning.
In the four schools, only one Grade R teacher among the four mixed two languages in her teaching and learning practices. Molteno (2017:63) aligns use of English in Grade R with a lack of vocabulary in isiXhosa home language because in South Africa teachers are mandated to teach in home language.

5.2.2.4 Subject content knowledge

Ms Zondi:

The lesson I observed in Ms Zondi’s classroom was aligned with what she shared during interviews about using various activities. Learners were engaged in various language activities, mathematics and life skills. This supported the view that Grade R curriculum prepares learners to be physically, cognitively, socio-culturally and linguistically developed (Janse van Rensburg, 2015:2). During classroom observations, I noted that Ms Zondi had a gap in understanding the importance of balanced subject content in her teaching and learning practices. I found that she focused more on teaching mathematics, while the other two subjects which are life skills and language were neglected. I aligned the imbalance of subject content teaching and learning with her workshop training and even with her lack of understanding that all life skills and language concepts had to be covered for learner academic development. I observed that learners who finished their classwork activities read wall pictures and words in their workbooks. This showed that learners were interested in reading books.

The above situation supports the findings from the literature which argues that if the utilisation of available resources is not planned, the new curriculum will not be implemented according to its aims (Nkosi, 2014:59). In this regard, I can conclude that Ms Zondi experienced a context content gap in not understanding that learners in her community did not have access to books and that she had to fill that gap in her classroom.

Teaching shared reading was also a challenge to Ms Zondi. She taught shared reading while learners were seated in groups and moved around the groups with a poster. Some learners could not see the poster. Learners participated and this was evident in their answering of questions. The seating arrangements of learners and her movement
around the groups showed that she lacked knowledge and understanding of how shared reading should be taught in Grade R. Her movements disrupted the class.

Although Ms Zondi showed a gap in teaching other language components but was clear with teaching and learning content for emergent writing. She knew that she had to teach learners how to write letters of the alphabet using many strategies. For example, in one activity learners were asked to write b by tracing the word in bold in the following words:

- Uboya (wool)
- isibane (lamp)
- baleka (run)
- ibomvu (red)

In activity two learners were asked to copy the words from flash cards into their exercise books:

- Ingwenya (crocodile)
- Idada (duck)
- Icilikishe (lizard)
- Inyoka (snake)

The above forms of activities are highlighted in the CAPS for isiXhosa as the content to be taught in Grade R and these words were in one of Grade R workbooks (DBE, 2011a:21). Looking at the content taught and the type of work done in the Grade R class, I believe that Ms Zondi had subject content knowledge for emergent writing.

In life skills, learners were given an activity in the workbook to complete a picture of a dinosaur and to colour it, as well as completing a drawing of butterfly wings. Ms Zondi only gave learners instructions and did not take learners through the drawings. It was apparent from this activity that she was not passionate about creative arts. She did not make creative art lessons fun and enjoyable for learners. The content gap she displayed did not recognise creative arts in Grade R as a study area with various skills that needed to be developed for language, mathematics and other subjects across Foundation Phase. The challenge in this instance was an imbalance in teaching the content. This would then mean that learners would progress to the next grade with a content gap in creative arts.

I also noticed that even Ms Zondi’s lack of content knowledge contributed negatively to content coverage as she did not teach some concepts such as physical education and performing arts components for a week. In mathematics, Ms Zondi focused much on numbers, while other content areas were ignored as if they were not as important. The above scenarios contradicted with CAPS implementation as each subject
component has its time scheduled for and should be taught to avoid imbalance in teaching concepts (DBE, 2011a:6). Maponya (2015:64) highlights that subject content knowledge is a key in teaching and learning and that needs teacher to be professionally developed.

Mrs Mbelu;

The literature emphasises that teachers should be empowered with content knowledge and skills to be competent in teaching and learning context (Atweh et al., 2012; Pretorius, 2014:9). In this section, I explore the knowledge and skills Mrs Mbelu portrayed during classroom observations. In one of the lessons I observed, Mrs Mbelu composed a song relevant to a theme of the week, which was based on an elephant (Indlovu). The song was as follows:

*Izilwanyana zasendle!*  Wild animals!

*Izilwanyana zasendle!*  Wild animals!

*Ezinye zikhulu!*  Some are big!

*Ezinye zincinci!*  Some are small!

*Ezinye zinemisila!*  Some have tails!

*Ezinye zinamehlo makhulu!*  Some have big eyes!

*Ziyoyikeka! Ziyoyikeka!*  They are scary? They are scary!

The song described wild animals including an elephant. Mrs Mbelu asked learners some questions about animals and learners responded. She composed a song that was related to a theme to develop learner vocabulary. She created a simple tune and actions to engage learners to sing a song. In this song, learners were engaged in integrated learning. The song was part of the performing arts activities. Language was used extensively to give learners an opportunity to communicate through acting out a song. The maths concepts *zikhulu (big)* and *zincinci (small)* were also taught in a song and were modelled. The lesson supported the views of Vygotsky and Piaget who believe that language in early grades should reflect the basic language concepts learner acquires from immediate home environment (Piaget, 1962:181; Vygotsky, 1978:59).
Mrs Mbelu understood that she had to engage learners in various activities. In free play activities, learners were given a box of Lego Duplo bricks to construct whatever they wanted and various models were made. In this case, the lesson showed that teachers should recognise learners as important subjects in knowledge creation (Freire, 1996:38). Similarly, Shih (2018:64) stresses that teachers should think critically about how to engage learners in the learning process. Vygotsky (1978:30) also encourages teachers to give learners an opportunity to explore resources in the form of play.

During classroom observations, Mrs Mbelu also instructed learners to complete various workbook activities and to do drawing activities in their exercise books. She also took learners through instructional activities that involved bead work, making of models using play dough and emergent reading. The lesson showed that Mrs Mbelu had an idea on how to scaffold teaching and learning as suggested for effective learning (Vygotsky,1978:40).

In mathematics, Mrs Mbelu focused much on numbers, operations and relationships. In language teaching, shared reading was not done at all during the period of my data collection at the school. I also observed that in life skills she spent much time on beginning knowledge. Learners were not very engaged in writing activities. On the issue of content coverage, Mrs Mbelu was supposed to cover all the concepts according to the CAPS.

- **Mrs Lindani**

During lesson presentation, I observed that Mrs Lindani did not teach all she planned for a day. She added new concepts but left out some of those she planned. For example, in the morning, Mrs Lindani gave me a lesson plan with a shared reading activity on big books but she suddenly taught a picture story using a poster whereby learners interpreted pictures through questions and answers. I followed up to find out about the shared reading activity she planned. She stated that she shared one big book with the Grade 1 teacher who was busy with the big book she had planned to use that day. Mrs Lindani had to wait for the Grade 1 teacher to finish her lesson so she could do hers afterwards. The findings confirmed that the lack of resources make teachers handle subject content in a complex manner that does not motivate teachers and excite learners. The findings acknowledged the literature which states the shortage of resources that there is a greater need of resources in Grade R (Elibariki,
2014:19). It emerged from the research findings that Mrs Lindani did not have a clear direction of what she planned to teach. She also lacked knowledge on how to link workbooks and other relevant resources in her planning. In this regard, the above findings concur with the literature that indicates that Grade R teachers find themselves unsure about the content knowledge of the subjects they are teaching (Mohapi, 2014:101). In addition, Mohapi (2014) indicates that teachers with little content knowledge in Grade R can hinder learner achievement.

- **Ms Solani**

Classroom observations revealed that Grade R learners were able to sound letters in their names and in written texts. It was evident when learners did a spelling activity in which they sounded words below the pictures. Ms Solani randomly chose some learners to spell words that were below pictures and learners did it properly. Some of the words learners spelled were as follows:

   - **Cephe (spoon) isuti (suit) isakhiwo (building).**

Ms Solani asked learners to name letter sounds at the beginning, in the middle and at the end of these words. The above findings are validated by the literature which confirms that Ms Solani used a problem-posing pedagogy method which favours the discovery of information through critical thoughts and free communication (Freire, 2000:46). The method accommodates teacher and learners in teaching and learning practices. The findings confirmed Vygotsky’s theory of socio-constructivism which argues that learners as social people can learn to solve real-world problems through interaction with their teachers who are regarded as knowledgeable adults in the classroom context.

Ms Solani also portrayed her knowledge on how to teach shared reading in her Grade R class. She understood that she should apply the whole-class approach when teaching shared reading. In a shared reading lesson, learners were engaged in picture interpretation through questions and answers. Learners were cooperative and gave correct answers. In this regard, the lesson revealed that if a teacher possesses a sound teaching approach, she can extend learners’ thinking and content can be understood by learners (Machaba, 2016:50). This supported the constructivist view that learners
can recall information with ease when engaged in an activity and revealed that learners’ ability should not be underestimated (Piaget, 1962:181; Vygotsky, 1978:40).

Observations also revealed that there were few learners who took part in the lesson. I believed that the seating arrangements for shared reading whereby learners were seated in rows was not conducive to shared reading activities. During the follow-up discussion, Ms Solani confirmed that she understood how the Grade R classroom layout should be but the overcrowded classroom and the desks did not allow her to arrange the classroom according to the prescribed layout. This confirmed what she mentioned in the interviews that it was difficult to teach reading in a big class. The literature confirms that learners in some Grade R classrooms in South Africa are found seated at desks like Grade 1 to 3 learners doing formal learning activities (Mulaudzi, 2016:148). The literature further indicates that the seating arrangement of the desks prevents teachers from engaging learners in play activities. In my view, she should move the desks to the back of the classroom and create space for shared reading activity. She had two carpets she could use for learners. I posit that Ms Solani lacked knowledge on how to improvise for shared reading in a big class.

Another challenge, I discovered that activities in physical education, creative arts and independent reading were not taught. In one of our conversations, Ms Solani indicated that she did not have enough time to teach these areas because of the large number of learners. I aligned this to the fact that Ms Solani acknowledged in the interviews that there were some content areas she found difficult to teach such as 3D in mathematics. In my view, Ms Solani had to balance curriculum content in teaching and learning to accommodate diverse learner needs according to time stipulated to CAPS (DoE, 2011). It appeared that she lacked content knowledge and understanding that all concepts should be taught according to the time scheduled as per subject in the CAPS. In this case, I can align Ms Solani’s challenge with her Grade 11 and Level 4 qualification as Feza (2014b:5) indicates that poor qualification has an influence on the quality of learning in ECD. It appears that content coverage was compromised.
5.2.2.5 Assessment

During classroom observations, all four Grade R teachers who were participants in this study assessed learners using various forms of assessments, such as oral, practical and written. Long (2014:108) confirms that Grade R teachers had potential to use various forms of assessment including small groups. The challenge that I observed was to assess learners in big groups or as individuals. Grade R teachers did not use observation sheets or tools in their process of teaching and learning. I was left wondering how they would determine the performance of each learner in such big classrooms.

- **Ms Zondi**

  In my observation, Ms Zondi did not use assessment recording tools when teaching and learning took place, yet she knew that she had to use them continuously. Her assessment process contradicted the statement she made during the interview when she indicated that she assessed learners continuously using an assessment recording tool.

  During lesson observations, Ms Zondi used various forms of assessment activities and assessment forms. Learners were assessed orally, practically and in written work. Sometimes learners were assessed individually or in groups. In my observation, she applied the assessment policy in terms of activities and forms of assessment. The questions that were asked learners to answer catered even for high-order thinking skills. The challenge that I observed was a lack of feedback to learners. Ms Zondi had appreciated what learners had done even if it was wrong and could not give learners correct responses. I observed that learners repeated same mistakes in responding to other similar activities. Ms Zondi marked and signed learners' work and did not worry about their mistakes. She was happy that they could do the activity. I noticed that she did not take assessment seriously. It would mean that learners would progress to Grade 1 without knowing that they had made mistakes and needed to be corrected. The assessment recording tool used did not show all the concepts taught and learned. There were concepts she could not report on despite being taught, because they were not included in assessment recording tool.

- **Mrs Mbelu**
In the interview, Mrs Mbelu indicated that she applied continuous assessment and various forms of assessment in her teaching and learning practices. The observations confirmed that learners in Grade R were assessed orally, practically and on written work. During the morning ring, learners answered questions in full sentences. The lesson was aimed at developing listening and speaking skills as well as language vocabulary. The strategies Mrs Mbelu used were aligned with the CAPS.

The challenge I observed in her assessment processes was that her assessment strategy was a one-size-fits-all approach. Mrs Mbelu did not consider that learners have different learning abilities and she had to assess them according to their levels of development. A good example was portrayed when she engaged learners in independent reading activity where all learners had to read wordless picture books. Some learners ignored the picture books on their tables and took readers with pictures and captions below them. The size of the class means that Mrs Mbelu did not see that the learners had changed the readers they were given to read. The above scenario showed that the learner assessment was not planned. Learners demonstrated that their abilities were above the level of the wordless picture books. This implied that Mrs Mbelu did not apply Vygotsky’s theory which states that in teaching and learning teachers need to consider the level of learner development (Vygotsky, 1978:59). Bruner (1962:33) also emphasises that learners should be given an opportunity to make mistakes, fix them and ultimately gain knowledge they can use even outside the classroom. In the interview, Mrs Mbelu indicated that she assessed learners in small groups but I did not see this. I also noted that Mrs Mbelu did not use recording tools or observation tools while interacting with learners. That raised a question on how she would know the strength and weakness of her learners for intervention purposes.

• **Mrs Lindani**

During classroom observations, Mrs Lindani did various forms of activities which included oral, written and practical but assessment criteria were not clear in some activities such as bead work. Learners were not given timeous feedback on their activities. During the interview, Mrs Lindani indicated that she used two quire books to record learner performance while teaching and learning took place. Observations on both that days I spent with her showed that Mrs Lindani did not use recording tools at all. The findings from observations revealed that Mrs Lindani had a challenge in
assessing learners in her class. She had the potential for designing various activities. The classroom observations support the literature which reveals that Grade R teachers in classroom observations demonstrate a very low assessment literacy (Kanjee & Mthembu, 2015:49).

- **Ms Solani**

In the interview, Ms Solani appeared to be a dedicated teacher who understood that learners should be assessed every day, in small groups and as individuals. In my classroom observation, Ms Solani did various activities with learners but found it difficult to assess learners in all forms. I noted her assessment approach when she asked a question in class and an individual learner answered the question. This support the findings which indicate that Grade R teachers find it difficult to change from formal to informal assessment tasks (Mohapi, 2014:5).

- **Synthesis**

In the light of the above, this study revealed that Grade R teachers experienced a content gap on assessment in the teaching and learning process. None of the sampled Grade R teachers assessed learners on continuous basis. They did not implement the assessment principles which indicate that learners should be assessed continuously according to their ability, content taught and be supported where they needed (DBE, 2011a:5). I concur with the literature that revealed that learner performance is not authentically reported in early grades and Grade R teachers are still lacking assessment knowledge in classroom practices (Kanjee & Mthembu, 2015:2; Mohapi, 2014:5; Riley-Ayer, 2014:2). According to Otieno et al. (2015:8), teachers need to understand that the practical nature of observation gives them an opportunity to obtain a holistic view of learner performance in practical situations. In their elaboration, the researchers emphasised that during observation, teachers record important details while learners are engaged in various learning activities.

In Grade R, assessment is a continuous activity. The teacher cannot assess learners at the end of a lesson. Learners are assessed during the course of an activity and given feedback in the form of support. An alternative measure for feedback is to give a learner another activity that would be at her or his level. The teacher should follow the principles of assessment for trustworthy assessment.
5.2.2.6 Addressing barriers to learning

- **Ms Zondi**

During classroom observations, I did not see any stage when Ms Zondi supported learners with learning difficulties. I observed learners who experienced barriers in mathematics and in life skills lessons but were ignored for individual support. Abongdia et al. (2015:4) suggest that teachers must have skills and knowledge for identifying learners with learning difficulties for support purposes. In the classroom, teachers should be able to accommodate all learners regardless of any learning difficulties as Bruner (1961:66) indicates that all learners are capable of tackling complex concepts in any subject if they are taught effectively. Curriculum adaptation for learners with special needs should be provided. This will help learners to cope according to their learning ability.

**Mrs Mbelu:**

During my presence in Mrs Mbelu’s class, I did not see her attending to individual learners who needed extra attention. I noted that it was challenging for her to identify learners who needed extra support in her overcrowded class. There were learners in her class who could not complete their activities and who struggled to handle pencils. I observed that those learners were ignored. This practice was against the idea of Vygotsky (1978:30) who believes that learners should be scaffolded according to their level of development. Bruner (1962:32) also emphasises that teachers should scaffold learning step-by-step until learners can do independent work. Mrs Mbelu needed to attend a workshop on barriers to learning and to assist her on how to identify, screen and plan differentiated activities according to the learners’ needs. The relevant steps for referral should be understood and the number of learners with barriers to learning would drop.

- **Mrs Lindani**

In the interview, Mrs Lindani mentioned that some learners could not answer questions, sequence picture stories and identify the letters of the alphabet they had learned. During observations, Mrs Lindani supported learners who could not identify letters in workbooks through scaffolding. She gave them a clue by writing a letter in the air or on the learner’s back, then learners easily remembered and sounded the letter.
properly. The findings revealed that the strategies she used were stipulated in the home language CAPS policy document. Because of the large number of learners, classroom organisation was a challenge in supporting learners individually. The findings confirmed the literature which indicates that poor classroom organisation hinders positive learning outcomes (Erradu & Week, 2013:2). It appeared that if she could get a small number of learners and a suitable classroom, learners would be fully supported. In South Africa, Grade R teachers need suitable infrastructure, outdoor and the relevant number of Grade R learners and that would minimise learners with barriers to learning. It would help the SMT to identify teachers who experienced challenge on supporting learners with barriers to learning.

- **Ms Solani**

In classroom observations, I noted that Ms Solani did not have sound knowledge and experience of handling learners who experienced barriers to learning. Her class was also faced with absenteeism. I observed that learners who experienced barriers to learning were often absent from school. I noticed that Ms Solani did not give extra support to learners who struggled to distinguish between the number 9 and the number 6. The school climate in Ms Solani’s case was a contributory factor on barriers to learning. The high rate of absenteeism in Grade R may be due to various factors that need to investigated.

- **Synthesis**

In summary, Grade R teachers had little content knowledge and understanding on how to support learners with barriers to learning. It appeared that Grade R teachers needed training so that they would be able to screen, identify and assess learners before they start formal schooling (Abongdia et al., 2015:3-4). Teacher knowledge on barriers to learning would assist learners to cope well in their academic careers. I noted that in all the observed classes, the major challenge was on high enrolments in Grade R classes. I could not determine the knowledge Grade R teachers had attained on barriers to learning. The HODs could find it difficult to assist Grade R teachers in identifying learners with barriers to learning.
5.3 CHAPTER SUMMARY

The findings from the observations revealed that Grade R teaching and learning took place under various challenges which involved poor classroom infrastructure, shortage of resources and poor implementation of admission policy, lack of safe and security to Grade R learners due to big school enrolment. These challenges influenced classroom layout, planning and content coverage, assessment of learners, teaching approach, utilisation of resources and support to learners with barriers to learning. The lack of experience and qualifications of Grade R teachers made it difficult for them to deal with big classes with more than thirty learners each. The observations revealed that the school climate was not conducive for Grade R teaching and learning. The school and classroom environment made Grade R teachers appear incompetent in teacher content knowledge. This resulted in some concepts not being taught at all and that caused learners to progress with content gaps because teachers lagged behind content coverage.

In the next chapter, the findings on document analysis are presented and discussed.
CHAPTER 6:
PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSIONS OF THE FINDINGS ON DOCUMENT ANALYSIS

6.1 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this chapter is to present an analysis and discussions of the research findings on the study that explored some of the challenges that face Grade R teaching and learning in rural schools. The findings were collected from the document analysis in four selected schools of the Eastern Cape Province, in South Africa. In this study, the documents that were analysed included learner attendance registers, the CAPS that involved language, mathematics and life skills, documents on barriers to learning, provincial weekly term planners, DBE learner workbooks, lesson plans, recording tools, mark schedules and report cards. These were the documents the Grade R teachers provided for Grade R teaching and learning programmes. I was influenced by the view that the documents are important in finding data that were most relevant to the research objectives (Guest et al., 2013:252). The research objective of this study was to explore the strategies teachers used to improve Grade R teaching and learning in rural schools.

The following table presents the documents received from the four Grade R teachers of different schools.

Table 6.1: Documents received from Grade R teachers and analysed

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<th>School</th>
<th>Teacher</th>
<th>Documents provided by teachers</th>
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<td>Zamukulungisa FSS</td>
<td>Ms Zondi</td>
<td>• Maths, language and life skills CAPS</td>
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<td>• Learner attendance register</td>
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<td>• English Eastern Cape Provincial Life Skills policy document</td>
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<tr>
<td>Khanya JSS</td>
<td>Mrs Lindani</td>
<td>• Maths, language and life skills CAPS</td>
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<td>• Learner attendance register</td>
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<td>Veli JSS</td>
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<td>Lingani JSS</td>
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There were documents I intended to include such as mental mathematics, assessment framework, baseline assessment and school-based assessment (SBA) but these were not available. The following paragraphs report about the findings from the documents collected and analysed under the themes that emerged during the interviews.

6.2. RESEARCH FINDINGS

6.2.1 Admission Policy Implementation

This section presents information obtained from the learner attendance registers in the four sampled schools which indicated that learners admitted were at the right age cohort and were more than 30 in each class. The aim in exploring the registers was to verify the information teachers provided during the interviews in Chapter 4 on learner
attendance and admitted. In all four schools, attendance registers confirmed that teachers taught more than 30 learners in one class.

6.2.1.1 Ms Zondi

According to document analysis, all 37 learners in attendance register were at 4 ½ turning 5 years by the end of June 2017 and that was the right age cohort for Grade R admission. The attendance register confirmed that there were 37 learners admitted for Grade R. The group of ten preschool learners had its own attendance register which was not captured in SASAMS. This proved that the Grade R class also accommodated preschool which should be under the DSD outside the school premises. This showed that in rural schools SMTs do not adhere to the Grade R admission policy. The number of preschoolers was approximately close to twelve which is the minimum number of preschool class (Maponya, 2015:50).

6.2.1.2 Mrs Mbelu

I also requested Mrs Mbelu to provide me with her learner attendance register. The learner attendance registers revealed that there were two learner attendance registers, one for Grade R and another one for preschool and that showed that school did not adhere to Grade R admission policy. Mrs Mbelu had 48 learners in her Grade R attendance register which was against admission policy which emphasises maximum of 30 learners (DBE, 2014b:17). It appeared that Mrs Mbelu had to administer attendance registers and maintain discipline as well. The above case is similar to Ms Zondi’s case where she also had preschool learners with their own attendance register. The attendance registers showed that only 25 learners regularly attended school. The poor learner attendance could be associated with the distance these young learners travelled.

6.2.1.3 Mrs Lindani

The learner attendance registers affirmed that all learners admitted were at the right age cohort but learner attendance was very poor. Observations revealed that among 57 learners in class, only 32 attended school regularly. The attendance registers and observations revealed an aspect of the lack of parental involvement in educational issues. Mansfield-Barry and Stwayi (2017:78) clearly state that it is the role of the parents to take responsibility for their children’s schooling. This is a mandate from he
SASA (Maponya, 2015: 99) which emphasises that parents should monitor and support learners in their academic journey. Therefore, parents should ensure that learners attend school on daily basis. The closer the parent to the learner needs, the better the learning outcomes achieved.

6.2.1.4 Ms Solani

In the case of Ms Solani, there were 52 learners on the attendance register and were age appropriate for Grade R schooling. There were only 36 learners who attended school on daily basis. The number of learners confirmed that in rural schools Grade R teachers were still teaching more than 30 learners. There were also seven additional preschool learners in her classroom. During the interview, Ms Solani indicated that the preschool that was initiated by parents was closed because parents could not fund it.

6.2.1.5 Synthesis

The main focus of my study was to explore Grade R teaching and learning in rural schools. The findings showed that in all four sampled schools, teachers were teaching more than 30 learners. Maharaj and Williams (2011:13) indicate that SASA recommends a teacher-pupil ratio of 1:30 for Grade R. There were also additional Pre-Grade R learners who were a contributory factor to big classes of Grade R. These findings support the study which claims that in most rural schools Grade R teachers are teaching two grades under one roof (Taole & Mohapi, 2013:4). I can conclude that Grade R admission policy was not fully implemented in rural schools as the above situation indicated that learners had little opportunity to access quality education. In Grade R, teachers need to monitor and support learners on problem-solving techniques and creativity in all the subjects. The teacher should establish positive relationships with learners in preparation for teaching and learning. It is difficult for the teacher to be closer to learners if the teacher is facing a challenge of teaching a big class. With large classes, this becomes very difficult.

These findings reflected the poor schooling system our Grade R learners experience in rural schools. The situation of these Grade R learners was confirmed by Spaull (2014:22) who established that learners in rural schools live far from better schools. Young learners should need not to travel long distances because they get tired early.
in the morning before teaching and learning takes place. This can demotivate them from attending school at an early age.

These findings are associated with a view that the poor socioeconomic status of families in rural schools negatively affects learners’ access to quality education (Spaull, 2014:29). The government needs to consider that the quality of the population depends on early investment in preschool and Grade R learners. An educated nation is able to alleviate poverty in the country through skills and knowledge as CAPS aims and objectives indicate for young learners.

6.2.2 Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statements

The Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statements were investigated to find out whether teachers understood the documents and that they were available for Grade R teaching and learning. The expected documents included isiXhosa home language, mathematics, isiXhosa life skills documents and the English version of the Eastern Cape Provincial Life Skills policy document for creative arts and physical education. The reason for investigating the CAPS was that some teachers did not know even the documents they were required to have which indicate all the principles to be followed for effective teaching and learning. Some teachers want to be supported yet they did not implement the curriculum because they did not use the documents.

6.2.2.1 Ms Zondi

I asked Ms Zondi to provide me with the CAPS and all related documents she used for planning Grade R teaching and learning as mentioned above. The purpose was to find out whether she had documents and were used for planning. Document analysis revealed that she had all the CAPS. I noted that all the documents were kept safely in a cupboard and they appeared new as if they were not used at all. There was also a CAPS for life skills for creative arts and physical education which were written in English. It appeared that this was not used by Ms Zondi. The language used in CAPS for life skills confirmed that physical education and creative arts study areas were not taught as the findings from classroom observations in Chapter 5 indicated. In this regard, Taole and Mohapi (2013:7) propose that resources distributed to schools should be written in simply in the language of teaching and learning.
6.2.2.2 Mrs Mbelu

Mrs Mbelu had all four CAPS: isiXhosa home language, isiXhosa mathematics, isiXhosa life skills and the English version of the life skills policy document (produced by the ECDBE) for physical education and creative arts. There were some concepts that were underlined in pencil in those CAPS. I assumed that the documents were used for planning teaching and learning. Teachers need to have knowledge and understanding on how to check the material and to understand the concepts to be taught.

6.2.2.3 Mrs Lindani

Document analysis revealed that Mrs Lindani did not have all CAPS for teaching Grade R. Mrs Lindani did not have the CAPS for mathematics. In this regard, I believe that if monitoring and support was to be done effectively, she should have all the relevant CAPS. This indicated that Ms Lindani did not teach mathematics effectively. In the CAPS for mathematics, there are various teaching and learning strategies teachers should familiarise themselves with for effective teaching and learning. Teachers should use those strategies to explain mathematics concepts to accommodate different learner needs. Learners should learn mathematics language as early as in Grade R.

6.2.2.4 Ms Solani

Document analysis highlighted that Ms Solani had CAPS for Grade R language and life skills. There was no CAPS for mathematics. I noted that she used term weekly planners to replace mathematics CAPS. This indicated that she could not use all the strategies she had to use for mathematics lesson.

6.2.2.5 Synthesis

Among all four Grade R teachers, two did not have the CAPS for mathematics. The CAPS contains the aims for language and mathematics which teachers should achieve in classroom context (DBE, 2011b:8). According to Mutodi and Ngirande (2014:67), teachers’ failure to introduce mathematics concepts are depriving learners of access to higher order problem-solving techniques. Mkhabela (2014:26) highlights that South African learners are the most affected in performing poorly in mathematics. Based on document analysis, if teachers teach mathematics without referring to the CAPS,
Grade R learners will be among those learners who fall below the benchmark in the upper grades. I concur with the researchers who hold a view that emergent mathematics in Grade R is of a low standard (Atweh et al., 2014:49; Feza, 2014b: 8; Helmbold, 2014:195; Siyepu, 2013: 1). I argue that, the low standard of mathematics in Grade R is caused by Grade R teachers who do not comply with the Grade R curriculum policy for teaching mathematics and HODs who had no content knowledge on Grade R teaching and learning programmes for monitoring.

Van Jaarsveld (2016:3) argues that if learners were engaged on practical introduction of correct language of mathematics, they would perform better in mathematics in upper grades. Freire (1970:68) also emphasises that language subjects should be taught according to the language that accommodates the teacher and the learners. Thus, teachers should use the CAPS relevant to the subjects so that learners develop knowledge and understanding of the subject.

It seems that Grade R teachers could not translate the assessment documents into the language of teaching and learning. This could be the reason why the document was not used. It could be meaningful and applicable if written in the language of teaching and learning. The resource materials should be user friendly if they are meant to improve teaching and learning (Elibariki, 2014:19; Mupa & Chinooneka, 2015:128).

The researchers on resource utilisation on language influence in which resources are written other than the language of Grade R teaching and learning are quiet (Atmore et al., 2012:44; Chikutuma & Mawere, 2013:6; Modisaotsile, 2012: 4; Taole & Mohapi, 2013:7). The aspect of resource utilisation should be well researched so that teachers value the few resources they have in their teaching and learning context.

To my knowledge, weekly term planners do not indicate all the strategies teachers need to use in planning. It appears that learners missed some knowledge and skills. According to Maponya (2015:67), subject content knowledge is the key for teaching and learning. Freire (1996:38) emphasises that it is the responsibility of the teacher to seek information for effective teaching and learning. In view of the findings, Ms Solani’s responsibility was to ensure that she had the CAPS for mathematics.
6.2.3 Barriers to learning document

I also analysed documents on Grade R barriers to learning. The aim was to verify what I observed when teachers interacted with learners during lesson presentation. Teachers who have knowledge on barriers to learning should portray that by supporting learners with learning difficulties during the lesson. This section presents the finding from the documents analysed.

6.2.3.1 Ms Zondi

Ms Zondi used a document on barriers to learning. I noticed that there was a tool on the last page of the document for screening Grade R readiness, but this was not in Ms Zondi’s file. The absence of the screening tool in the teacher’s file was evidence that Ms Zondi did not use the screening tool. The literature supports the view that in rural areas, 805 head teachers managed ECD without training (Hlupo et al., 2013:6). It showed that the SMT did not know that the screening tool was one of the measures that could assist even the SMT to know the strengths and weaknesses of Grade R learners to effectively plan for the next grade. In my opinion, if the SMT had done monitoring and support, the screening could have been done. It is the responsibility of SMT to track readiness of Grade R learners for entry to Grade 1.

6.2.3.2 Ms Mbelu

The findings from the document analysis revealed that Ms Mbelu had a document on barriers to learning but she could not use it for the purpose of addressing the challenges learners experienced. I noted that she used activities highlighted in the document as class work for the whole class. The class workbooks had some of the activities on language and mathematics that were in the document on barriers to learning as activities were aligned with CAPS policy documents. On my analysis, I did not see any supporting document that indicated remedial programmes. It was clear that Ms Mbelu relied on her strategy of keeping learners after school for support as she indicated in the interview but the evidence was not provided. The findings were associated with the view that many Grade R teachers lack awareness and skills to identify learners with barriers to learning (DBE, 2015:7).

In this regard, Mulaudzi (2016:64) suggests that Grade R teachers should be engaged in workshops and professional development programmes that would capacitate them
with skills and knowledge for effective teaching and learning. I argue that Mrs Mbelu had a challenge with handling learners with barriers to learning. It is evident from document analysis that Grade R teachers constructed their own ways of handling learners with barriers to learning. Teachers need to have a standardised procedure to support learners. This should help teachers to be able to support each other in some circumstances.

6.2.3.3 Mrs Lindani

With regard to barriers to learning, Mrs Lindani had a document on barriers to learning but there was no intervention tool and intervention report about learners who were experiencing barriers to learning. On the last page of the document, there was a screening tool for learners with barriers to learning; however, not even one learner was screened in the Grade R class.

After I had analysed the document on barriers to learning, I followed up to find out how Mrs Lindani got the document and why it was not used. She indicated that she attended a one-day workshop that took only three hours and was given the document on barriers to learning as a guide for supporting learners. She affirmed that she never used the screening tool because she had to photocopy a booklet of 10 pages for 57 learners and there was no budget for Grade R at her school.

Mrs Lindani also claimed that there was no support for learners with hearing difficulties or with speech problems in the document. The document was only about learners with learning difficulties in mathematics and language. Seemingly, the document providing teachers with guidance on how to handle learners with barriers to learning was not adequate. Brazil (2012:17) notes inadequate teacher training as a problem and recommends ongoing training on special needs education.

6.2.3.4 Ms Solani

Document analysis revealed that Mrs Solani had a document on barriers to learning for screening Grade R readiness. In her file, there were two screening reports about learners who were experiencing barriers to learning. Learners were screened on term 1 (March) and by the end of term 2 (June). I noted that the screening was done in the form of a formal examinations. All learners had to write one common activity taken from
the activities scheduled to support learners from various areas in which they experienced learning difficulties.

According to the SIAS, learners must be supported on the basis of their individual learning difficulties in subject areas (ECDBE, 2015:15). I noted that feedback was not recorded for remedial purposes. In my analysis, screening was done for compliance. Seemingly, Mrs Solani had a content gap on supporting learners with barriers to learning. In this study. I can associate her challenge with training she received and the quality of document she used. The document had no clear guidelines on the process of supporting learners until they reach the expected performance.

6.2.3.5 Synthesis

The document on barriers to learning appeared not very supportive for Grade R teachers. Although some teachers did not use the document, the content was not sufficient to support learners with various barriers to learning, but simply provided additional learning activities for mathematics and language. The document had no steps to guide teachers on how to identify learners, support measures learners to be done and the steps to be taken after remedial actions. In light of the above, there is an urgent need for capacitating Grade R teachers with information on barriers to learning. A document that would guide teachers on barriers to learning, with clear steps to be followed in supporting learners should be provided. This emanated from classroom observations where support to learners with barriers to learning was limited.

6.2.4 Provincial weekly planner and lesson plans

This section presents the findings obtained from four Grade R teachers on how they used weekly term planners for Grade R teaching and learning.

6.2.4.1 Ms Zondi

The findings from document analysis highlighted that Ms Zondi had lesson plans and were drafted from the weekly term planners. The lesson plans that Ms Zondi provided me with did not provide for any planned sharing activities, independent reading, creative arts and physical education activities. It appeared that Ms Zondi skipped some of the content that she was not comfortable with like using various techniques to teach sharing activities. Ms Zondi did not follow the weekly term planners and daily
programme properly. She was expected to have 40 weekly lesson plans per subject but she had 25. This showed that she could not cover the content.

6.2.4.2 Mrs Mbelu

I requested Mrs Mbelu to provide me with the weekly term planners and lesson plans for Grade R. The aim was to find out how teachers used provincial weekly term planners for drafting lesson plans. In my observation, I noticed that Mrs Mbelu planned weekly lessons. These lesson plans did not provide detailed strategies and activities that were to be done to strengthen teaching and learning of the concepts. Soma (2011:28) stresses that planning should highlight the skills and knowledge to be learned. The weekly planning suggested that it could be used as an overview of what was to be taught and learned per week. In my view, daily lesson planning is more detailed and the resources are specified for each lesson. Document analysis revealed that she planned 16 lessons and there were 24 unplanned lessons. This study was conducted in the fourth term, meaning that Mrs Mbelu should have covered most of the relevant content for Grade R. The number of lesson plans from January to October indicated that Ms Mbelu did not teach some of the concepts. I also noticed that Mrs Mbelu did not follow a term weekly planner and she skipped some themes and concepts. On the issue of content coverage, Mrs Mbelu had to cover all the concepts according to the CAPS. The planning revealed that she was behind on content coverage. This supports the findings which indicate that Grade R learners progressed with content gaps (Mohangi et al., 2016:8; Pretorius, 2014:2; Soma, 2011: 44).

6.2.4.3 Mrs Lindani

Document analysis revealed that Mrs Lindani had lesson plans and were drafted from the CAPS. Lesson plans also revealed that Mrs Lindani lacked skills on how to infuse similar concepts into one lesson to cover the missed concepts. In light of the above, Mrs Lindani experienced a gap in planning integrated teaching and learning. Document analysis also highlighted that physical education, creative arts and some language and mathematics concepts such as sharing activities were not planned. In classwork books, there were concepts done but not featured in lesson plans. I associated the challenge of teaching the concepts without lesson plans with the teacher’s subject content knowledge gap.
6.2.4.4 Ms Solani

The document analysis revealed that Ms Solani followed provincial weekly term planners when she planned her lessons. The weekly planners were designed from the CAPS. I also noted that there was a lesson plan document from the DBE which was written in English. The document was partially used because it was written in English but she only took some strategies she understood and used them in her planning. In my view, the lesson plans should be written in isiXhosa as the language of teaching and learning. The findings that emerged from the document analysis revealed that all the lessons that were taught were planned. The challenge that I noticed was that Ms Solani did not indicate the resources used in the lesson plans. The skills and knowledge were not clearly indicated. This confirmed what I observed during classroom observations when she forgot to use the resources she collected for the lesson in mathematics.

6.2.4.5 Synthesis

The reviewed literature highlights that reception-year teachers lacked content knowledge (Mohapi, 2014:6). The content knowledge gap affected learners in communication skills, low standard in mathematics skills and in development of gross and fine motor skills (Bruwer et al., 2014: 18; Feza, 2014b: 5; Van Rensburg, 2015:3; Chirwa & Naidoo, 2014: 4). Teachers should follow daily programme and understand that all concepts are equally important. Learners should progress with all skills and knowledge required for Grade 1.

Subject knowledge is the key in teaching concepts because it guides teachers on all the aspects that are needed for effective learning. According to the CAPS, time stipulated for creative arts and physical education in a week is two hours for each study area (DBE, 2011C: 6) In my observation, the time was not spent according to what the CAPS outlines. Time stipulated for each subject was given according to the weight of subjects and concepts and teachers needed to observe to prevent having learners with content gaps in the next grade.

With regard to content coverage, document analysis revealed that Ms Solani did not teach all the expected concepts in all the three Grade R subjects (isiXhosa home language, mathematics and life skills). The curriculum document stipulated that forty
themes were to be covered at the end of the year (DoE, 2011b:17-18) and she was behind content coverage by eight themes. Ms Solani had no plan for content coverage. The above findings on document analysis indicated that Ms Solani had a content gap on planning which had negative influence on content coverage. The concepts missed in early grades affect the learner in the upper grades. It is important to ensure that all concepts are taught and if possible, similar concepts should be infused as from the beginning of the year.

6.2.5 Learner activity books

6.2.5.1 Ms Zondi

According to document analysis, learners’ classwork books were marked, signed and dated. Document analysis revealed that all the activities done in language, mathematics and in life skills were CAPS aligned. I only noted that the activities were very few as compared with the content for term one to three. Classwork books showed that they were used for various activities such as drawing, cut and paste, circling the correct answer, colouring pictures, tracing, matching and writing words and number symbols. The findings support a literature which posits that learners should be engaged in various activities to develop child’s higher order thinking (Feza, 2013:4; Vygotsky, 1978: 30). The planned activities should cater different needs and interests of learners. It is important to understand that learners have different abilities and they should be given an opportunity to demonstrate their creativity.

Document analysis also revealed that learner activities were the same to all learners and classwork books showed no provision made for those who experienced learning difficulties. Teachers should have skills and knowledge to identify learners with learning difficulties for remedial purposes (Abongdia et al., 2015:3). It appeared that Ms Zondi lacked knowledge and understanding on how to apply scaffolding as a strategy to support learners to improve performance according to the ZPD proposed (Vygotsky, 1978:86). Mrs Zondi’s class activities were one-size-fits all approach.

6.2.5.2 Mrs Mbelu

Mrs Mbelu provided me with learner classwork books. My intention was to find out how learners performed in mathematics, language and in life skills. Document analysis confirmed that learners had a problem in handwriting and in writing number symbols.
According to my observations, learners were not engaged much in activities that develop fine motor skills. The studied literature confirms that the influence of ineffective teaching and learning of life skills in Grade R cause learners to struggle in colouring and cutting activities required in the Grade 1 curriculum (Bruwer et al., 2014:18). In learners’ classwork books, no learner activities catered for individual learners with learning difficulties.

6.2.5.3 Mrs Lindani

Research findings revealed that learner class workbooks were available, marked, signed and dated by Mrs Lindani. The content in class workbooks was CAPS aligned. The challenge I observed was that, Mrs Lindani did not engage learners in various forms of activities. In class workbooks, I observed that activities such as drawing, matching, circling and many more activities that make learning more interesting were not done. The activities done did not show any content adaptation for special needs learners. Teachers need to understand that learners are different and often have special needs.

In addition, class workbooks did not indicate that learners were engaged in resource utilisation such as paint brushes. According to Vygotsky, activities should be designed according to the needs of learners and their ZPD (Vygotsky, 1986:54). Freire (2000:46) also states that teachers should apply problem-solving approach in their teaching and learning practices. Learners in Grade R should work as if they are engaged in project activities. They believe on hands-on activities as theories of play highlight (Piaget, 1962:181; Bruner, 1962:32). Their activities should be more resourced to give them an opportunity to access manipulatives.

6.2.5.4 Ms Solani

Learners’ classwork books revealed that Ms Solani marked all Grade R learners’ work. Learners also had homework books, Ms Solani was able to give feedback to parents at the bottom of the work done. During document analysis, I observed that some of the activities done by learners were not highlighted in lesson plans though they were in the CAPS. It appeared that she did not follow a weekly term planner.
6.2.5.5 Synthesis

The reviewed literature confirmed that teachers sometimes teach outside of the prescribed content that needs to be taught and learners may also learn the content that is out of the scope of their curriculum content (Reche et al., 2012: 4). In addition, Ms Solani used a single strategy when teaching a concept, yet all the CAPS for the various subjects suggest various strategies teachers have to use to cater for individual learner needs (DBE, 2011a:10). This indicates a lack of planning for teaching and learning. Teachers should understand that unplanned lessons do not develop learners’ skills, knowledge and attitudes and do not help them to appreciate learning. The findings showed clearly that quality of teaching and learning was compromised. Teaching and learning is effective when it accommodates learner diversity. The CAPS for life skills has activities which help learners to develop fine and gross motor skills (DBE, 2011d:6; ECDBE, 2012:8). Learners should be engaged in ball handling, brush painting, scribbling, drawing, beads work and many more activities that would improve their handwriting skills. These activities also improve speed of writing which is important for Grade 1 readiness.

In this study, I can associate the case of one-size-fits all approach to activities with a challenge of teaching a big class in a small classroom. The overcrowded classroom made it difficult to completely study the situation whereby the teachers was expected to support individual learners. Sometimes the teacher may have ended up focussing to a few group of learners.

6.6 Department of Basic Education learners’ workbooks

The DBE learners’ workbooks are designed to support South African learners with activities and reading text relevant to each grade in primary schools. The aim is to improve learner performance in primary schools by engaging learners in literacy and mathematics activities. This section presents findings on how teachers utilised workbooks for teaching and learning practices.

6.2.6.1 Ms Zondi

Document analysis indicated that various activities were done from term 1 to term 3 and progression was evident. Ms Zondi’s passion was clearly displayed in her mathematics lessons. The activities in learners’ workbooks revealed that learners
performed well in most mathematics concepts compared with other subjects such as language and life skills. The research commenced in term 4 and the workbooks revealed that most activities for mathematics were done. The findings show that there was imbalance in teaching the Grade R subjects and that indicated that Ms Zondi did not adhere to the times stipulated in the CAPS for each subject.

6.2.6.2 Mrs Mbelu

According to document analysis, Mrs Mbelu did all the activities in workbooks and these were marked, signed and dated. Workbook activities should be part of planning to assess learners. In my observation, workbooks were treated as a standalone additional work. The four Grade R workbooks were not fully aligned with CAPS quarterly activities. The teacher, then, had to do work in workbooks according to the CAPS and leave other activities for the next term. I noted that Mrs Mbelu did all the activities, even for the following terms. Some of the activities appeared as if they were not done by learners themselves but were signed. This made me doubt that the workbooks were implemented effectively. Learners should do workbooks by themselves. These workbooks exposed learners to various activities and texts.

6.2.6.3 Mrs Lindani

I found that workbook activities were completed by learners from term 1 to term 3. The challenge observed was that Mrs Solani did not mark some activities but signed at the end. In some cases, she marked even incorrect answers. In my assessment, she did not take workbook utilisation seriously. She lacked an understanding that these workbooks help to track the learner’s ability to work independently. Through marking learners’ workbooks, the teacher gets an opportunity to provide extra support to individual learners.

6.2.6.4 Ms Solani

The activities that were in workbooks were not linked with the activities in the lesson plans although some of the activities in workbooks were relevant to the concept that Ms Solani taught. It is clear that Ms Solani needs training to help her link resource materials to her planning. In my findings, some of activities in DBE workbooks were not marked, dated or signed. It appeared that Ms Solani did not understand the value of workbooks in her teaching and learning practices.
6.2.6.5 Synthesis

Siraj and Taggard (2014:3) explain that teachers who are less prepared are unable to manage time for teaching and learning. It is evident that teachers need to plan for all subjects to track learner progress in all concepts. Workbooks are simply a way of helping the teacher to provide additional support to individual learners. It appeared that teachers need workshops where they should be reminded about the importance of workbooks in Grade R mathematics, language and life skills learning.

6.2.7 Assessment recording tools

6.2.7.1 Ms Zondi

The document analysis revealed that the ECDBE provided recording tools that were aligned to the weekly term planner document for all four terms and for each subject. Ms Zondi drafted her own recording tool which had few concepts to be assessed. The recording tool she used was aligned with the mark-list in the SASAMS. The mark-list only showed total mark for each language component, mathematics content areas and life skills study areas. The assessment recording tools did not show any practical or oral work done although Naidoo and Mkhabela (2017:11) suggest teachers to use various assessments strategies to scaffold learning. Ms Zondi did not understand that the purpose of assessment is to assess knowledge, skills, quality of teaching and learning and to provide learner support (Luneta & Olusola, 2016:248). In my understanding, the tool Ms Zondi used did not address learner needs as we focus on the process of learning not the product in Grade R. The teacher needs to report about day-to-day learner progress recorded in observation tool.

6.2.7.2 Mrs Mbelu

During document analysis, I requested recording tools. The purpose was to find out how Mrs Mbelu recorded learner performance and how the assessment records inform mark schedules for authentic assessment. I noticed that Mrs Mbelu did not use assessment recording tools that were provided by the ECDBE with the concepts to be assessed. She used her own recording tools with few concepts to be assessed but the template was the same. I noted that the number of concepts assessed in the recording tools were below those that were supposed to be done according to CAPS. According to the Provincial Planning, Teaching and Assessment in the CAPS for Grade R, all the
basic concepts specified for assessment should be recorded (ECDBE, 2015:15). Learners’ activity books indicated that some of learners’ work was not recorded, yet it was part of the work to be assessed in the CAPS.

6.2.7.3 Mrs Lindani

In assessment, Grade R teachers are expected to use an observation tool to assess learners continuously in isiXhosa home language, mathematics and life skills. Mrs Lindani assessed and recorded learner performance as if learners were engaged in a formal task activity. She used SASAMS recording tool for recording the marks she obtained from formal tasks.

6.2.7.4 Ms Solani

The findings established that Ms Solani used a recording tool that was attached to weekly term planner according to the four terms of the year. The challenge I noted was that not all learners were assessed as there were no ticks or any rubrics next to their names. Ms Solani did not have any recording tool where she could record learners with special needs for support purposes.

6.2.7.5 Synthesis

The findings from various researchers confirm that Grade R teachers need training on assessment for addressing the academic needs of learners (Kanjee & Mthembu, 2015:2; Mohapi, 2014:5; Riley-Ayer, 2014:9). From the analysed data, it was clear that Mrs Mbelu did not assess learners fairly and did not provide reports that would inform the kind of support individual learners needed. Teachers need to follow assessment principles so that they report what reflects the actual learner performance.

Mohapi (2014:5) concurs with the findings that Grade R teachers find it difficult to assess learners informally. This is an indication that Grade R teachers demonstrate a very low assessment literacy in teaching and learning context (Kanjee & Mthembu, 2015:49). Teachers are expected to use various assessment practices with the purpose of tracking learner progress. I argue that informal assessment should be practised in Grade R to monitor and support learner progress. Grade R teachers should assess learners in a fun and enjoyable way.
I concur with literature which highlights that Grade R teachers need training on assessment for addressing the academic needs of learners (Kanjee & Mthembu, 2015:2; Riley-Ayer, 2014:9i). Teachers need to plan assessment with the content. In Grade R, learners are observed in all the concepts prescribed and supported so that they progressed to Grade 1 without content gaps. The findings support the literature which indicates that learner performance is not authentically reported in early grades (Long, 2014:123). Naidoo and Mkhabela (2017:10) specify clearly that learners should be assessed in various forms because they have different learning styles. Assessment is planned with the content for teaching and learning. The criteria for assessing learners are also planned with the content.

6.2.8 Quarterly Schedules and Report Cards

According to the DBE, quarterly schedules report on the overall learner performance of learners. Parents receive feedback through report cards. The following paragraphs report about the findings from the four Grade R teachers in their teaching and learning practices.

6.2.8.1 Ms Zondi

Document analysis revealed that schedules and report cards were captured in SASAMS. I managed to get the three mark schedules from term 1 to term 3. In mark schedules, no learner was below level 6. The performance in activity books and in recording tools contradicted what was recorded in mark schedules. I noticed that the marks in mark schedules were aligned with the marks in report cards. On the other hand, the marks in assessment tools were not aligned with marks in mark schedules.

6.2.8.2 Mrs Mbelu

I requested mark schedules for terms 1 to 3. The purpose was to find out how Mrs Mbelu aligned recording tools with mark schedules for authentic reporting about learner performance. In all the three subjects (language, mathematics and life skills), no learner was below Level 4 which is 50 and 59%. Those mark schedules were captured in the SASAMS. The learner performance in classwork books contradicted what was in mark schedules. I asked Mrs Mbelu to print one report card of a learner from SASAMS so that I could see the alignment with mark schedules.
The learner performance in the report card was aligned with the mark schedules from terms 1 to 3. I noticed that the recording tool was not aligned to the mark schedule and the report card. It was evident that Mrs Mbelu needed further training on assessment and recording learner performance. It was clear from the SBA activities that Grade R class visits were not properly done as learners’ work, assessment recording tools and DBE workbooks were not moderated. Hoadley (2014:3) confirms that Grade R teachers find it difficult to assess learners properly and their feedback is often of poor quality. This is a challenge because learners would not get support on the concepts with which they experienced difficulties. Teaching and learning could therefore be called ineffective.

6.2.8.3 Mrs Lindani

I requested Mrs Lindani to provide me with mark schedules for terms 1 to 3. In all the three subjects, no learner was below Level 4 which indicated that all learners performed above 50% in all three terms. According to CAPS assessment policy, Level 4 is between fifty to fifty-nine percent. In life skills, learners passed with Level 7 which is between 80 and 100%. Looking at the recording tool, all the study areas were met the achievement requirements. These work schedules were captured in the SASAMS. In my analysis, I agree with the literature which highlights that lack of teacher assessment knowledge and understanding of Grade R assessment principles is a challenge (Chikutuma & Mawere, 2013:9; Rose & Rogers, 2012:7).

I asked Mrs Lindani to print one report card of a learner from SASAMS for me to interpret the alignment. The report card was aligned with the mark schedules and combined term 1 to 3 learner performance. The components of language, content areas of mathematics and the study areas of life skills were rated from levels 4 to 7 in the report cards. There were also subject improvement plans that were attached at the back of each schedule. The improvement plan indicated the areas where learners did not do well in the previous term and this suggested to the teacher what to focus on in the next term.

6.2.8.4 Ms Solani

In Ms Solani’s case, the information provided for mark schedules was taken from the observation tools. The observation tools were for each term as per subject. In mark
schedules, all learners passed with hundred percent. This indicated that a big number of learners who were more than thirty were not authentically assessed. It would mean that all learners performed well without any learning difficulties.

6.2.8.5 Synthesis

The findings from the literature confirmed that Grade R teachers find it difficult to assess learners properly and their feedback is often of poor quality (Hoadley, 2014: 3). I posit that if assessment is not authentic, learners progress to next grade without being scaffolded. Teaching alone does not indicate progress of the learner until learner is assessed. I believe that if assessment is not planned as part of teaching content it will be of poor quality because it will not achieve any goal. This support the findings of previous studies which contend that quality of reporting learner performance may give unauthentic results of learner performance (Mohapi, 2014: 5; Riley-Ayer, 2014:2; Kanjee & Mtembu, 2015:2). It would be difficult for teachers to support learners if assessment is not done in a fair and free manner. Teachers need to be capacitated on how to apply assessment principles in teaching and learning.

6.2.9 Evidence of school-based assessment

6.2.9.1 Ms Zondi

Document analysis revealed that Ms Zuza moderated lesson plans, learner activities in workbooks and in learner portfolio files with a green pen. I noted that the HOD did not give her time to scrutinise the quality of work done by learners and align it with CAPS policy documents and with weekly planners. I aligned Ms Zuza’s supervision with her workload in her school as in Chapter 4 indicated that she monitored 10 Foundation Phase teachers.

6.2.9.2 Mrs Mbelu

Document analysis revealed that Mrs Mbelu’s work was not moderated by the HOD. The only work moderated by the HOD and the principal was a mark schedule. I reasoned that the SMT was compelled to moderate the mark schedules because they had to submit them to the district examination section. Seemingly, Grade R teaching and learning operates with little support from the SMT. The findings clearly indicated that in Mrs Mbelu’s school managers were relaxed in carrying out their responsibilities.
and the situation allowed her to manage herself (Campbell-Evans et al., 2014:2). Omar (2014:4) warns that the absence of supportive managers can create difficulties to teacher development. It is clear that if the absence of support continues, Grade R teachers would not grow professionally and their teaching and learning would not improve to an accepted standard.

6.2.9.3 Mrs Lindani

The document analysis revealed that learners’ portfolio files, assessment recording tools, lesson plans and registers of learner attendance were not signed by the HOD. The SMT did not even moderate the DBE workbooks. The only work moderated was the mark schedules that were dated and signed by the HOD and the principal. This supports the findings that there is a lack of monitoring and support in schools (Hwenha, 2014:21; Van der Berg, 2016:145). In Mrs Lindani’s portfolio file, I did not see any copy of feedback on moderation from the HOD even though in interviews she indicated that she received adequate support.

In my personal view, the mark schedules are informed by the continuous assessment tasks done in a term. The SBA provides the SMT with the results of learner performance for each term of the year for intervention programmes. The analysed documents revealed that SBA was not done effectively. The absence of a monitoring tool showed that Mrs Lindani did not get full support from the SMT on curriculum content implementation.

6.2.9.4 Ms Solani

Document analysis confirmed the interviews findings which revealed that Ms Solani received little support from the SMT. Her portfolio file was evident that SBA was not done in Grade R. I noticed that the weekly lesson plans, learner activities and the recording tools were not stamped and signed.

6.2.9.5 Synthesis

The evidence on SBA supports the literature which argues that SMTs need to be capacitated to perform their role of monitoring curriculum implementation in schools (Madikida, 2016:59). The strategy HODs use may encourage Grade R teacher not to
cover the content of Grade R and that may lead to poor learner performance in Grade 1.

These findings support the literature which shows that planning in early grades is not monitored because the education of young learners is regarded as being of little value (Reche et al., 2012:4). These findings could be aligned with the findings that in rural areas 80% of head teachers managed ECD without training (Hlupo et al., 2013:6). Madikida (2016:59) states that SMTs lack content knowledge and understanding on how to monitor teaching and learning. Schools do not have SBA tools that would reflect the priorities for quality teaching and learning. It appeared that Grade R teachers were not monitored and good results may thus be compromised.

6.3 CHAPTER SUMMARY

The findings from document analysis indicated that some teachers taught without referring to the CAPS. Some teachers in the sampled schools utilised workbooks effectively. The findings also revealed that HODs monitoring and support on Grade R teaching and learning were limited. Assessment was of low quality as teachers assessed learners on the concepts they liked. There were no standardised assessment guidelines they had to follow which made the assessments unauthentic. Most teachers assessed learners formally, yet in Grade R, we assess informally. In conclusion, document analysis confirmed that the quality of teaching and learning was compromised and big classes were also a contributory factor.

The next chapter presents a summary of the research findings, limitations, conclusions, recommendations and suggestions for further studies.
CHAPTER 7:
SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 INTRODUCTION

This study has explored Grade R teaching and learning in rural schools. The findings were gathered from four rural schools through interviews, observations and document analysis. The findings from the four rural schools on Grade R teaching and learning practices were revealed and supported by evidence from the literature review in Chapter 2. I presented the findings of the empirical research through analysis and discussions. The purpose of this chapter is to present a summary of the key findings, to identify the significance of the study, to identify the limitations of the study, to draw conclusions from the evidence gathered during interviews, classroom observations and document analysis, to make recommendations and to suggest areas for further research. The findings of the study are related to the literature review and the theoretical framework.

7.2 OVERVIEW OF THE CHAPTERS 1 TO 6 OF THE STUDY

The study was organised into seven chapters. This section provides a summary of each chapter. Chapter 1 provided an orientation to the study, introduction and background, context of the study, statement of the problem, rationale of the study, research questions, clarification of concepts and chapter layout of the study. The chapter also presented a brief discussion of research methodology, literature review and theoretical framework.

Chapter 2 presented a literature review on some of the challenges facing Grade R teaching and learning and how these challenges influenced teaching and learning. The theoretical framework that underpins this study was adapted from Vygotsky’s theory that emphasises that teachers should support learners according to their levels of development to achieve better outcomes of learning. The theory was also discussed in Chapter 2 as it is embedded within the literature review. Theories of play by Piaget, Freud, Bruner, Bandura and Froebel were also reviewed as the study explored teaching and learning which involved the learning-through-play approach. As this study explored teaching and learning in rural schools, the theory of Freire was also reviewed.
In Chapter 3, the research methodology and its components were discussed in detail. These components included the qualitative research approach, case study approach, selection of participants, data collection methods, quality criteria of the study and ethical considerations. To ensure confidentiality of information given by the participants, pseudonyms for schools and participants were used instead of real names. Semi-structured interviews, observations and document analysis as data collection methods were discussed. The process of data analysis was also discussed in Chapter 3.

The research findings and interpretations on interviews were presented in Chapter 4. The case studies were presented under the three major themes which emerged during data analysis, namely; qualifications and training, content knowledge and unconducive school climate for Grade R teaching and learning.

In Chapter 5, the research findings and interpretations on structured observations were presented. The classroom context followed by the findings and interpretations observed during classroom observations were presented.

Chapter 6 presented research findings and interpretations on document analysis. Documents that strengthened CAPS implementation were interpreted. The major challenges facing Grade R teaching and learning were revealed.

7.3 SUMMARY OF THE RESEARCH FINDINGS

The summary of the research findings is presented under the three main themes namely, qualifications and training, content knowledge and the challenges and influence of school context in teaching and learning. The research findings showed that Grade R teaching and learning was compromised in the rural schools that participated in this study.

7.3.1 Qualifications and Training

The challenge of qualification and training in ECE had long been debated internationally. Most of the current Grade R teachers who are in the system pursued their diplomas through distance learning. In as far as teachers’ qualifications were concerned, only one teacher of the four possessed a Level 6 Grade R certificate (Table 3.1). As discussed in Chapter 4, Grade R teachers depend on departmental workshops
for capacitation with knowledge and skills for teaching Grade R. It was noted that Grade R qualification was insufficiently studied.

The research findings also highlighted that some HODs who monitored and supported the Foundation Phase, including Grade R, had no relevant qualifications. These HODs found it challenging to support Grade R teaching and learning programmes. Some HODs agreed with everything that the Grade R teachers did because they did not know better. The results of the study also showed that the HODs who had a primary teachers’ diploma and a diploma in educational management portrayed a sound knowledge and understanding of Grade R teaching and learning programmes. In South African context, the study established that even those HODs who were at college their qualification was not aligned with CAPS implementation and therefore they had not been exposed to Grade R content knowledge (Mahan, 2015:18). The study revealed that qualifications are important for teaching even in Grade R.

The researchers established that in most countries as South Africa, Zimbabwe, Singapore and China, most reception-year teachers were unqualified (Andrich et al., 2015:3; Hlupo et al., 2013:6; Mahan, 2015:21). Literature also highlights that if reception-year learners are taught by untrained teachers they tend to experience learning difficulties in their learning process (Hwenha, 2015:31). Taken together, these studies offer some insight into how the Grade R qualification can be shaped to improve learner performance in lower grades.

7.3.2 Content Knowledge

In the South African context, the aims for CAPS implementation indicate the quality of teaching and learning teachers have to provide to learners regardless of socioeconomic background.

7.3.2.1 Content knowledge on teaching and learning strategies

In Grade R, for effective teaching and learning, three teaching approaches should be applied, namely instructional, guided and free play (Mulaudzi, 2015:160). My study revealed that Grade R teachers used only a few teaching and learning strategies in teaching mathematics, language and life skills and play received little attention. The findings established that Grade R teachers engaged learners in cooperative learning through which they could support each other in groups during guided and free-play
activities. The classroom observations affirmed that all four Grade R teachers struggled in applying the instructional play approach to the extent that they often ignored it. Grade R teachers did not involve learners in peer and individual groups, but focused only on group work activities. Individual activities were done only when learners were engaged in activities on writing. The approach used by Grade R teachers was not aligned with the social constructivist theory which emphasises interaction between the teacher and the learner for effective application of scaffolding (Vygotsky, 1978: 57).

The play theorists argue that learners should be engaged in learning by means of the activities-through-play approach (Bandura, 1989:34; Vygotsky, 1978:86). These theorists believe that if learners are given an opportunity to search out the information, they tend to be creative and develop cognitively in solving problems. Freire (1998: 67) described the lack of content knowledge observed in Grade R classes as a teacher-centred approach which deprived learners of access to free education.

7.3.2.2 Lack of resources and utilisation

The findings highlighted that the Grade R teachers had indoor teaching resources, even though these were not enough. The Grade R teachers confirmed that the DBE distributed indoor resources but teachers did not use them because they were not trained on how to use them. It is evident that in South Africa, schools were provided with material but teachers had no intervention training and knowledge on how to use the resources effectively (Helmbold, 2013:197).

The observations also revealed that all four schools did not have outdoor materials. Grade R teachers mentioned that it was challenging to teach physical education which aimed at developing learners’ gross motor skills. Modisaotsile (2012:4) affirms a decline in quality education in rural schools because of the shortage of basic resources. These teachers acknowledged that they skipped some concepts of Grade R content in teaching and learning practices because of the lack of outdoor materials. It became clear that these Grade R teachers did not know how to improvise, even though they understood the importance of physical education in Grade R. Froebel (2014, cited in Park, 2016:128) suggests that teachers need to learn how to use waste material to design their own play material without incurring costs.
The lack of appropriate reading materials for Grade R learners, resource materials for creative arts, a fantasy area, the block area and furniture were also highlighted as challenges that hindered effective teaching and learning. In this regard, the findings confirmed that teachers regarded lack of furniture as a contributing factor towards poor handwriting and drawing skills of learners. The Grade R teachers asserted that they preferred to form small groups of learners for handwriting and for creative arts activities. A lack of budget for Grade R to acquire resource materials was also indicated as a challenge as teachers found it difficult even to make copies for learner activities.

All Grade R teachers perceived a lack of resource materials as a serious challenge that hindered teaching and learning. It is apparent from the research findings that Grade R learners were not provided with opportunities to explore the resource materials. The findings also suggested that the play-based approach was not much applied in some Grade R classes. Grade R teachers also indicated that they were not involved in selecting the materials for teaching and learning when the schools budgeted for materials. The Grade R teachers felt that they were not fully recognised in their schools, yet they were implementers of curriculum in those schools.

7.3.2.3 Lack of knowledge on barriers to learning

The research findings confirmed that Grade R teachers and HODs had challenges in identifying learners with barriers to learning. The findings indicated that Grade R teachers were not given an opportunity to attend workshops on barriers to learning and revealed that schools selected teachers from Grade 1 to Grade 3 to attend workshops. The Grade R teachers were not orientated on the basic skills they could apply to support learners. Abongdia et al. (2015:4) argue that teachers need to have skills and knowledge to identify barriers to learning. The lack of knowledge and skills on barriers to learning influenced Grade R teachers in most cases to use their informal observations to screen learners through practical activities.

The HODs also portrayed a lack of knowledge and understanding regarding barriers to learning because they could not screen learners after being referred to them by Grade R class teachers. The findings also highlighted that document analysis and classroom observations showed that some Grade R teachers were unable to support learners with learning difficulties in drawing and in handwriting. While it was evident that HODs hold the view that learners should be supported as from Grade R, they
could not provide teachers with clear strategies and plans to follow in supporting learners. It was clear that Grade R learners progressed to upper grades with barriers to learning not being identified or supported in terms of the areas affected.

7.3.2.4 Subject teacher content knowledge on Grade R teaching and learning

In this study, Grade R teachers portrayed a sound language content knowledge in teaching letter sounds, emergent writing and storytelling. The subject content knowledge gap they experienced was observed regarding teaching shared reading, emergent reading and independent reading. In mathematics, Grade R teachers focused largely on the content area which dealt with numbers, operations and relationships but sharing activities were not done although teachers knew that they were supposed to teach them.

The research findings further revealed that in life skills, Grade R teachers focused attention on beginning knowledge and little time was spent on physical education and creative arts yet these study areas are the ones which strengthen implementation of language and mathematics in the Foundation Phase. According to Maponya (2017:59), teachers’ subject content knowledge is the key to influencing learner performance and highlighted that in primary schools, teachers struggle to teach language and mathematics. I align lack of teachers’ subject content knowledge with various factors such as teaching the phase they were not trained to teach, the lack of support which involves mentoring and the lack of resources.

All Grade R teachers implemented the play-based approach in their classes, although on a limited scale. The Grade R teachers always explained the challenge of overcrowding of learners and lack of enough physical space in classrooms for adhering to the principles of the play-based approach. The physical education, creative arts, shared reading and sharing activities in mathematics were not taught properly and some of these concepts did not appear in lesson plans. The findings relating to lack of Grade R teacher content knowledge link to literature in the sense that ECE has received little attention in most countries (Whitman, 2015: 44). The lack of content knowledge appeared to negatively affect content coverage for the year. This then compromises progression requirements in the sense that Grade R learners would not have acquired all basic knowledge and skills for laying the foundation in the early grades (Excell & Linington, 2012:3; ILO, 2012:14). I can conclude that, in Grade R,
teachers did not cover the content they were expected to cover. The findings clearly show that learners progressed to upper grades with some concepts missed.

7.3.2.5 Content knowledge on Grade R language of teaching and learning

Regarding language of teaching and learning, the findings affirmed that some Grade R teachers did not understand language as a tool that helps learners to communicate, read and write properly according to their level of development. Some Grade R teachers mixed English and isiXhosa when they interacted with learners. In this study, one teacher engaged learners in reciting English rhymes as a warm-up for a story-telling activity and this was not in accordance with the home language of teaching and learning. It is my assumption that it can be the influence of parents who want their children to be taught in English as observed by Molteno (2017:36) in Grade R. Vygotsky (1978:16) believes that learners learn better when they learn in the language of their culture and it is easy to scaffold learning for them.

The other teacher also engaged learners in a counting activity and she allowed learners to say numbers in English and isiXhosa, for example; ziyitwo instead of 2 in English or zimbini in isiXhosa. The literature review states that if more than one language is used in a Grade R class, learners will experience a challenge (Soma, 2011:45). Some Grade R teachers observed did not adhere to the Foundation Phase language policy for teaching and learning. The policy emphasises that learners in Grade R should be taught in their mother language (DBE, 2011d:14). The study confirmed the findings which indicate that some learners in Grade R had little language competency (Feza, 2014a:6).

The findings also revealed that the lesson plan document from the DBE and the life skills documents from the ECDBE were not written in the language of teaching and learning. The two documents suggested that neither the nations nor the provisional departments adhered to the language policy which emphasises the use of home language in Grade R for teaching and learning. It was evident from the findings that not all teachers used the prescribed DBE lesson plans. I aligned Grade R teachers’ ignorance of those lesson plans with their difficulty in translating documents into the language of teaching and learning. This may result in low academic progress in the grade, which, as Machaba (2013:67) noted, limited language proficiency in mathematics in lower grades.
7.3.2.6 Content knowledge on planning and content coverage

The research findings from the literature studied, showed that, for effective teaching and learning, planning should involve content to be taught, objectives and a remedial plan for supporting learners on concept development (Reche et al., 2012:4). In this study, the findings revealed that Grade R teachers used CAPS policy documents for planning. The findings highlighted that Grade R teachers did not adhere to a daily programme, Grade R timetable, in planning integrated lessons for mathematics, language and life skills. Some Grade R teachers confirmed that they did not follow a daily programme because of the big number of learners they taught. It was evident that overcrowding has negative impact on teaching and learning (Maponya, 2017:56).

This study also established that teachers found it difficult to infuse similar topics to cover the content missed. The teachers’ lack of knowledge on how to infuse similar concepts or themes caused them to be behind in as far as content coverage was concerned. The teachers’ planning did not cover all the concepts to be taught; for example, physical education, creative arts and sharing activities lessons did not appear in the teachers’ lesson plans. The research findings revealed an imbalance in the planning of teaching and learning concepts. The findings supported the literature which indicates that in South Africa, Grade R teacher-initiated activities were fewer than expected (Helmbold, 2014:12). Teachers explained that part of their time for planning was consumed by attending workshops, managing poor learner attendance and managing absenteeism. It was apparent from the research findings that Grade R learners progressed to Grade 1 with missed concepts.

7.3.2.7 Content knowledge on Grade R assessment

The study established that all Grade R teachers understood that assessment is continuous. The Grade R teachers also understood the usage of recording tools for recording learner performance. In assessing learners, teachers used rubrics that were in the CAPS. The research findings revealed that Grade R teachers used different recording tools. Some teachers used recordings tools which covered all the concepts learners had to learn in each CAPS while others used their own recording tools which covered only the concepts they taught in the CAPS. This resulted the recorded learner performance on observation tool not being aligned with the marks captured in SASAMS for mark schedules but the report cards were aligned with mark schedules.
because they were automatically produced by the computer. It appeared that assessment was not authentic and not standardised.

The findings also revealed that teachers did not assess learners continuously as they indicated in the interviews. Findings included that learners were engaged in group activities but no assessment was done regarding this. Grade R teachers focused much on assessing written work. The findings provided that other forms of assessment such as oral and practical activities were limited and sometimes not recorded. It was evident that assessment principles were partially applied in Grade R teaching and learning. The literature findings indicate that various forms of assessment activities should be provided to support learner needs and diversity (Kanje & Mtembu, 2015:9).

Based on the research findings, I argue that the play-based approach was limited in Grade R teaching and learning. I can align the above statement with the findings from the literature which indicates that Grade R teachers found it difficult to apply the play-based approach when teaching big class numbers (Taole & Mohapi, 2013:1). According to play theorists, Grade R learners learn better by doing and therefore each learner should be given an opportunity to play (Bruner, 1961: 105; Vygotsky, 1978:86).

In conclusion, the findings from the literature and empirical study revealed that assessment was still a challenge in Grade R teaching and learning (Deacon, 2016:10; Kanjee & Moloi, 2014:10; Mohapi, 2014:3).

7.3.3 The School Climate

7.3.3.1 Unconducive school environment for Grade R teaching and learning

The study noted that in South Africa, there were schools offering Grade R that were still confronted with a shortage of infrastructure. The findings of this study highlighted that classrooms, playgrounds and toilets created an unacceptable school climate for teaching and learning in rural schools. The findings confirmed the study which indicated that many rural schools in South Africa experience a lack of infrastructure and toilets (Mavundla, 2016:13). The literature also argues that poor classroom conditions and lack of toilets in rural schools influence learner absenteeism and lead to academic poor performance. The attendance registers confirmed that in some Grade R schools, learners start school late and leave early for holidays. During harsh
In this study, the research findings also revealed that the available classrooms were not standardised classrooms and were too small to accommodate Grade R learning stations. The study found that there were some schools in which Grade R learners were taught in prefabricated classrooms. The Grade R learners who were physically challenged were not catered for in most school buildings. These classrooms were also not suitable for pasting Grade R posters and pictures on the walls. The research findings showed that it was difficult for teachers to instil incidental reading in Grade R classes. This supports the argument which indicates that lack of infrastructure and poor school conditions make it more difficult for teachers to teach according to the expectations of curriculum delivery (Mavundla, 2016:55). This was in contrast with the Curriculum and Assessment Statement which emphasises print-rich Foundation Phase classrooms (DBE, 2011a:10). In one of the four schools, two Grade R teachers shared one classroom. This implied that there was a shortage of infrastructure in those selected schools.

The findings also established that school playgrounds in all four schools were uneven and appeared neglected and not suitable for use by Grade R learners. This suggested that learners were not provided with opportunities to do physical education activities. Another challenge observed was a lack of suitable toilets for Grade R. The pit toilets were not meant for smaller children and this posed a challenge for Grade R learners.

The contexts of the four schools portrayed an unfavourable school environment for Grade R teaching and learning. The absence of outdoor equipment made the school environment less attractive and not enjoyable for young learners who want to play. I therefore posit that Grade R facilities are not yet sufficiently developed for effective teaching and learning. Only one of the four schools included Grade R in co-curriculum activities. The findings established that learners were not engaged even in language festivals or mathematics quizzes at cluster level. I perceived that SMT did not have a knowledge and understanding of Grade R programmes which are based on play activities. The Grade R situation highlights that there are strategies teachers in rural schools cannot apply in their teaching practices because of rurality and poor socioeconomic status of the schools.
7.3.3.2 Lack of security

The research findings from the sampled schools indicated that Grade R materials were not safely kept in all the four schools. All the interviewed teachers stated that some of the indoor materials were kept in the principals’ offices because of the lack of security in Grade R classrooms and in schools. Teachers reported a high rate of burglary cases that occurred in their schools during weekends and school holidays. The observations also revealed that Grade R classroom sites were not fenced or separated from the rest of the classes. Therefore, older learners vandalised the outdoor materials and Grade R learners could not access their resource materials for learning. One of the four Grade R teachers indicated that she preferred to clean her own classroom to avoid losing indoor materials.

Another challenge that faced Grade R learners was unsafe and insecure toilets. There were no special toilets for Grade R learners in any of the schools. The HODs explained that the schools had no other alternative because the toilets were supposed to be built by the DBE. The big enrolment in three schools led to an unconducive school climate which contributed to a lack of security for Grade R learners.

7.3.3.3 Poor admission policy implementation

The research findings affirmed that not all schools adhered to Grade R admission policy implementation in terms of age cohort. Evidence presented in Chapter 4 revealed that most Grade R teachers in rural schools taught more than 30 learners in a class. The research findings established that overcrowding caused many challenges on Grade R teaching and learning in the classrooms. Overcrowding made it difficult for teachers to provide learners with individual support. Teachers felt that overcrowding had a negative influence on supporting learners with learning difficulties. The findings also affirmed that teachers could not follow the daily programme properly as they spent much time maintaining discipline. Based on the findings, teachers could not teach all the concepts they were expected to teach according to CAPS. The overcrowding also deprived Grade R learners of an opportunity to explore play materials.

Further findings from the data included that in moderate weather conditions, Grade R teachers took learners outside for accessing open space. The teachers highlighted that sometimes it was difficult to engage learners in play-based activities. Classroom
observations acknowledged that teachers found it difficult to interact with learners effectively because of the limited space to move around the groups. Observations further revealed that Grade R classrooms accommodated only a few learning stations because of overcrowding.

The HODs and Grade R teachers stated that the lack of preschools in areas around schools compelled the schools to accept those pre-schoolers but not to register them. The preschoolers became a contributing factor towards overcrowding in those schools. Grade R teachers had groups of pre-schoolers in their Grade R classes. Three HODs shared that parents were not keen to support the opening of preschools as they indicated that it was government’s responsibility. The findings revealed that Grade R teachers could not focus much on Grade R learners for support because of the additional load of pre-schoolers. This arrangement contradicted the school admission policy which stipulated the age cohort for learners to be admitted in a Grade R class (DBE, 2011d:8).

All Grade R teachers observed experienced challenges in managing their overcrowded classes. Classroom observations confirmed that teachers could not manage behavioural interruptions from some learners during group work activities. The observed teachers experienced challenges in teaching shared reading in big classes. Learners were often disruptive even though classroom rules were recited every day. The lack of classroom management was associated with teachers’ inability to use different play-based activities in the classrooms. Most Grade R activities were formally structured. Based on observations of the Grade R lessons, teachers did not provide individualised strategies to avoid disruptions in class. This compromised effective teaching and learning. The challenges and negative influence of overcrowded classes are confirmed by the literature (Mulaudzi, 2016:110). Therefore, Mohapi (2014:101) suggests that learners require enough space for learning-through-play to be effective in Grade R classrooms and with proper planning. Overall, poor adherence to the admission policy suggest that effective teaching and learning is compromised in rural schools.
7.3.3.4 Lack of support

- Lack of support for Grade R teachers

It is clearly noted that support is always required in implementing curriculum changes to everybody regardless of qualification (Taole & Mohapi, 2013:4). The research findings from the collected data confirmed that schools provided little support for Grade R teaching and learning. The HODs explained that they were not trained on Grade R teaching and learning programmes. The study concurred with Hlupo et al. (2013:10) who state that, in rural schools, SMTs manage ECD without training.

The study also indicated that HODs were not invited even to Grade R workshops so that they could support teachers effectively. Another challenge the research findings highlighted was that the Grade R teachers were supported by some HODs who had no Grade R teaching and learning content and their qualifications were not relevant to Foundation Phase. The findings of this study also confirmed that most Grade R HODs had monitored more than eight HODs and they had additional administrative duties and had class of their own to teach. The influence of the above challenges that confronted HODs was observed in Chapter 6 where most Grade R teachers’ work and learner evidence was not moderated by the HODs.

The SMTs appeared to lack capacity to monitor and support Grade R teaching and learning. The data collected from Grade R teachers revealed that principals seldom participated in implementation of Grade R teaching and learning programmes; instead they wanted them to implement Grade R programmes in the same way as for Grade 1 to Grade 3: timetables on the wall next to daily programmes were evidence of this. The findings support the literature which reveals that the lack of knowledge and understanding that SMTs experience bring changes that are sometimes incongruent with the knowledge that teachers have already acquired (Nkambule & Amsterdam, 2018:4). Among the four schools, two had timetables similar to the other grades in the Foundation Phase pasted next to the daily programme, yet in Grade R teachers use a daily programme only as their timetable. The SMTs’ practices were characterised by the influence of the old curriculum and their lack of interest in learning about Grade R programmes.
The findings affirmed that these HODs relied on what the Grade R teachers said in their sessions for monitoring and support. Some of Grade R teachers supported each other as their HODs had no content knowledge and the strategy was approved by most HODs direct and indirect. This showed that quality support in teaching and learning was compromised. Based on the above findings, I argue that Grade R teaching and learning received little or no monitoring and support in some schools.

- Lack of parental support

The Grade R teachers and HODs understood that parental support was needed for effective teaching and learning. It was reported that parents in rural schools did not recognise the importance of their roles and responsibilities in the education of their children. The findings indicated that parents’ meetings were poorly attended. The findings highlighted that parents attended in the majority when they had to collect reports cards for learner performance. The SMT together with SGB strategized when there would be elections by emphasising all learners should come with their parents on particular days and the strategy worked. Teachers stated that, sometimes, they were compelled to take decisions about learners without involving the parents. The study established that parents lacked empowerment on how to be actively involved in the education of their own children.

7.4 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RESEARCH FINDINGS

The findings of this study are important as they provide curriculum planners and stakeholders that support ECE with an understanding of some challenges facing Grade R in South African schools. The findings have implications for Grade R teacher qualifications, infrastructure, quality of resources, parental support, authentic assessment, language of teaching and learning, use of various strategies for teaching and learning and the quality of support. The study provides opportunities for curriculum advisers to strengthen support and monitoring procedures for Grade R classes in rural schools. The study also suggests circuit education officials to play a much more supportive role in introducing programmes for parental participation and other workable interventions for improvement of teaching and learning in rural schools. Qualifications for Grade R teachers are extremely important and these influence teaching and learning practices. Therefore, the study highlights the relevance of qualifications and training for both Grade R teachers and HODs for effective teaching and learning.
The study also suggests the importance of language usage in Grade R teaching and learning. It supports the idea that one language of teaching and learning should be used in the Grade R class. The study emphasises that for effective teaching and learning, Grade R teachers need to plan their lessons properly, be provided with suitable resources and use them effectively and use various assessment strategies for authentic assessment. The study also stresses the use of the play-based approach to strengthen teaching and learning of language, mathematics and life skills in Grade R classrooms. Finally, the study outlines the importance of a conducive school and classroom environment for effective Grade R teaching and learning.

7.5 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The scope of this study was limited to rural schools of OR Tambo Coastal District in the Eastern Cape Province in South Africa. The research sample that comprised four teachers and four HODs from four schools was very limited for generalising the findings of this study. The research findings should not be generalised to other rural school contexts since challenges differ from school to school.

The data gathered was limited to the information provided by the sampled participants and observations from the sampled schools. The documents provided were limited but the study had to focus on the available sources of data. Some of the selected HODs appeared not to be sufficiently knowledgeable about the content of Grade R teaching and learning but I had to rely on the data they provided. The Grade R teachers were also not comfortable in sharing the challenges they experienced in their schools as they were employed on contract.

7.6 CONCLUSIONS

7.6.1 Conclusion on Interview Findings

The interview findings revealed that there are several challenges facing Grade R teaching and learning in rural schools, as followed:

- The school environment which was not conducive for teaching and learning: Large learner enrolment numbers, poor and lack of suitable classrooms for Grade R, lack of furniture, lack of sport grounds for play activities and lack of outdoor and poor fencing made schools unattractive for young learners. The study also established
that some of Grade R classrooms were prefabricated and that made it difficult to post material for print-rich walls. The interviews confirmed that Grade R was taught by unqualified teachers and even the HODs monitored the grade without training.

- Grade R teachers used limited teaching and learning strategies in teaching language, mathematics and life skills. The large numbers of learners in class made it difficult for the teachers to follow the daily programme in their teaching practices and that caused them not to teach other concepts in language, mathematics and life skills. The teachers experienced various challenges such as lack of resources or how to use them, managing learners with barriers to learning, lack of support from parents and SMTs, overcrowded classes with preschoolers and lack of security for Grade R materials.

- The HODs’ monitoring of and support for Grade R teaching and learning was very limited and was due to their lack of content knowledge. The strategies HODs mentioned to support Grade R teachers did not address the challenges facing Grade R teaching and learning which included planning and barriers to learning.

7.6.2 Conclusions on Observation Findings

Some of the major challenges identified during observations verified poor infrastructure which involved small prefabricated classrooms that made it difficult to post pictures and other materials for print-rich classrooms. Lack of suitable toilets for Grade R learners, lack of sport grounds for play activities and poor fencing posed a challenge for the Grade R teaching and learning context. Three schools had learner enrolment ranging between 1000 and 2200 which posed the challenge of security and a lack of space for young learners to play. The observed classrooms were overcrowded and that caused poor classroom organisation which deprived learners of the opportunity for incidental learning.

Classroom observations also established that some concepts which involved sharing, physical education, creative art and independent reading were not taught in Grade R classes. Teachers used very few teaching and learning strategies to unpack the concepts, yet the CAPS for the various subjects provide many strategies. With regard to assessment, teachers found it difficult to assess learners in small groups and as individuals, due to big classes. I observed that teachers struggled even to identify or
support learners with barriers to learning. The overcrowding could be a contributory factor (Chimhenga, 2016:10; Mohapi, 2013:4:).

I also noted that some Grade R teachers mixed two languages when they interacted with learners in teaching and learning context. The use of two languages made Grade R learners sound isiXhosa words differently. Based on the findings in this study, I concur with the literature findings which reported that one language is good for Grade R learners to avoid confusion in sounding words (Soma, 2011:21). In classroom observations, I found that Grade R teachers had no sound knowledge and experience of how to address the challenges facing Grade R teaching and learning.

7.6.3 Conclusions on Document Analysis Findings

I collected the following documents from the participants: Learner attendance registers, the CAPS, DBE learner workbooks, weekly term planners, lesson plans, classwork books, recording or observation tools, mark quarterly schedules, learner report cards and the document on barriers to learning. These documents were scrutinised to verify the findings provided from participants during the interviews and classroom observations.

The registers of the sampled schools confirmed that most schools did not adhere to Grade R admission policy which indicates that the maximum number of learners should be 30 per class. This verified the data collected from the interviews and from the classroom observations. There was an absence of some policy documents such as the CAPS for mathematics, mental mathematics booklet, weekly term planners and assessment framework in some schools. The absence of these documents led Grade R teachers to struggle with teaching and assessing the relevant CAPS concepts learners were expected to learn before they progressed to Grade 1. The documents were meant to guide teachers on their planning for effective teaching and learning.

Regarding barriers to learning documents, teachers were provided with strategies to support learners with barriers to learning in language and in mathematics. The document did not provide teachers with steps to be taken when the strategies did not address the challenges facing the learner. It appeared to me that the document on barriers to learning did not support teachers much. The document should have outlined the strategies and clearly stated how to support each learner, for example, with poor
eyesight, speech problems, hearing challenges and behavioural problems that are common in teaching and learning. The document provided activities that were based on supporting learners with handwriting and basic counting skills. The document had little positive impact in supporting other learners in Grade R teaching and learning practices. A comprehensive document that would make it easier for teachers to support learners with barriers to learning is needed.

The document analysis findings also revealed that in classwork books and in DBE workbooks teachers used very few strategies to address different learner needs. The informal assessment tasks and recording tools confirmed that assessment was one-size-fits-all. Learners should be assessed according to their level of development as literature suggests (Brunner, 1960:79; Gray & MacBlain, 2012:21; Moalosi, 2013:3; Vygotsky, 1978:87). I was expecting to see special tasks designed to support special groups of learners. Curriculum differentiation in Grade R class is always needed as an intervention strategy to scaffold learning for those learners who struggle in class.

With regard to learner performance, mark schedules captured from SASAMS and recording tools showed no alignment. In recording tools, learners did not perform well in some concepts but in mark schedules, all learners passed with 100%. In classwork books and in DBE workbooks, there were learners who struggled in doing some activities. It was clear that assessment was not authentic. Informal assessment tasks did not show the strength of teaching and learning of language, mathematics and life skills in Grade R. I assume that it was because teachers did not follow weekly term planners and were behind in terms of the content coverage. The content coverage was not monitored which was the strategy that would assist teachers to complete the content stipulated in CAPS policy documents. Some Grade R teachers did not have even the CAPS for mathematics. This implied that Grade R learners would perform below the expected standard.

7.7 RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations made in this study are based on the literature reviewed and the research findings. The following recommendations are suggested for improving Grade R teaching and learning in order to attain the quality of education in rural schools.
7.7.1 Qualification and Training

It is acknowledged that the training Grade R teachers received was inadequate for teachers to deliver the curriculum effectively. My study affirms that Grade R teachers and HODs should be appointed on the basis of their qualifications and training relating to the Foundation Phase. Continuous in-service-training on Grade R teaching and learning programmes should be provided for effective teaching and learning.

The institutions that provide Grade R teachers with qualifications should ensure that the knowledge and skills teachers acquire are relevant to Grade R teaching and learning and that teachers are able to apply what they have learned. South Africa needs to improve the pace of upgrading Grade R qualifications for effective teaching and learning because curriculum changes are occurring rapidly. Provision of financial support for improving Grade R teachers’ qualifications could motivate teachers to study further.

7.7.2 Content Knowledge

The teacher content knowledge is regarded as a strong aspect that influences learner performance in schools. The content knowledge is observed on various areas which influence effective teaching and learning. Based on the findings of this study, the following areas are suggested to improve Grade R teaching and learning in rural schools:

7.7.2.1 Teaching and learning strategies

The findings of this study revealed that there the play-based approach in Grade R teaching and learning practices was not applied. The study recommends that teachers need to be workshopped on how to apply various strategies in teaching concepts to accommodate different learner needs. The examples used to consolidate the concepts in teaching and learning should be sociocultural to help learners understand concepts with ease. It is also recommended that teachers should make use of resources to develop teaching and learning strategies that could also accommodate learners with special needs.
7.7.2.2 Resources

This study recommends that materials for effective implementation of the play-based approach need to be in place for teachers to provide more opportunities to learn in Grade R. It is important that Grade R teachers are involved in the selection of indoor and outdoor resource materials for Grade R. Grade R teachers require support with developmentally appropriate resources which corresponds with the language of teaching and learning. Training on resource making would assist teachers not to rely only on NGOs and the DBE for simple resources that they could easily make themselves.

7.7.2.3 Barriers to learning

Grade R teachers should also be given an opportunity to attend workshops on barriers to learning and be members of Institutional Level Support Team. It is recommended that teachers should be provided with a document with simple language and terminology on barriers to learning which could guide them on how to support learners with learning difficulties. The document should also have guidelines on how to support learners with poor eyesight and those who have hearing deficits and speech problems.

7.7.2.4 Subject teacher content knowledge on Grade R teaching and learning

HODs at school level need to identify teacher support needs and organise people who have content knowledge on that particular subject concepts for support. Subject advisers also need to work hand in hand with HODs so that they could combine schools which experience content gap in some subject concepts and capacitate those teachers. The trainings and workshops alone cannot develop teachers on subject content knowledge. Teachers themselves need to network, to find out what other teachers are doing for sharing of best practices. Due to a shortage of workshops, teachers can share best practices at cluster level where they can organise themselves as groups.

7.7.2.5 Grade R language of teaching and learning

It is recommended that Grade R teachers should ensure that teaching and learning is provided in the language of their learners. Furthermore, the resources that make
classrooms print-rich should be in the language of the learners. The rhymes, songs and drama should be in the language of the learners to extend learner vocabulary.

7.7.2.6 Planning and content coverage

It is recommended that HODs and district curriculum officials monitor and support Grade R teachers closely on their planning to be able to cover the expected content. In addition, the number of learners in Grade R class should be taken into consideration for effective teaching and learning as most teachers raised their concern about big numbers they taught. Finally, in order to assist Grade R teachers to cover the content for the year, the curriculum planners should infuse the themes and concepts that are similar. Weekly term planners can assist HODs to monitor the Grade R content coverage.

7.7.2.7 Assessment

It is recommended that Grade R teachers receive further training on how to assess learners in groups, individually and in pairs using various assessment strategies according to the levels of learner development. In addition, Grade R teachers should be re-orientated with the aims of CAPS implementation and the principles of assessment in order to understand the importance of assessing learners on continuous basis. The HODs together with the departmental officials need to monitor that Grade R learners are assessed according to CAPS content prescripts and that assessment is authentic. This would help learners to progress to Grade 1 without content gaps.

7.7.3 The School Climate

It is recommended that a conducive school environment for Grade R teaching and learning should to be provided with modern infrastructure, toilets relevant for Grade R learners, outdoor equipment, sport grounds and open space for free play activities. I believe that learners would view the school as an important place to improve their academic career paths to satisfy their dreams. The size of the school enrolment in schools offering Grade R should also be considered for the safety and security of young learners. A suitable structure and adequate number of Grade R toilets would improve the health status of young learners at schools.
7.7.3.1 Classroom organisation

It is recommended that Grade R should be provided with suitable classrooms with adequate space for learning stations and for play activities. The Grade R teachers also need to be capacitated on classroom layout which is one of the aspects that attract learners for incidental learning. The Grade R walls should be print-rich and more attractive as young learners believe on colourful materials. Teaching and learning should be well planned to make classroom environment more positive for learners. With regard to small classrooms, teachers should change play stations on daily or weekly basis.

7.7.3.2 Support for Grade R teachers

- Teacher support

It is recommended that the DBE should capacitate SMTs with knowledge and skills for supporting Grade R teaching and learning programmes. I believe that once SMTs are trained, monitoring and support would not be once-off activity but could be structured for improvement of teaching and learning in Grade R. The HODs should also attend Grade R workshops.

- Parental support

It is recommended that the SMT together with the district officials should orientate parents on their role in supporting the education of their children. Furthermore, teachers should be capacitated on how to establish relationships with parents to make teaching and learning effective in their schools. I suggest play days at schools whereby parents would come and play with their children and that would establish a good relationship between teachers and parents towards the education of their children.

7.7.3.3 Admission policy implementation

It is recommended that more primary schools are built in rural areas to accommodate preschool learners and Grade R learners to avoid overcrowding in Grade R classrooms.

It is also recommended that preschools should be introduced within or around the schools. Although it is a responsibility of the DSD to introduce preschools, parents
should also take the lead to ensure that they have preschools in their communities. This would help schools to adhere to the Grade R admission policy and not to accommodate underage learners in Grade R classes. This would also minimise overcrowding and give teachers enough opportunity to support learners with barriers to learning. Preschool would also prepare those young learners for readiness to attend formal schooling.

7.7.3.4 Safety and security

It is recommended that the DBE should provide proper fencing and hire security guards to safeguard Grade R infrastructure and the expensive materials distributed to schools. Furthermore, communities should be capacitated to know and understand that the safety of their children and security of the school is in their hands.

7.8 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

The research findings suggest that further research is required to investigate areas that could provide deeper knowledge and understanding about some of the challenges that face Grade R teaching and learning in rural schools. The findings for this study could be replicated and extended to include strategies to overcome challenges facing Grade R in rural schools, based on intervention programmes for addressing barriers to learning, provision of resources for successful implementation of Grade R programmes and continuous in-service training for Grade R teachers.

Specific recommendations for further studies include:

- Further research on the strategies that can be implemented to ensure the implementation of the play-based methodology in rural schools.
- The content of the Grade R teacher qualification should be aligned with the content required for teaching and learning. A study is recommended to establish how this can be done.
- The knowledge and understanding of SMT on Grade R teaching and learning programmes needs to be further investigated.
- Alternative strategies to improve overcrowding in Grade R classrooms in rural schools and the challenge of preschoolers who added overcrowding in Grade R should be investigated.
• An investigation into the alternative strategies to engage ECD parents in education of their children in rural schools should be done.
• The improvement of safety and security of Grade R learners accommodated in schools with large enrolment and the resources as well should be investigated.
REFERENCES


Department of Basic Education. 2010. *Guidelines for full-service schools*. Pretoria: Department of Basic Education.


Moyo, J., Wadesango, N. & Kurebwa, M. 2012. Factors that affect the implementation of early childhood development programmes in Zimbabwe. Studies of Tribes and Tribals, 10(2):141-149.


Sinyei, C., Mwonga, J. & Wanyama, M.N. 2012. An assessment of the availability of resources to facilitate early childhood music and movement curriculum


APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: PERMISSION FROM UNISA ETHICS COMMITTEE TO CONDUCT THE STUDY

UNISA COLLEGE OF EDUCATION ETHICS REVIEW COMMITTEE

Date: 2017/08/16

Dear Ms Makeleni,

Decision: Ethics Approval from 2017/07/12 to 2022/08/16

Ref: 2017/08/16/30557992/11/MC
Name: Ms TN Makeleni
Student: 30557992

Researcher:
Name: Ms TN Makeleni
Email: nomvuyisom95@gmail.com
Telephone: 0734344644

Supervisor:
Name: Dr MJ Sethusaha
Email: sethumj@unisa.ac.za
Telephone: 012 429 2258

Title of research:
An exploration of the challenges facing Grade R teaching and learning in rural schools

Qualification: PhD in Curriculum and Instructional Studies

Thank you for the application for research ethics clearance by the UNISA College of Education Ethics Review Committee for the above mentioned research. Ethics approval is granted for the period 2017/08/16 to 2022/08/16.

The low risk application was reviewed by the Ethics Review Committee on 2017/08/16 in compliance with the UNISA Policy on Research Ethics and the Standard Operating Procedure on Research Ethics Risk Assessment.
The proposed research may now commence with the provisions that:

1. The researcher(s) will ensure that the research project adheres to the values and principles expressed in the UNISA Policy on Research Ethics.

2. Any adverse circumstance arising in the undertaking of the research project that is relevant to the ethicality of the study should be communicated in writing to the UNISA College of Education Ethics Review Committee.

3. The researcher(s) will conduct the study according to the methods and procedures set out in the approved application.

4. Any changes that can affect the study-related risks for the research participants, particularly in terms of assurances made with regards to the protection of participants’ privacy and the confidentiality of the data, should be reported to the Committee in writing.

5. The researcher will ensure that the research project adheres to any applicable national legislation, professional codes of conduct, institutional guidelines and scientific standards relevant to the specific field of study. Adherence to the following South African legislation is important, if applicable: Protection of Personal Information Act, no 4 of 2013; Children’s act no 38 of 2005 and the National Health Act, no 61 of 2003.

6. Only de-identified research data may be used for secondary research purposes in future on condition that the research objectives are similar to those of the original research. Secondary use of identifiable human research data requires additional ethics clearance.

7. No field work activities may continue after the expiry date 2022/08/15. Submission of a completed research ethics progress report will constitute an application for renewal of Ethics Research Committee approval.

Note:
The reference number 2017/08/16/30557992/11/MC should be clearly indicated on all forms of communication with the intended research participants, as well as with the Committee.

Kind regards,

Dr M Claassen

CHAIRPERSON: CEDU RERC
mcdtc@netactive.co.za

Prof V McKay

EXECUTIVE DEAN

University of South Africa
Preller Street, Muckleneuk Ridge, City of Tshwane
PO Box 392 UNISA 0003 South Africa
Telephone: +27 12 429 3111 Facsimile: +27 12 429 4150
www.unisa.ac.za
APPENDIX 2: PERMISSION LETTER FROM EASTERN CAPE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

DISTRICT: ORT COASTAL DISTRICT
Old Lusikisi College of Education, 961 Main Road Lusikisi 4820, Private Bag X1010
Lusikisi 4820, Tel: 039 253 6602 Fax: 039 253 1777
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA, www.ecdoe.gov.za
Enquiries: V.E. MATWASA  CELL NO.: 083 529 6622 E-MAIL: emmatwas@gmail.com
Phone No.: 039 253 6696 FAX NO. 039 253 1777/866 514 3497

TO:
NOMVUYISO THEORIN MAKELENI – “AN EXPLORATION OF THE CHALLENGES FACING GRADE R TEACHING AND LEARNING IN RURAL SCHOOLS” – RESEARCH STUDY

FROM:
CHIEF EDUCATION SPECIALIST - LUSIKISI CIRCUIT MANAGEMENT CENTRE

SUBJECT:
CONSENT TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN LUSIKISI DISTRICT SCHOOLS

DATE: 19 SEPTEMBER 2017

In response to your letter dated the 19 September 2017, the Education Office at Lusikisi gives consent to you to conduct the proposed research study in Lusikisi schools towards Doctor of Education Degree with the University of South Africa. We look forward to the outcomes of the study to assist in the discharge of quality educational outcomes in our district.

We wish you all the success in your study.

DEPT OF EDUCATION
LUSIKISI

V.E. MATWASA
(Chief Education Specialist)
APPENDIX 3: PERMISSION LETTER FROM THE CIRCUIT MANAGER

Kwa-Dick Location
Xurana Administrative Area
P.O. Box 488
Lusikisiki
4820
19-09-2017
Contact numbers: 0734344644

The Circuit Manager
The Department of Education

Dear Sir /Madam

RE: REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN YOUR CIRCUIT

TITLE: EXPLORING GRADE R TEACHING AND LEARNING IN RURAL SCHOOLS

I, Nomvuyiso Theorin Makeleni, am conducting research under the supervision of Dr Mantsose Jane Sethusha, a senior lecturer in the College of Education towards a Doctorate in Education degree at the University of South Africa. The research requires participation of Grade R and Foundation Phase head teachers in a study entitled EXPLORING GRADE R TEACHING AND LEARNING IN RURAL SCHOOLS.

The aim of the study is to explore Grade R teaching and learning in rural schools and to explore the extent to which the challenges influence effective teaching and learning. The study also aims at exploring the strategies that could improve Grade R teaching and learning.

The study will use a qualitative approach and a case study design. I will use semi-structured interviews, observations and document analysis as tools for collecting empirical data from participants. Teachers’ participation in this study is voluntary and
if they decide to withdraw their participation they may do so without any penalty or negative consequences. A letter requesting for permission from participants will be forwarded to them after I have been granted permission.

The study will provide insight on challenges facing Grade R teaching and learning in rural schools and how these challenges influence teaching and learning, as well as provide strategies to improve teaching and learning in rural Grade R contexts. There is no risk anticipated in this study and no reimbursement or any incentives for participation.

After analysing the data, I will return to your school to give a short briefing about the findings of the study and provide interview feedback.

Thanking you in advance in anticipation of your cooperation in this regard.

Yours sincerely

..........................................................

Nomvuyiso Theorin Makeleni TN (MS) Email: nomvuyisom95@gmail.com
APPENDIX 4: PERMISSION LETTER FROM THE SCHOOL PRINCIPAL

Kwa-Dick Location
Xurana Administrative Area
P.O. Box 488
Lusikisiki
4820
5-10-2017
Contact Numbers : 0734344644

The PRINCIPAL

-------------------

Dear Sir/ Madam

RE: REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN YOUR SCHOOL

TITLE: EXPLORING GRADE R TEACHING AND LEARNING IN RURAL SCHOOLS

I, Nomvuyiso Theorin Makeleni, am conducting research under the supervision of Dr Mantsose Jane Sethusha, a senior lecturer in the College of Education towards a Doctorate in Education degree at the University of South Africa. Grade R and Foundation Phase head teachers will be required to participate in a study entitled EXPLORING GRADE R TEACHING AND LEARNING IN RURAL SCHOOLS.

The aim of the study is to investigate Grade R teaching and learning in rural schools and to explore the extent to which the challenges influence effective teaching and learning. The study also aims at exploring the strategies that could improve Grade R teaching and learning.

The study will use a qualitative approach and a case study. It will use semi-structured interviews, observations and document analysis as tools for collecting empirical data from participants. Teachers' participation in this study is voluntary and if they decide to
withdraw their participation they may do so without any penalty or negative consequence. A letter requesting for permission from participants will be given to them after I have been granted permission.

Teachers have the right to insist that their names not be recorded anywhere and that no one, apart from the researcher and identified members of the research team, will know about their involvement in this research. Their answers will be given code numbers or pseudonyms and they will be referred to in this way in the data, any publications, or other research reporting methods such as conference proceedings.

The study is expected to provide insight on challenges facing Grade R teaching and learning in rural schools and on how these challenges influence teaching and learning, as well as suggesting strategies to improve teaching and learning in rural Grade R classes. There is no risk being anticipated in this study and no reimbursement or any incentives for participation in the research.

After analysing the data, I will return to your school to give a short briefing about the finding and provide interview feedback.

Thanking you in advance in anticipation of your cooperation in this regard.

Yours sincerely

Nomvuyiso Theorin Makeleni TN (MS) email address: nomvuyisom@gmail.com
CONFIRMATION FOR CONDUCTING RESEARCH STUDY

This is to confirm that Miss Makeleni T. N. has been permitted to conduct a research study at the above mentioned school. We will support her in every way possible.

Hoping that our explanation will meet your highest degree of consideration.

Yours Faithfully

(School Principal)

DEPT OF EDUCATION
EASTERN CAPE

(P.O. BOX
LUSIKISIKI 4820
PRINCIPAL
SIGNATURE
DATE: 08/10/2017

EMIS NO.
ENQUIRIES.
PAYPOINT NO.
CENTRE NO.
CONTACT
TO: THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA- Ms T.N MAKELENI  
FROM: SMT AND SCHOOL GOVERNING BODY  
SUBJECT: GRANITING A PERMISSION TO MS MAKELENI FOR CONDUCTING HER RESEARCH IN OUR SCHOOL  
DATE: 9-10-2017

The SGB and the School Management Team of the above school kindly grant a permission to Ms Makeleni to conduct her study. We, as a school, hope that she will enjoy her stay with us.

We wish her all the best in her project.

Yours faithfully

(Acting principal)
FROM: SCHOOL PRINCIPAL

TO: MAELENT N - UNISA STUDENT

SUBJECT: ACCEPTANCE OF MAELENT N IN CONDUCTING RESEARCH AT:

DATE: 09-10-2017

The above mentioned school highly appreciate to be selected to participate in your research programme. It is our pleasure to inform you that you are welcomed to conduct your research in our school, hoping that you will share your findings with us at the end.

We, as SMT of the above school, wish you all the best in your journey.

With regards,

[Signature]

PRINCIPAL

CELL:
FROM: SCHOOL PRINCIPAL

TO: MAKILENT N - UNISA STUDENT

SUBJECT: ACCEPTANCE OF TN MAKILENT IN CONDUCTING RESEARCH AT

DATE: 09-10-2017

The above mentioned school highly appreciate to be selected to participate in your research programme. It is our pleasure to inform you that you are welcomed to conduct your research in our school, hoping that you will share your findings with us at the end.

We, as SMT of the above school, wish you all the best in your journey.

With regards,

[Signature]

PRINCIPAL

CELL:

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

2017 - 02 - 09
APPENDIX 6: LETTER TO REQUEST TEACHER PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH PROJECT

Kwa-Dick Location
Xurana Administrative Area
P.O. Box 488
Lusikisiki
4820
5-10-2017

DEAR PARTICIPANT

My name is Theorin Nomvuyiso Makeleni and I am conducting research under the supervision of Dr Mantsose Jane Sethusha, a senior lecturer in the College of Education towards a Doctorate in Education degree at the University of South. You are invited to participate in a study entitled EXPLORING GRADE R TEACHING AND LEARNING IN RURAL SCHOOLS.

This study is expected to provide insight on Grade R effective teaching and learning in rural schools and on how these challenges influence teaching and learning. The study will also provide knowledge about the strategies that are used to improve teaching and learning in rural Grade R contexts.

The study involves semi-structured interviews, structured observations, field notes and document analysis. Your participation will involve an interview of 30 minutes in a place and at a time convenient to you. The questions will be based on the topic mentioned above.

Participating in the study is voluntary, you are under no obligation to participate and you may withdraw from the study at any time without any negative consequences. If you do decide to take part, you will be given the information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a written consent form. All information will be considered completely confidential, and pseudonyms and code numbers will be used to ensure anonymity of
such information. You have the right to insist that your name should not be recorded anywhere and that no one, apart from the researcher should know about your involvement in this research.

There will be no financial incentives or reward for participants. The study is aimed at identifying challenges experienced in Grade R rural settings. This study will commence after receiving written approval from the Research Ethics Review Committee of the College of Education at the University of South Africa. A copy of the approval letter can be obtained from the researcher if you so wish.

If you would like to be informed of the final research findings, please contact Theorin Nomvuyiso Makeleni on 0734344644 or email nomvuyisom95@gmail.com. Should you require any further information or want to contact the researcher about any aspect of this study, please do so on the above contact details. Should you have concerns about the way in which the research has been conducted, you may contact Dr MJ Sethusha at 012 429 2258, email sethumj@unisa.ac.za.

Thank you for taking time to read this information sheet and for participating in this study.

Yours sincerely,

Theorin Nomvuyiso Makeleni

.................................................. (signature)........................................
APPENDIX 7: CONSENT FORM FOR THE PARTICIPANTS TO PARTICIPATE IN THE STUDY

I, ................................., confirm that the person asking for my consent to take part in this research has told me about the nature, procedure, potential benefits, and anticipated inconvenience of participation. I have read and understood the study as explained in the information sheet. I have had sufficient opportunity to ask questions and am prepared to participate in the study. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without penalty. I am aware that the findings of this study will be processed into a research report, journal publications and/or conference proceedings, but that my participation will be kept confidential.

I agree to the recording of the semi-structured interview and structured classroom observation. I will also allow the researcher to access all the documents that will be relevant to the objectives of the study.

I have received a signed copy of the informed consent agreement.

Participant Name & Surname: ________________________________

_________________________ ________________________

Participant Signature Date

Researcher's name and signature : Theorin Nomvuyiso

_________________________ ________________________

Researcher's signature Date :
APPENDIX 8: CONSENT LETTERS FROM THE EIGHT PARTICIPANTS

Consent form from the participant to participate in the study

......................................................, confirm that the person asking for my consent to take part in this research has told me about the nature, procedure, potential benefits, and anticipated inconvenience of participation. I have read and understood the study as explained in the information sheet. I have had sufficient opportunity to ask questions and am prepared to participate in the study. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without penalty. I am aware that the findings of this study will be processed into a research report, journal publications and/or conference proceedings, but that my participation will be kept confidential.

I agree to the recording of the semi-structured interview and structured classroom observation, I will also allow the researcher to access all the documents that will be relevant to the objectives of the study.

I have received a signed copy of the informed consent agreement.

Participant Name & Surname: ________________________________

Participant Signature: ________________________________

Date: 12/10/2017

Researcher’s name and signature: Theorin Nomvuyiso Makeleni

Researcher’s signature: ________________________________

Date: 14/10/2017

Reference number: 2017/08/16/30557992/11/MC

Thanking you in advance in anticipation of your co-operation in this regard.

Yours sincerely

......................................................

Nomvuyiso Theorin Makeleni TN (MS)
D.Ed student
Contact: 0734344644
Email: nomvuyisom95@gmail.com

Reference number: 2017/08/16/30557992/11/MC
Consent form from the participant to participate in the study

I, [Participant Name & Surname], confirm that the person asking for my consent to take part in this research has told me about the nature, procedure, potential benefits, and anticipated inconvenience of participation. I have read and understood the study as explained in the information sheet. I have had sufficient opportunity to ask questions and am prepared to participate in the study. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without penalty. I am aware that the findings of this study will be processed into a research report, journal publications and/or conference proceedings, but that my participation will be kept confidential.

I agree to the recording of the semi-structured interview and structured classroom observation. I will also allow the researcher to access all the documents that will be relevant to the objectives of the study.

I have received a signed copy of the informed consent agreement.

Participant Name & Surname: [Participant Name & Surname]
Participant Signature: [Signature]
Date: 14/10/2017

Researcher’s name and signature: Theorin Nomvuyiso Makelele
Researcher’s signature: [Signature]
Date: 14/10/2017

Reference number: 2017/08/16/30557992/11/MC

Thanking you in advance in anticipation of your co-operation in this regard.

Yours sincerely,

Nomvuyiso Theorin Makelele TN (MS)
D.Ed student
Contact: 0734344644
Email: nomvuyisom05@gmail.com

Reference number: 2017/08/16/30557992/11/MC
Consent form from the participant to participate in the study

I ____________________________, confirm that the person asking for my consent to take part in this research has told me about the nature, procedure, potential benefits, and anticipated inconvenience of participation. I have read and understood the study as explained in the information sheet. I have had sufficient opportunity to ask questions and am prepared to participate in the study. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without penalty. I am aware that the findings of this study will be processed into a research report, journal publications and/or conference proceedings, but that my participation will be kept confidential.

I agree to the recording of the semi-structured interview and structured classroom observation. I will also allow the researcher to access all the documents that will be relevant to the objectives of the study.

I have received a signed copy of the informed consent agreement.

Participant Name & Surname: ____________________________

Participant Signature: ____________________________ Date: 06-10-2017

Researcher’s name and signature: Theorin Nomvuyiso Makeleni

Researcher’s signature: ____________________________ Date: 2017-10-06

Reference number: 2017/08/16/30557992/11/MC

Thanking you in advance in anticipation of your co-operation in this regard.

Yours sincerely

Nomvuyiso Theorin Makeleni TN (MS)
D.Ed student
Contact: 0734344644
Email: nomvuyisom55@gmail.com
Reference number: 2017/08/16/30557992/11/MC

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Consent form from the participant to participate in the study

I, ................................................................., confirm that the person asking for my consent to take part in this research has told me about the nature, procedure, potential benefits, and anticipated inconvenience of participation. I have read and understood the study as explained in the information sheet. I have had sufficient opportunity to ask questions and am prepared to participate in the study. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without penalty. I am aware that the findings of this study will be processed into a research report, journal publications and/or conference proceedings, but that my participation will be kept confidential.

I agree to the recording of the semi-structured interview and structured classroom observation. I will also allow the researcher to access all the documents that will be relevant to the objectives of the study.

I have received a signed copy of the informed consent agreement.

Participant Name & Surname: __________________________________________________________

Participant Signature: ____________________________________________________________________________
Date: 07-10-2017

Researcher’s name and signature: Theorin Nomvuyiso Makeleleni

Researcher’s signature: ____________________________________________________________________________
Date: 2017-10-08

Reference number: 2017/08/16/30557992/11/MC

Thanking you in advance in anticipation of your co-operation in this regard.

Yours sincerely

.................................................................
Nomvuyiso Theorin Makeleleni TN (MS)
D.Ed student
Contact: 0734344644
Email: nomvuyisom95@gmail.com

Reference number: 2017/08/16/30557992/11/MC

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Consent form from the participant to participate in the study

I, ........................................................................................................................................, confirm that the person asking for my consent to take part in this research has told me about the nature, procedure, potential benefits, and anticipated inconvenience of participation. I have read and understood the study as explained in the information sheet. I have had sufficient opportunity to ask questions and am prepared to participate in the study. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without penalty. I am aware that the findings of this study will be processed into a research report, journal publications and/or conference proceedings, but that my participation will be kept confidential.

I agree to the recording of the semi-structured interview and structured classroom observation. I will also allow the researcher to access all the documents that will be relevant to the objectives of the study.

I have received a signed copy of the informed consent agreement.

Participant Name & Surname: ...........................................................................................................

Participant Signature: .......................................................................................................................

Date: 08-10-2017

Researcher’s name and signature: Theo Tin Nomvuysiso Makeleni

Researcher’s signature: .......................................................................................................................

Date: 2017-10-09

Reference number: 2017/08/16/30557992/11/MC

Thanking you in advance in anticipation of your co-operation in this regard.

Yours sincerely
.................................................................................................................................

Nomvuysiso Theo Tin Makeleni TN (MS)
D.Ed student
Contact: 0734344644
Email: nomvuysisom55@gmail.com

Reference number: 2017/08/16/30557992/11/MC

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Consent form from the participant to participate in the study

I, .............................................................., confirm that the person asking for my consent to take part in this research has told me about the nature, procedure, potential benefits, and anticipated inconvenience of participation. I have read and understood the study as explained in the information sheet. I have had sufficient opportunity to ask questions and am prepared to participate in the study. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without penalty. I am aware that the findings of this study will be processed into a research report, journal publications and/or conference proceedings, but that my participation will be kept confidential.

I agree to the recording of the semi-structured interview and structured classroom observation. I will also allow the researcher to access all the documents that will be relevant to the objectives of the study.

I have received a signed copy of the informed consent agreement.

Participant Name & Surname: ..............................................................

Participant Signature: ..............................................................
Date: 8-10-2018

Researcher’s name and signature: Theorin Nomvuyiso Makeleni

Researcher’s signature: ..............................................................
Date: 10/10/2019

Reference number: 2017/08/16/30557992/11/MC

Thanking you in advance in anticipation of your co-operation in this regard.

Yours sincerely,

Nomvuyiso Theorin Makeleni TN (MS)
D.Ed student
Contact: 0734344644
Email: nomvuyiso95@gmail.com

Reference number: 2017/08/16/30557992/11/MC
Consent form from the participant to participate in the study

I, ____________________________, confirm that the person asking for my consent to take part in this research has told me about the nature, procedure, potential benefits, and anticipated inconvenience of participation. I have read and understood the study as explained in the information sheet. I have had sufficient opportunity to ask questions and am prepared to participate in the study. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without penalty. I am aware that the findings of this study will be processed into a research report, journal publications and/or conference proceedings, but that my participation will be kept confidential.

I agree to the recording of the semi-structured interview and structured classroom observation. I will also allow the researcher to access all the documents that will be relevant to the objectives of the study.

I have received a signed copy of the informed consent agreement.

Participant Name & Surname: 

______________________________

Participant Signature

Date: 29-10-2019

Researcher’s name and signature: Theorin Nomvuyiso Makeleni

______________________________

Researcher’s signature

Date: 2017-10-30

Reference number: 2017/08/16/30557992/11/MC

Thanking you in advance in anticipation of your co-operation in this regard.

Yours sincerely

______________________________

Nomvuyiso Theorin Makeleni TN (MS)

D.Ed student

Contact: 0734344644

Email: nomvuyisom95@gmail.com

Reference number: 2017/08/16/30557992/11/MC

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I agree to the recording of the semi-structured interview and structured classroom observation. I will also allow the researcher to access all the documents that will be relevant to the objectives of the study.

I have received a signed copy of the informed consent agreement.

Participant Name & Surname: ____________________________

Participant Signature: ____________________________

Date: 09-10-2017

Researcher’s name and signature: Theorin Nomvuyiso Makeleni

Researcher’s signature: ____________________________

Date: 09/10/2017

Reference number: 2017/08/16/30557992/11/MC

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D.Ed student
Contact: 0734344644
Email: nomvuyisom95@gmail.com

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APPENDIX 9: LETTER TO THE SGB TO REQUEST CONSENT FOR MINORS TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH PROJECT

Kwa-Dick Location
Xurana Administrative Area
P.O. Box 488
Lusikisiki
4820
5-10-2017

Dear Parent

Your child is invited to participate in a study entitled EXPLORING GRADE R TEACHING AND LEARNING IN RURAL SCHOOLS. I am undertaking this study as part of my doctoral research at the University of South Africa. The purpose of the study is to explore Grade R teaching and learning in rural schools. I envisage that the study will make beneficial recommendations towards addressing the challenges facing Grade R teaching and learning in rural schools. I request permission to include your child in this study as I will be observing teaching and learning in her classroom. I expect to have more other children participating in the study.

If you allow your child to participate, she/he will be part of the observation activities where I will audio record the whole process.

Any information that is obtained regarding this study and can be identified with your child will remain confidential and will only be disclosed with your permission. The child’s responses will not be linked to her name or your name or the school’s name 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 benefits to education are to improve teaching and learning. Neither your child nor you will receive any type of payment for participating in this study.

360
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 study will take place during regular classroom activities with prior approval of the school and your child’s teacher. However, if you do not want your child to participate, an alternative activity will be available. The child may remain in classroom but not participate and her activities may not be forwarded to a researcher for any information.

In addition to your permission, your child must agree to participate in the study and you and your child will also be asked to sign the assent form which accompanies this letter. If your child does not wish to participate in the study, he or she will not be included and there will be no penalty. The information gathered from the study and your child’s participation in 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 questions about this study, please ask me or my study supervisor. My supervisor is Dr Mantsose Jane Sethusha, a senior lecturer in the College of Education, UNISA. Her personal contact is sethumj@unisa.ac.za. My contact number is 0734344644 and my email is nomvuyisom95@gmail.com. Permission for the study has already been given by principal, circuit manager, Grade R teacher and the Ethics Committee of the College of Education, UNISA.

You are making a decision about allowing your child to participate in this study. Your signature below indicates that you have read the information provided above and have decided to allow her to participate in the study. You may keep a copy of this letter.

Name of child:

Sincerely

______________________________  ________________________________
Parent/guardian’s name     Parent/guardian’s signature     Date
Researcher's name (T.N. Makeleni)

Researcher's signature…………………………………… Date………………………………………………
APPENDIX 10: CONSENT LETTERS FROM FOUR SGB MEMBERS ON BEHALF OF PARENTS

APPENDIX J : LETTER TO REQUEST PARENTAL CONSENT FOR MINORS TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH PROJECT

University of South Africa
College of Education
P. O. Box 392
Pretoria
05-10-2017

Dear Parent

Your child is invited to participate in a study entitled EXPLORING GRADE R TEACHING AND LEARNING IN RURAL SCHOOLS. I am undertaking this study as part of my doctoral research at the University of South Africa. The purpose of the study is to explore the challenges facing Grade R teaching and learning. I envisage that the study will make beneficial recommendations towards addressing the challenges facing Grade R teaching and learning in rural schools. I request permission to include your child in this study as I will be observing teaching and learning in her classroom. I expect to have more other children participating in the study.

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If you have questions about this study please ask me or my study supervisor. My supervisor is Dr Maritiase Jane Sethushe, a senior lecturer in the College of Education, UNISA. Her personal contact is sethums@unisa.ac.za. My contact number is 0734349444 and my e-mail is romuvisom89@gmail.com. Permission for the study has already been given by principal, circuit manager, Grade R teacher and the Ethics Committee of the College of Education, UNISA.

You are making a decision about allowing your child to participate in this study. Your signature below indicates that you have read the information provided above and have decided to allow her to participate in the study. You may keep a copy of this letter.

Name of child: 

Sincerely

__________________________________________________________
Parent/guardian’s name (S C B) Parent/guardian’s signature: Date: 11/12/17

__________________________________________________________
Researcher’s name (T N Makeleni) Researcher’s signature Date: 12/10/17
APPENDIX J: LETTER TO REQUEST PARENTAL CONSENT FOR MINORS TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH PROJECT

University of South Africa
College of Education
P. O. Box 392
Pretoria
05-10-2017

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You are making a decision about allowing your child to participate in this study. Your signature below indicates that you have read the information provided above and have decided to allow her to participate in the study. You may keep a copy of this letter.

Name of child:

Sincerely

Parent/guardian’s name ___________________________  Parent/guardian’s signature: ___________________________ Date: 13/10/2017

Researcher’s name (T.N Makelele) ___________________________ Researcher’s signature ___________________________ Date: 13/10/2017
APPENDIX J : LETTER TO REQUEST PARENTAL CONSENT FOR MINORS TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH PROJECT

University of South Africa
College of Education
P. O. Box 392
Pretoria
05-10-2017

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You are making a decision about allowing your child to participate in this study. Your signature below indicates that you have read the information provided above and have decided to allow her to participate in the study. You may keep a copy of this letter.

Name of child:

Sincerely

Parent/guardian’s name (S.C.B)  )  Parent/guardian’s signature:  Date:  10-10-17

Researcher’s name (T N Makeleni)  Researcher’s signature  Date:  10/10/2017
APPENDIX J: LETTER TO REQUEST PARENTAL CONSENT FOR MINORS TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH PROJECT

University of South Africa
College of Education
P. O. Box 392
Pretoria
05-10-2017

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You are making a decision about allowing your child to participate in this study. Your signature below indicates that you have read the information provided above and have decided to allow her to participate in the study. You may keep a copy of this letter.

Name of child:

Sincerely

__________________________
Parent/guardian’s name (SCB)

__________________________
Parent/guardian’s signature

__________________________
Researcher’s name (T.N Makeleni)

__________________________
Researcher’s signature

Date: 6/10/2017

Date: 9/10/2019
APPENDIX 11: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR GRADE R CLASS TEACHERS

Time schedule: 60 minutes

A. BIOGRAPHICAL QUESTIONS

1. How long have you been teaching Grade R?
2. What are your academic qualifications?
3. What is the link between your qualifications and your teaching?
4. How many learners are in your classroom?
5. How does your learner enrolment affect teaching and learning in your classroom?
6. What influence does age of learners have in your teaching and learning?
7. Are there any situations where you find yourself teaching another grade other than Grade R, or combining Grade R and one other? If so, how does it affect Grade R content coverage?

B. IMPLEMENTING GRADE R CURRICULUM LEARNING PROGRAMMES

1. Emergent literacy
   i. How do you teach emergent reading?
   ii. What challenges do you experience in teaching emergent reading?
   iii. How do you cope with these challenges?
   iv. What can be done to improve reading in Grade R classrooms?
   v. How do you teach emergent writing?
   vi. What challenges do you experience in teaching emergent writing?
   vii. How do you cope with these problems?
viii. Can you suggest any strategies that can be done to improve emergent writing in Grade R?

2. Emergent Mathematics

I. How do you teach Maths in Grade R?

II. What challenges do you experience in teaching Maths?

III. How do you cope with these challenges?

IV. What could be done to ensure that Maths is taught effectively in Grade R?

V. How do you teach sharing activities?

VI. What challenges do you experience in teaching sharing activities?

VII. How do you cope with these challenges?

VIII. What could be done to ensure that sharing activities are taught effectively in Grade R?

3. Life Skills

i. How do you teach Physical Education?

ii. What challenges do you experience in teaching Physical Education?

iii. How do you cope with these challenges?

iv. What strategies could be done to ensure that Physical Education is taught effectively?

v. How do you teach Creative Arts?

vi. What challenges do you experience in teaching Creative Arts?

vii. How do you cope with these challenges?

viii. What strategies could be done to ensure that Creative Arts is taught effectively?
C. GRADE R CURRICULUM IMPLEMENTATION COMPONENTS

1. Grade R planning for teaching and learning
   I. How does your Daily Programme influence teaching and learning activities?
   II. How do you plan integrated teaching and learning?
   III. To what extent does your planning influence content coverage?
   IV. What problems do you meet in planning Grade R teaching and learning activities?

2. Teaching and learning approach
   I. What does learning through play approach mean to Grade R teaching and learning context?
   II. How do you apply learning through play?
   III. What challenges do you experience when using learning through play approach?
   IV. How do you cope with these challenges?

3. Assessment on learner performance in Grade R
   I. How do you plan assessment?
   II. How does your assessment influence teaching and learning?
   III. Which challenges do you experience about assessment?
   IV. How do you cope with these challenges?

4. Resources for supporting teaching and learning in Grade R
   I. To what extent are the resources available for Grade R teaching and learning?
   II. How do these resources influence teaching and learning?
   III. What are the main challenges about resources in Grade R?
IV. How do you handle such challenges?

V. What can be done to improve the challenges of resources in Grade R?

D. MANAGING BARRIERS TO LEARNING:

i. What kind of barriers to learning do you experience of teaching and learning in Grade R?

ii. How do you discuss those barriers?

iii. What support do you receive from the Department of Education about barriers found?

iv. To what extent does the support influence teaching and learning?

v. What suggestions are provided to manage barriers to learning?

E. THE SUPPORT GRADE R TEACHERS EXPERIENCE:

i. What kind of support do you receive from SMT for effective teaching and learning?

ii. How does the support you receive influence your teaching and learning practices?

iii. What additional support from SMT do you need to improve teaching and learning?
APPENDIX 12: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR FOUNDATION PHASE HEADS OF DEPARTMENT

Time schedule: 60 minutes

Teacher: .......................... School: .......................... Date: .................

Time: 45 minutes

A. BIOGRAPHICAL QUESTIONS

1. How long have you been monitoring and supporting Grade R?

2. What are your academic qualifications?

3. To what extent do your qualifications influence your monitoring and support?

4. How many teachers are you supporting in Foundation Phase?

5. What influence does the number of teachers have in monitoring and supporting Grade R?

6. What influence does age of learners have in teaching and learning?

7. What strategies have you used, as SMTs, to engage parents in teaching and learning?

8. How does the SMTs support teachers to improve teaching and learning?

B. IMPLEMENTING GRADE R CURRICULUM LEARNING PROGRAMMES:

1. Emergent literacy

 i. What challenges do teachers experience in teaching emergent reading?

 ii. How do teachers cope with these challenges?

 iii. As a Head of Department, what can be done to improve emergent reading in Grade R?

 iv. What challenges do teachers experience in teaching emergent writing?
v. How do teachers cope with these challenges?

vi. Which strategies can be used to improve emergent writing in Grade R?

2. Emergent Mathematics

I. What challenges do teachers experience in teaching mathematics in Grade R?

II. How do teachers cope with these challenges?

III. What could be done to ensure that mathematics is taught effectively in Grade R?

IV. What challenges do teachers experience in teaching sharing activities?

V. How do teachers cope with these challenges?

VI. What strategies can be done to improve sharing activities in Grade R?

3. Life Skills

i. What challenges do Grade R teachers face in teaching Physical Education?

ii. How do teachers cope with these challenges?

iii. Which strategies could be done to ensure that Physical Education is taught effectively?

iv. What challenges do teachers experience in teaching Creative Arts in Grade R?

v. What strategies do teachers apply to address the challenges?

vi. Which strategies can help to improve Creative Arts teaching and learning?

C. GRADE R CURRICULUM IMPLEMENTATION COMPONENTS:
1. Grade R planning for teaching and learning
   i. How do you monitor planning for teaching and learning in Grade R?
   ii. How do teachers plan for lessons?
   iii. How does this planning influence teaching and learning in Grade R?
   iv. What challenges do you encounter regarding planning?
   v. How do you address the challenges on planning?

2. Teaching and learning approach
   i. What challenges do Grade R teachers experience in applying learning through play approach?
   ii. How do teachers cope with these challenges?
   iii. What can be done to improve teaching and learning?

D. Monitoring teaching and learning in Grade R
   i. How do you monitor Grade R teaching and learning?
   ii. How does your monitoring influence effective teaching and learning?
   iii. What challenges do you experience in monitoring Grade R teaching and learning?
   iv. How do you manage these challenges?

E. RESOURCES FOR SUPPORTING TEACHING AND LEARNING IN GRADE R
   i. What are the challenges regarding resources in Grade R teaching and learning?
   ii. To what extent do resources influence teaching and learning?
   iii. As a school, how do you handle the challenges with resources?
   iv. What could be done to ensure that resources improve teaching and learning?
F. MANAGING BARRIERS TO LEARNING:
   i. What kind of barriers to learning do Grade R teacher experience?
   ii. How do you assist the teachers in addressing those barriers?
   iii. To what extent does support influence teaching and learning?
   iv. What suggestions could be provided to manage barriers to learning?

G. THE SUPPORT GRADE R TEACHERS EXPERIENCE:
   i. What form of support is provided by the SMTs?
   ii. How does the support assist in improving the quality of teaching and learning in Grade R?
   iii. What additional support do you need to improve Grade R teaching and learning?
APPENDIX 13: CLASSROOM OBSERVATION SCHEDULE

School: …………………… Teacher: …………………………

Date: ……………………. Subject……………………….

Researcher’ name: ……………………….

Length of classroom observations: 2 working days per school

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Areas of Lesson observations</th>
<th>Findings from the observed lesson</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Planning:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching and learning approach: teacher-learner interaction. <em>How is learning through play approach applied?</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Content knowledge: What kind of subject content knowledge does the teacher have?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clear presentation: How does the teacher link conceptual knowledge and skills with learners’ cultural background to improve learner performance in classroom activities?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How is planning aligned with CAPS content coverage?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Assessment principles:**

<p>| How were learners involved in teaching and learning activities? |                                   |
| How were high order questioning and thinking skills applied? |                                   |
| How are assessment tools aligned with the content taught? |                                   |
| How was feedback provided? |                                   |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Barriers to learning:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How were different learner abilities accommodated?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How did the teacher handle learners with barriers to learning?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How did the teacher adapt content to accommodate learners with learning difficulties</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Resource:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Which resources were available for teaching and learning?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How were resources aligned with the content taught?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How were resources utilised effectively to support learning?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Were illustrations big enough and colourful for Grade R learners?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language of teaching and learning:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How is language policy maintained in teaching and learning?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>General observations:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How do classroom resources support and encourage incidental learning?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Availability of basic wall charts for daily activities such as weather charts, birthday charts, learning stations, (\text{(Block area, Creative Arts, Language corner, Mathematics, fantasy)}) Area), carpets for story - telling and learning space to enhance culture of teaching and learning?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How is classroom layout designed? How are learning areas developed and used?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is classroom size appropriate for Grade R activities?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX 14: DOCUMENT ANALYSIS CHECKLIST

Name of School.......................... Teacher..........................

Grade: R Date..........................

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Documents for strengthening Grade R teaching and learning</th>
<th>Areas for investigation</th>
<th>Findings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Learner attendance register</td>
<td>Are all learners admitted according to Grade R age cohort?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAPS</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language, mathematics and Life skills</td>
<td>How are these documents utilized for planning the content to be taught, how is assessment conducted to provide the quality of expected outcomes of learning?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Document on barriers to learning</td>
<td>Which documents do teachers use and how do these documents assist to address barriers to learning?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provincial weekly planners</td>
<td>How do teachers plan according to weekly term planners provided by the province?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DBE workbooks</td>
<td>How are workbooks utilized to support effective teaching and learning?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learners’ activities</td>
<td>Do learner activities show learner progression from term one up to date?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daily Programme</td>
<td>How do teachers adhere to Daily Programme?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lesson plans</td>
<td>How are lesson plans structured?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recording tools</td>
<td>How are recording done?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark schedules</td>
<td>How are mark schedules completed?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Report card used</td>
<td>How is the report card structured?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evidence of School Based Assessment (SBA)</td>
<td>How is monitoring and supporting for Grade R teachers conducted?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX 15: PROOF OF EDITING

Blue Diamonds Professional Editing
Services (Pty) Ltd
Enhancing your brilliance
Tel: 031 916 1420
Fax: 086 627 7756   Email: jaybee@telkom.co.net
Website: www.jaybe9.wixsite.com/bediammedit

19 September 2019

Declaration of professional edit

EXPLORING GRADE R TEACHING AND LEARNING IN RURAL SCHOOLS

by

Nomvuyiso Theorin Makeleni

I declare that I have edited and proofread this thesis. My involvement was restricted to language usage and spelling, completeness and consistency, referencing style and formatting of headings, captions and Tables of Contents. I did no structural re-writing of the content.

I am qualified to have done such editing, being in possession of a Bachelor’s degree with a major in English, having taught English to matriculation, and having a Certificate in Copy Editing from the University of Cape Town. I have edited more than 100 Masters and Doctoral theses, as well as articles, books and reports.

As the copy editor, I am not responsible for detecting or removing passages in the document that closely resemble other texts and could thus be viewed as plagiarism. I am not accountable for any changes made to this document by the author or any other party subsequent to my edit.

Sincerely,

Dr Jacqui Baumgardt
D. Ed. Education Management

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