PARENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF GRADE R TEACHING AND LEARNING

by

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I declare that <u>Parents' perceptions of Grade R teaching and learning</u> 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.

I further declare that I have not previously submitted this work, or part of it, for examination at UNISA for another qualification or at any other higher education institution.

Joanne Grafton Kirby

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to determine the perceptions of parents of Grade R children regarding teaching and learning. This will be compared to relevant education theories and the Foundation Phase curriculum and assessment policies to establish whether parents' perceptions of Grade R teaching and learning differ from prescribed policy, and that which is age-appropriate. This study is based on qualitative methodology and uses a single case study approach. The case identified is located in the suburb of Westville in the Pinetown School District. Open-ended questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis were used for data collection. Ten parents of Grade R children from two ECD centres were purposively selected to respond to the questionnaire. The two Grade R teachers from each centre were also interviewed. A document analysis of the Mathematics, English Home Language, and Life Skills curriculum and assessment policies was also conducted. The findings revealed that parents' perceptions regarding Grade R teaching and learning significantly differed in relation to current literature and prescribed curriculum policies. Parents' expectations of the curriculum also exerted pressure on teachers and children, thus it is recommended that parents become *au fait* with the use of play as an appropriate teaching and learning strategy in the informal Grade R year.

KEY TERMS: *Grade R, parents, perceptions, play, teaching and learning*

OPSOMMING (ABSTRACT IN AFRIKAANS)

Die doel van hierdie studie is om die persepsies van ouers van graad R-leerders rakende onderrig en leer te bepaal. Die studies al vergelyk word met relevante onderwysteorieë en die Grondslagfase-kurrikulum en assesseringsbeleid om vas te stel of ouers se persepsie van graad R-onderrig en -leer verskil van die voorgeskrewe beleid, en dit wat ouderdomsgepas is. Hierdie studie is gebaseer op kwalitatiewe metodologie en gebruik 'n enkel gevallestudie-benadering. Die geïdentifiseerde gevallestudie vind in die voorstad Westville in die Pinetown-distrik plaas. Oop eindigende-vraelyste, semi-gestruktureerde onderhoude en dokumentontleding is gebruik vir die insameling van data. Ouers van graad R-leerders van twee VKO-sentrums is doelgerig gekies om die vraelys te beantwoord. Daar is ook onderhoude gevoer met die graad R-onderwysers van elke sentrum. 'n Dokumentanalise van die kurrikulum- en assesseringsbeleid vir Wiskunde, Engels Huistaal en Lewensvaardighede is ook uitgevoer. Die bevindings het aan die lig gebring dat ouers se persepsies rakende graad R-onderrig en -leer beduidend verskil in verhouding met die huidige literatuur en voorgeskrewe kurrikulumbeleid. Die verwagtinge van ouers oor die kurrikulum het ook druk op onderwysers en leerders uitgeoefen, daarom word daar aanbeveel dat ouers vertroud raak met die gebruik van speel as 'n gepaste onderrig- en leerstrategie in die informele graad R-jaar.

SLEUTELTERMES: *onderrig en leer, ouers, persepsie, graad R, speel*

ISIFINYEZO (ABSTRACT IN ISIZULU)

Injongo yalo lucwaningo ukunquma mayelana nemicabango yabazali bezingane ezenza ibanga R maqondana nendlela yokufunda kanye nokufundiswa kwabo. Lokhu kuzoqhathaniswa nemihlahlandlela ephathelene nenqubomgomo kanye nokuhlola kwezemfundo esemazingeni aphansi (Foundation Phase), ukuthola ukuthi imicabango yabazali bezingane ezenza ibanga R iyahluka yini kunalenqubomgomo emiselwe leli banga mayelana nokufunda kanye nokufundiswa kwabo, kanye nokuthi ifanele abafundi abaneminyaka emingaki. Lolu cwaningo lumiselwe indlela eyikhwalithi yokwenza ucwaningo kanti kuzosetshenziswa isehlo esisodwa. Isehlo okunqunywe ukuba kusetshenzwe ngaso sizobe sitholakala endaweni eyidolobha lase Westville esifundeni sase Pinetown. Kuzosetshenziswa iphepha elinamahlelo emibuzo evulekile nenhlolovo engenazimiso kanti inhlaziyo yemiqulu yasetshenziswa ukuqoqa imininingwane. Abazali ababili bezingane ezifunda ibanga R ezikoleni ezimbili zamabanga aphansi kakhulu (ECD centres) baqokwe ngokukhethekile ukuba baphendule amaphepha anamahlelo emibuzo. Othisha bebanga R nabo abavela kulezo zikole bafakwa imibuzo yenhlolovo. Kwenziwe inhlaziyo yemiqulu yomhlahlandlela kanye nenqubomgomo yokuhlola Izibalo, IsiNgisi nezifundo zamakhono. Imiphumela yocwaningo iveze ukuthi imibono yabazali ngokufunda nokufundiswa kwabafundi bebanga R ihluke kakhulu kunezifundo zemibhalo zakamuva kanye nenqubomgomo yomhlahlandlela wezemfundo omiselwe abafundi. Lokho okulindelwe ngabazali mayelana nomhlahlandlela wezemfundo kubuye kubafakele ingcindezi othisha kanye nabafundi, ngakho-ke kunesiphakamiso sokuthi abazali babe nolwanzi olunzulu ngokusetshenziswa komdlalo njengendlela efanele yokufundisa onyakeni webanga R ongenazimiso.

AMAGAMA ASEMQOKA: *ukufundisa nokufunda, abazali, imicabango, Ibanga R, umdlalo*

ISICATSHULWA (ABSTRACT IN ISIXHOSA)

Injongo yoluphononongo kukufumanisa iimbono neengcinga zabazali babafundi bebanga leR malungu nokufundisa nokufundiswa. Oku kuya kuthelekiswa neethiyori ezifanelekileyo zemfundo kunye nemigaqo-nkqubo yekharityhulam kunye novavanyo lweSigaba seSiseko ukumisela ukuba ingaba iimbono zabazali ngokufundisa nokufunda kwebanga leR zahlukile na kumgaqo-nkqubo omiselweyo, kwaye oko kufanelekile ngokweminyaka. Olu phononongo lusekwe kwindlela esemgangathweni kwaye lusebenzisa indlela eyodwa yokufunda. Ityala elichongiweyo lifumaneka kwihlomela-dolophu laseWestville kwiSithili seSikolo iPinetown. Iikhweshine ezivulekileyo, udliwanondlebe olwenziwe ngokwesiqingatha, kunye nohlalutyo lwamaxwebhu zazisetyenziselwa ukuqokelela idatha. Abazali babafundi beBanga leR abavela kumaziko amabini e-ECD bakhethwa ngenjongo-njongo yokuphendula kwiphepha lemibuzo. Ootitshala bebanga uR kwiziko ngalinye nabo benziwe udliwanondlebe nabo. Uhlahlelo lwamaxwebhu eMathematika, isiNgesi uLwimi lwaseKhaya, kunye nemigaqo-nkqubo yovavanyo lwezakhono zobomi nayo yaqhutywa. Iziphumo zaveza ukuba iimbono neengcinga zabazali ngokubhekisele ekufundiseni nasekufundeni kwabanga leR zahluke kakhulu ngokunxulumene noncwadi lwangoku nemigaqo-nkqubo emiselweyo yekharityhulam. Izinto ezilindelwe ngabazali kwikharityhulam zikwabonakalise uxinzelelo kootitshala nakubafundi, yiyo loo nto kucetyiswa ukuba abazali bahlawulwe ngokusetyenziswa komdlalo weqonga njengesicwangciso esifanelekileyo sokufundisa nokufunda kunyaka ongacwangciswanga weBanga R.

IMIMISELO EBALILEKILEYO: weBanga R, nokufundisa nokufundiswa, malungu,iimbono, dladla

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

CAPS	-	Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement
DBE	-	Department of Basic Education
DHET	-	Department of Higher Education and Training
DoE	-	Department of Education
ECD	-	Early Childhood Development
IEP	-	Individual Education Plan
KZN	-	KwaZulu-Natal Province
LoLT	-	Language of Learning and Teaching
PE	-	Physical Education
RSA	-	Republic of South Africa
SGB	-	School Governing Body
ZPD	-	Zone of Proximal Development

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

1.1   INTRODUCTION

"It is paradoxical that many educators and parents still differentiate between a time for learning and a time for play without seeing the vital connection between them" (Buscaglia, 2017:54).

Grade R is a unique year within the Foundation Phase, considering that its general purpose is to prepare children for the formal education stage. Grade R is the first year of foundation phase schooling. Parental involvement is essential in promoting a positive relationship between the home and the school. Thus, parents' perceptions of Grade R teaching and learning can affect (negatively or positively) the teacher and the Grade R child. "Interfering" parents, who are perhaps not familiar with strategies such as learning through play, unintentionally impose stress on both the teacher and the child. The importance of play in early years is supported by multiple theorists such as Vygotsky, Piaget and Wood. This research is significant to the researcher as she is passionate about Early Childhood Education and believes that the home and school environment should work together harmoniously to promote optimal learning experiences for young children.

This chapter introduces the background to the study, as well as outlines the theoretical framework and key concepts used. Additionally, the problem statement, the aim, and the objectives of the study will be discussed. Also, there follows an overview of the research methods, the trustworthiness aspect, and the ethical considerations of the study.

1.2   BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

The importance of play is often overlooked by adults. Parents hardly believe that their children are "working" in a play-based environment (Moyles, 2015:164). Just as adults need their hobbies to relax and for pleasure, children also need the outlet of play. Adults seem to underestimate the importance and value of play concerning young children's

ability to learn. Play is often regarded by adults as "unproductive and its importance and value for the young learner is overlooked" (Davin & Van Staden, 2005:6). Some parents discourage play with the attitude that "sooner or later children have got to get used to the world of work, and the sooner the better" (Moyles, 2015:165). Parents and teachers also have the tendency to impose adult standards onto children (Davin & Van Staden, 2005). Adults often respond negatively to play-based activities because they view it merely children having fun, and not as a mode of constructive learning. However, play is proven to be the most appropriate teaching and learning strategy for young children and is essential in Early Childhood Development (Gordon & Browne, 2004). Through improved school and parent collaboration, parents can be educated on the importance of play and thus try not to exclude play from their child's daily life. Grade R must maintain its own "unique characteristics based on how children in this age group learn" and should not be a "watered down Grade 1 class" (Department of Basic Education [DBE], 2011a:17).

1.3   PROBLEM STATEMENT

It is unfortunate that parents appear to have expectations which are causing complications in Grade R children's development. Schools are also "bending" to pressure to cater for parents' expectations; however, in the long term this affects the holistic development of children in Grade R. The development of the curriculum is no longer considered to be a guide towards achieving goals in terms of child development, instead it now serves to satisfy people with different agendas. It is a well-known fact that Grade R children learn through "integration and play-based learning" (DBE, 2011b: 9), therefore it is important for this study to be conducted to assess what the parental expectations are in order to guide the parents into adopting a more realistic view of what a Grade R child should be able to achieve within the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). This is done by interviewing the Grade R teacher and analysing the Grade R curriculum policy documents. The problem emanates from parents' understanding of teaching and learning in Grade R according to their own "fossilised" perceptions and experiences; hence, the importance of this investigative study.

1.4   RATIONALE OF THE STUDY

The researcher was previously a Grade R educator for ten years. These personal experiences as a Grade R teacher informed the researcher that parents expect archaic and inappropriate teaching strategies to be used in Grade R teaching and learning; this put too much pressure on Grade R teachers, as well as on the learners. One of these strategies was worksheet-based teaching and learning. Parents did not always support play-based teaching strategies as they felt that learning should be structured on drawing, reading and word recognition, and engaging children in written activities (Bryce-Clegg, 2015).

Parents appear to have unrealistic notions and make naïve suggestions which put pressure on school officials who feel obliged to satisfy parents' demands, only to find that they are disturbing the effectiveness of modern teaching and learning processes. The researcher's knowledge, skills, qualifications and experiences empower her to adopt appropriate teaching methods as well as design creative and innovative classroom and playground activities for young children to flourish as holistic individuals; but as the pressure from parents mounts, it interferes with teachers' and children's focus concerning teaching- learning pedagogies. According to Excell and Linington (2015), there needs to be holistic development and freedom to learn through play; that is, interacting with the environment. The researcher is of the opinion that this study will enlighten parents, teachers, and communities on what is expected in teaching and learning in Grade R classes.

The focus of this research is to understand the parental perceptions and expectations regarding Grade R learning and teaching. With this information, schools can help educate and enlighten parents about the importance of effective Grade R teaching strategies to promote learning for each individual child. Armed with this understanding, parents will be amenable to support the school and teachers to adopt appropriate stipulated teaching and learning methods as guided by literature and departmental policies and guidelines, instead of bowing to pressure by using methods that can be detrimental to the foundations of ECD learning. With parental understanding that Grade R children learn best through play, the school and home environment can work cohesively together to promote the essential development of foundation skills required for the higher grades, and the fundamental skills needed for lifelong learning.

1.5   REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The literature review focuses mainly on Grade R teaching and learning. Since Grade R is the final year of the preschool phase and the first year of the Foundation Phase, it is regarded as a period of transition which brings with it its own peculiar intricacies. Grade R is therefore not a formal school-learning year. Moreover, the DBE (2011a: 20) states that the Grade R year has unique characteristics and must not be seen as a "watered down Grade 1". It is accepted that play-based activities are part-and-parcel of Grade R teaching and learning (Excell & Linington, 2015). Furthermore, learning is scaffolded by the teacher using the principle of the ZPD (zone between what a child already knows and what a child is not yet able to achieve). With adult guidance, the child is led into the unknown and supported through steps in the learning process (Miller, 2011). Play is often regarded by adults as "unproductive and its importance and value for the young learner is overlooked" (Davin, 2015:6). The use of play as a strategy to teach subjects like Mathematics, Literacy, and Life Skills in the context of the Grade R classroom play areas, was unpacked and presented in the literature review. The Grade R classroom was required as per DBE (2011b) guidelines to be divided into the following areas: fantasy play, art area, outdoor play, sensopathic play (experiential), cognitive play, and group work areas. Through free play, children are able to make sense of the world around them, thus incidental learning is encouraged. Since parental involvement influences teaching and learning, positive involvement was encouraged, although sometimes negative involvement also prevailed. It must be noted that demanding parents can put strain on teachers (Davin, 2015), and according to Moyles (2015:165), parents often wish to accelerate their child's learning with the view that "sooner or later children have got to get used to the world of work, and the sooner the better".

1.6   THEORETICAL UNDERPINNINGS

This study was framed using Lev Vygotsky's (1978) socio-cultural learning theory. Vygotsky was a Russian developmental psychologist who focused on the growth of the whole child which is directly linked to the curriculum and assessment policies of the DBE (2011a; 2011b; 2011c; 2011d) regarding the teaching and learning of Grade R children. The idea that learning is a social exchange and that learning should be an active process which occurs in the ZPD is a Vygotskian (1978) socio-cultural principle.

Vygotsky (1978) identified important elements to promote the successful development of children, believing that true education is about nurturing and extending each child's individual learning potential. According to Moll (2014), social experiences are how children can process information and learn new things. The social-cultural theory emphasises the importance of the role of culture in shaping cognitive development by determining how and what the individual learns. Children's ideas, values and knowledge develop as they adopt the behaviour and thinking offered by their culture. Children learn about their community through social interactions with more knowledgeable members of society. This is directly linked to the influence of parents or caregivers on children where culture and community come together in the form of the home environment (Karpov, 2014).

1.7   RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The research focuses on the parents' perceptions of teaching and learning in the Grade R year. Parents appear to perceive Grade R teaching and learning in different ways. These insular perceptions appear to directly affect their children's learning in this formative foundation year. This is a phenomenon that the researcher aims to thoroughly explore in this study. In order to do this, the following critical questions were identified to incisively dissect the phenomenon.

1.7.1   Main Research Question

What are parents' perceptions of teaching and learning in Grade R?

1.7.2   Sub-questions

- How do parents view play-based teaching and learning activities in Grade R?
- What do parents expect their child to know by the end of Grade R?
- What are policy expectations regarding teaching and learning in Grade R?
- How does the parent's expectations affect teaching and learning in Grade R?

1.8   RESEARCH AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

1.8.1   Aim

The aim of this study is to determine the perceptions of parents of Grade R children regarding teaching and learning.

1.8.2   Objectives

The following objectives of the research are related to the research questions:

- To determine Grade R parents' opinions about play-based teaching and learning in Grade R;
- To establish what Grade R parents' expect their child to know by the end of Grade R;
- To determine what the policy expectations are regarding the teaching and learning in Grade R classes; and
- To determine whether parents' expectations affect teaching and learning processes in Grade R.

1.9   CLARIFICATION OF KEY TERMS

The five key terms/concepts in this study are teaching and learning, parents, perception, Grade R, and play.

1.9.1   Teaching and Learning

Teaching and learning is a complex process that incorporates various aspects. Teaching, in the context of this study, can be described as the process of attending to children's needs, experiences and feelings, and intervening so that they are learning things and go beyond the given (Killen, 2019). Furthermore, Killen (2019) suggests that teaching involves creating an optimal and engaging environment that is conducive to learning. According to Berry (2018:21), the definition of learning is "the activity of obtaining knowledge". Cook (2016) contextualises this within early childhood education by stating that learning is a social process where children acquire new information and are guided by the teacher to make sense or meaning of this.

1.9.2 Parents

Within the context of education, a parent will be defined in terms of the South African Schools Act no. 84 of 1996 as summarised below:

- The biological or adoptive parent or legal guardian of a learner;
- The person legally entitled to the custody of a learner; and
- The person who undertakes to fulfil the obligations of a person referred to in (a) or (b) above, towards the learner's education at school;

1.9.3 Perception

According to Grusec and Danyliuk (2014), a perception in the context of this study is an understanding or specific attitude about something. Information is gathered according to our environment, and the way we regard this information is known as one's perception.

Regarding this study, it is important to be sensitive to the perceptions of the parents; hence, an understanding that everybody's perception of the same occurrence may be different, is beneficial.

1.9.4 Grade R

According to the *Education White Paper 5*, Grade R was introduced to improve learner success within the education system (DoE, 2001). The 'R' in Grade R stands for Reception. This is the grade before a child begins formal schooling in Grade 1 and is the final year of the preschool phase. There is an overlap as it is also the first year of the Foundation Phase. With this in mind, the Grade R year can be situated in either an ECD Centre or a Junior Primary School context. Grade R is therefore an informal year, and the main strategy for teaching and learning is through play (Excell & Linington, 2015).

1.9.5 Play

Play can be defined as "a physical or mental leisure activity that is undertaken purely for enjoyment" (Else, 2014:47). In the context of this study, play is the "work" of the child (Excell & Linington, 2015). Play allows children the opportunity to connect to the world

in a way that is meaningful to them. Through exploration and discovery, children can make meaningful connections between their current knowledge and what they are still to learn. The experience of play provides "activities in which skills can be practised, both physical and mental, and repeated as many times as necessary for confidence and mastery" (Moyles, 2015:4). Moreover, play is a way in which children explore their environment and come to terms with its realities. In this informal way, children are able to learn while participating in enjoyable activities.

1.10   RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The purpose of a research methodology is to provide a structure of the methods that are used in this research (Devi, 2017). According to Chaudhary (2018:56), the methodology is the "systematic collection, analysis, and interpretation of data to answer a certain question or solve a problem". The methodology of this study is qualitatively based. The following sections will introduce the research design and research methods used in this study.

1.10.1 Research Design

A research design is where guidelines are created that give direction and order to the research (Godwill, 2015). In the context of this study, the research design includes the research paradigm of interpretivism, the qualitative research approach, and the research type of a single case study.

1.10.1.1 Research paradigm

This study is based on the paradigm of Interpretivism. According to White (2015), a paradigm is a set of beliefs or assumptions that guides action, and forms a framework used by researchers to organise their observations. In other words, a paradigm is a research perspective with a set of assumptions about how processes work (Beuving & De Vries, 2015).

1.10.1.2 Research approach

This research project is based on the qualitative approach. Qualitative research involves collecting data from participants in their natural settings with the purpose making sense of what they believe and perceive. It involves a naturalistic and interpretive research approach (Du Plooy-Cilliers, Davis & Bezuidenhout, 2017). As parents' perceptions are being explored, it is essential for evidence to be obtained in a qualitative manner as this allows for open-ended responses which enables the researcher to gain deeper insight into each participants' understanding of Grade R teaching and learning.

1.10.1.3 Research type

The research type used for this study is a single case study as it was used to explore a phenomenon (case) in detail. It also helped to investigate a single setting or occurrence (Woodside, 2017). In the context of this research, the "case" refers to the learning and teaching environment in Early Childhood Development (ECD) centres in the Westville suburb, Kwa-Zulu Natal, South Africa.

1.10.2   Research Methods

The research methods deal specifically with the way data is collected, analysed, and interpreted (Fallon, 2016). The selection of participants, data collection techniques, and data analysis will be discussed in the following sections.

1.10.2.1 Selection of participants

The suburb of Westville in the Pinetown Education District was chosen because it is the area where the researcher experienced the research problem. The case study was conducted at two ECD centres in Westville that cater for the ages between two to six, with each having one Grade R class. These centres were chosen because they have a play-based teaching and learning approach.

The 12 participants were chosen via purposive selection. There were five adult participants who are parents of children attending Grade R in ECD Centre 1, and one adult participant who is the Grade R teacher in ECD Centre 1. Additionally, there were five adult participants who are parents of children attending Grade R in ECD Centre 2,

and one adult participant who is the Grade R teacher in ECD Centre 2. There was a total of 10 parents with children in Grade R, and two Grade R teachers.

1.10.2.2 Process of data collection

The following data collection processes were utilised:

a.   Interviews

Semi-structured telephonic interviews were conducted with the two Grade R teachers (one from ECD centre 1, and one from ECD centre 2). A semi-structured interview (appendix F) used open-ended questions which facilitated the opportunity to probe further if responses did not fully answer the research question (White, 2015). The questions were used to guide the conversation, which allowed the participants to respond in as much detail as possible which elicited an original response. This was important as there were no limitations placed on the participants' responses. The semi-structured interviews were conducted telephonically, after obtaining prior permission from the participants for the interview to be recorded.

b.   Questionnaires

This data collection method of utilising questionnaires (appendix E) allowed for the accommodation of ambiguous language structures by the participants which could be understood in multiple ways (Atieno, 2009). Open-ended questions were designed to encourage responses that would reveal how the participants think and feel about aspects of the phenomenon under study (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014). The questions could be answered in detail and allowed for original and unique responses. There were also no time limitations regarding participants' responses which allowed for more in-depth and authentic answers. Also, open-ended questions allowed the researcher to access the participants' true feelings and created the opportunity to discover something new (White, 2015). The participants were given space to express themselves freely as there were no leading questions that could influence their responses. This allowed the researcher to collect maximum information in the form of original responses from the participants. This questionnaire differed from the quantitative survey questions in that semi-structured and open-ended questions made it possible for participants to provide rich qualitative data using their own words. The answers were not restricted in anyway and participants could respond to the questions

as extensively as they wanted to. An online system was used to alleviate any possibility of Covid-19 transmission and thus allowed the researcher access to participants during the Lockdown period.

c.   Document analysis

Data was analysed by examining the Foundation Phase Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statements for Grade R. The documents were downloaded from the Department of Basic Education's (DBE) website and then reviewed and interpreted. This method, which promoted the triangulation process, complemented data collected from interviews and questionnaires (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014). The DBE's documents provided evidence of the stipulated teaching and learning strategies that are prescribed via official policy for Grade R.

1.10.2.3 Data analysis

Data analysis is the process of organising and reducing large amounts of collected data into understandable sections (White, 2015). The collected data from the questionnaire was relocated into a space such that there could be a better understanding of participants' perceptions. The data preparation involved data being organised into predetermined categories which separated the data into workable units (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014). These categories were developed according to the questions in the questionnaire. These smaller units were then analysed coded. Via the thematic analysis process, each segment was allocated a code using a colour coding system. A list of codes was created, and these were then applied to the data (Godwill, 2015). This method revealed relationships, which are known as patterns, to emerge from the categories, (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014). The interviews were carefully planned, observed, listened to, and recorded; after which all information was analysed and synthesised into different categories. The policy documents were dissected incisively to determine what was expected from Grade R teaching and learning in Mathematics, Literacy and Life Skills. Links were made for triangulation purposes using the three methods of data collection; namely, questionnaires, interviews and document analysis. Emerging from these patterns, common themes were visible, and thus the triangulation process commenced. In other words, the many similarities in data allowed for common themes to be developed.

1.11   TRUSTWORTHINESS

The trustworthiness of the study was ensured by considering the credibility of the research as there were well-defined research aims and questions. Additionally, the transferability and multi-method approach (interviews, questionnaires, and document analysis) of the research strengthened the aspect of trustworthiness. A comprehensive literature review with due acknowledgement to all sources of reference, and appropriate methodology contributed to the credibility of the research. Moreover, the use of a purposive sampling ensured that this study could be replicated in a Grade R class within in any well-resourced ECD centre in South Africa; and this further confirmed the study's element of transferability.

1.12   ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

In order to ensure validity and the authenticity of this research project, ethical considerations were followed. Firstly, the researcher applied for ethical clearance from the Ethics Committee of the University of South Africa, and this was duly granted (appendix A). Permission was also sought (and received) from the ECD centres' principals to conduct research with Grade R teachers and Grade R parents. Anonymity was ensured by allocating pseudonyms/codes to each ECD centre as well as the participants. Each selected participant read, understood and signed the informed consent form to contribute to the study. To prevent the transmission of Covid-19, interviews were done telephonically, and the questionnaire was available online. To guarantee confidentiality of information, the data collected was stored as soft copies in a password-secure computer, only accessible to the researcher.

1.13   CHAPTER OVERVIEW

Chapter one of this study provides the introduction, the background, the rationale, the literature review, the statement of the problem, aim and objectives, the research methodology and an overview of the chapters.

In *chapter two*, a literature review outlines parental involvement, the Grade R theory and policies, and the importance of play-based learning. It was important to review the current literature in order develop a better understanding of parents' perception of

teaching and learning in Grade R. The literature review discusses the important role of play in Grade R classes and how it is developmentally appropriate for the future success of the child.

Chapter three discusses the research design and methodology that will be used in this study. This study is based on the qualitative research approach with three methods of data collection; namely, semi-structured interviews, open-ended questionnaires, and document analysis.

Chapter four presents the data which will be analysed and interpreted. This will include employing qualitative methods of analysis. Also, the findings with be discussed, and then the data will be compared to the literature review,

Chapter five includes recommendations and conclusions. The recommendations arising from these findings may be used to inform parents of appropriate teaching and learning strategies in Grade R classes in relation to the value of play-based learning,

1.14   CONCLUSION

This chapter provided an orientation of this research study. The background, theoretical framework and key concepts of the study, were presented. The researcher included the problem statement, and the aims and objectives of the study. Also, presented was an overview of the research methodology that will be used to explore parents' perceptions of Grade R teaching and learning processes. Further, the trustworthiness and ethical considerations were discussed. Chapter two will review the existing literature related to the study.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1   INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter discussed the background of the study and introduced the main aspects. Chapter 2 will present a review of the current literature relating to the study. The focus of this study pertains to parents' perceptions of Grade R teaching and learning. Accordingly, the aim of this study is to determine the perceptions and expectations of parents of Grade R learners regarding teaching and learning. This is done with the intention of improving parents' understanding of the Grade R teaching and learning curriculum for learner development, which is supported by sound scientific theories.

The purpose of this chapter is to present a review of current literature regarding teaching and learning in the Grade R year, the value of play-based learning, parents' views regarding play-based learning, and the importance of parents' general perceptions of teaching and learning processes in the Grade R year. These will provide a research framework concerning parental perceptions of Grade R teaching and learning, and how these compare to the stipulations of the South African Grade R education policies and guidelines.

2.2   GRADE R TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching and learning is a complex process that involves various aspects and processes. Teaching, in the context of this study, can be described as the process of attending to the needs, feelings, and experiences of children in order to ensure that they are acquiring skills and knowledge that go beyond what they already know (Killen, 2019). Killen (2019) adds that teaching involves creating an optimal and engaging environment that is conducive to learning. According to Berry (2018:21), learning can be defined as "the activity of obtaining knowledge". Cook (2016) contextualises this within early childhood education by stating that learning is a social process where children acquire new information and are guided by the teacher to make sense or meaning of this. Hence, teaching and learning are intertwined especially in the early

years, and it is the teacher's role to create an optimal and stimulating environment for learning.

According to the *Education White Paper 5* of 2001, Grade R was introduced to improve learner success within the education system. The "R" in Grade R stands for *Reception*. This is the grade before a child begins formal schooling in Grade 1 and is the final year of the preschool phase. There is an overlap as it is also the first year of the Foundation Phase. Grade R is therefore an informal year where the main strategy for teaching and learning should be through play (Excell & Linington, 2015). Moreover, the DBE (2011a: 20) states that the Grade R year has unique characteristics and must not be seen as a "watered down Grade 1". With these unique characteristics of incidental learning and play-based pedagogy in mind, Davin (2015), agrees that Grade R is an opportunity to guide each child to be holistically ready for the future formal years of school. The South African Government legislates that children may begin school when they are five, but it is compulsory to enter Grade 1 in the year that they turn seven. This positions the Grade R child between the ages of four and six (De Witt, 2016).

Grade R is known as the year of school readiness. School readiness includes three main aspects of development: social, school, and emotional maturity (Davin, 2015). Children need to acquire a certain level of readiness before being able to master formal skills at school. According to Excell and Linginton (2015), the readiness skills are as follows: developing a positive learning disposition, healthy and physical development, emergent language skills, emergent mathematics skills, social and emotional competence, problem-solving skills, and thinking and reasoning skills. Grade R follows an integrated programme which incorporates a thematic approach in teaching and learning processes. As such, all activities are planned around a specific theme such that the subject areas are interconnected. According to Excell and Linington (2020), the development of the whole child must be considered, and this includes physical, emotional, social, cognitive and moral development. These aspects of development accommodate children's need to become learning-ready for the formal academic learning environment.

According to CAPS, Grade R teaching-learning processes should focus on whole-child development (DBE, 2011a). This holistic development is the "interrelationship between the various aspects of a child's physical, social, emotional, cognitive, language,

perceptual motor and moral spirit" (Excell & Linington, 2015:19). All these domains of development closely work in tandem to produce well-balanced individuals. In other words, holistic education simply means that each mental and physical part of a person is cultivated or developed in order to help him/her to live more productively, and to be an asset to society (Pepler, 2015). There are also certain developmental milestones that children must reach in the Grade R year, and these are discussed in the following sections.

2.2.1   Grade R Developmental Milestones

It is important to highlight the developmental milestones for children in the Grade R year as this will be compared to the South African education policies regarding the Grade R curriculum. Regardless of the age of the child, these milestones need to be reached by the end of Grade R in order to cope with the attainment of Grade 1 learning outcomes (Davin, 2015).

2.2.1.1   *Physical development*

Physical development involves the growth of muscles, and the body as a whole (Cook, 2016). This includes large and small muscle development, as well as the development of body organs, including the central nervous system. The Grade R child should be developing an adult-like posture and good co-ordination in order to hold a pencil and a pair of scissors correctly, as well as begin copying adult-like writing (Excell & Linington, 2015). By the end of the year, the child must be able to maintain a correct sitting posture in order to complete formal tasks comfortably at a desk. Important life skills such as (among others) dressing, using the bathroom, and basic hygiene habits are essential for child independence in formal education settings.

2.2.1.2   *Social and emotional development*

Social development refers to the advancement of interactions with other people and the learning of societal rules (Harding, 2013). Emotional development occurs when the child begins to discover his/her feelings and self-image. Grade R aims to teach children to build healthy relationships with their peers, and also have an appreciation for authority (Davin, 2015). Hence, a self-concept is formed, and this encourages self-esteem.

Additionally, Grade R children must also learn how to control their emotions to express their opinions and feelings in socially acceptable ways.

2.2.1.3 Cognitive development

Cognitive development concerns all aspects of mental activities and functions relating to thinking and formation of ideas. The aim in Grade R is to develop the foundation for essential concepts regarding Mathematics and Language (Davin, 2015). Grade R children also need to develop the ability to think creatively and to solve problems independently in order to prepare themselves to become globally relevant in future years (Joubert, 2015).

The cognitive, social, physical, emotional, and moral development of the children are progressively encouraged throughout the Grade R year via exposure to learning areas and play-based teaching and learning.

2.2.2 Grade R Learning Areas

The Grade R learning environment is divided into the following areas: fantasy play, art area, outdoor play, sensopathic play and cognitive play (DBE, 2011b). These areas are activated during free-play periods of the daily routine.

2.2.2.1 Fantasy area

The fantasy area, which is also known as the dramatic play area, is a space in the learning environment that promotes make-belief and pretend-play experiences. Fantasy play exposes children to a variety of pretend-situations that relate to their life-world (Excell & Linington, 2015). Pretend play is an important aspect of learning in the Grade R year, as through fantasy, children begin making sense of the complex adult world. According to Robertson, Yim and Paatsh (2020), fantasy play enriches the imagination by motivating children to go beyond the limits of their reality. This encourages children to think symbolically which promotes abstract thinking skills. Hence, children can act or play out scenarios and problem-solve situations in a safe and secure environment. Further, language skills are developed through fantasy play as the child needs to think carefully about what appropriate words to choose in order to ensure their peers understand them. Extension of vocabulary skills is encouraged through the use of different themes that link to the child's real-life world (Davin, 2015). According to the

DBE (2011b), some examples of appropriate themes are: *my family*, *jobs that people do*, and *fruits and vegetables*. Moreover, children can use objects to represent something concrete or abstract, in addition to assigning themselves roles.

A study by Moyles (2015), included fantasy play where a young boy put on an apron and displayed some plastic fruit. His friends would then come by to buy the fruit using plastic money. Through these interactions, the children were learning important money-handling skills which helped them in real-life situations of using money to buy items at a shop.

Further, social and emotional development is an essential aspect of the Grade R year (DBE, 2011b). Fantasy play allows children to learn about positive and negative emotions and they can be taught how to deal with feelings in a socially acceptable manner. Children will be exposed to different views and experiences by playing and communicating with their peers. They will be required to co-operate and compromise with other children in order to be allowed to play with them (Moyles, 2015). As such, a safe environment for exploration is created where children's self-confidence is promoted, which cascades into a positive self-image of themselves. Promotion of a vivid imagination is essential in Grade R as teachers are preparing children for a world that does not yet exist for them. Through the development of a wide imagination, children learn to think critically, problem-solve, and become creative (Loizou, Michaelides & Georgiou, 2019).

2.2.2.2   Art area

The art area is a space in the learning environment where creative art activities can be explored by children. According to Koster (2015), creative arts are essential in early childhood as it promotes creativity, cognition, and social and emotional development. Art activities allow children to freely explore art materials and create something new. This nurtures creative development through a process-approach to art (Excell & Linington, 2015). According to a study by Kemple and David (2020), creative children display elements of curiosity, flexibility, self-confidence, and insight. These are essential skills for critical thinking, problem-solving, and cognitive development. Art experiences promote the activation of multiple senses, allowing learning to be more exciting and memorable (Fox & Schirrmacher, 2015). Language development is also promoted by

children listening to instructions and communicating their ideas. Children can be introduced to new cultures by using content integration and exposing themselves to art from different cultural backgrounds. This is essential in South Africa as it helps create culturally responsive children (Koster, 2015). Art also involves fun activities that provide children to have an outlet for their pent-up feelings and stress they may experience. This artistic creative process allows them to explore their emotions, and also helps them to express their "negative" feelings in an appropriate socially acceptable manner (Davin, 2015).

2.2.2.3 Outdoor play area

The outdoor play area is also known as the playground. This area promotes gross motor, cognitive, social and emotional development. Outdoor play is also essential in promoting the overall health of children (Kinsner, 2019). Children are active learners and outdoor play is focused on providing activities to nurture this trait (Excell & Linington, 2015). In the outdoor environment children feel free and more relaxed in comparison to being indoors. According to Mountain (2015), when children play outside, they feel as if they are in control, and this enhances the learning experience. Gross motor skills which require the movement of the whole body, are enhanced through the development and activation of large muscles in the arms and legs that help to perform everyday routine functions. The gross motor muscles are used in activities like climbing on jungle gyms and using balancing equipment, which are essential to build core muscle groups in order to maintain the correct sitting posture for formal classroom tasks (Naude & Meier, 2019). Also, these physical activities promote good health as it is cardiovascular in nature which is important for maintaining appropriate body mass index (BMI), a strong heart, and lung functions (Yogman, et al., 2018). Further, outdoor play encourages language development which is an important cognitive skill because when children play games with their peers, they communicate using verbal and non-verbal communication (Norling & Sandberg, 2019). Similarly, Mountain (2015) emphasises the value of outdoor play in promoting thinking skills which form part of language development. Moreover, social and emotional skills such as taking turns, following the rules of the game, and empathy are developed. This can be seen when children naturally tend to encourage their peers to try something new or empathise with them should they suffer from an injury (Kinsner, 2019).

2.2.2.4 Sensopathic play area

Sensopathic play involves exploration and discovery with sensory materials. This can be done by using large trough basins, sand pits, and smaller containers (Excell & Linington, 2020). Some examples of sensory materials are playdough, water, hay, mud and seashells. According to Rosback and Coulson (2015), children naturally explore their environment using their senses. By allowing hands-on tactile activities, children can use concrete and real objects to gain new knowledge. The primary aim of sensopathic play is to provide opportunities for the child to self-soothe (Bass & Walker, 2015). The textures and materials in these trays give the child an outlet or opportunity to release anxieties and frustrations. The supportive equipment added to these trays present the child with a wide variety of opportunities for scientific experimentation and developing cognitive skills (Lois & Stead, 2015). With regards to language development, children can use their sensory experiences to create a narrative about what they have discovered. It also leads itself to the discovery of descriptive vocabulary (Koster, 2015). Pre-writing skills are also developed as children use their small muscle groups to handle educational equipment and tools. This fine motor development is essential to develop the muscles needed for emergent writing skills (Joubert, 2015).

2.2.2.5 Cognitive play area

According to Excell and Linington (2020), the cognitive play area should be a quiet indoor area stocked with books, building blocks, puzzles and educational games. This area promotes cognitive and fine motor skills development. The use of books for language development is critical in early childhood (Wessels, 2015) as this allows children to develop emergent literacy skills by creating a foundation of connecting the spoken word to printed text. Having stories read to them during free play allows children to learn about their emotions and the correct way to deal with them (Bryce-Clegg, 2015). The pictures in the books also encourage discussions and develops thinking skills (Davin, 2015). Block play further increases these thinking skills by developing problem-solving skills and creativity. Important mathematical concepts such as shape, size and estimation are also promoted through constructing formations with blocks (Bruce, 2018). Hence, children are required regularly to use their fine motor skills when playing with blocks. Similarly, children use the small muscle group when completing puzzles as they pick up the small pieces and place them in the correct spaces (Moyles, 2015). Puzzles

are also advantageous when utilised for problem-solving skills and analytical thinking. Additionally, educational games, such as shadow matching, promote emergent mathematical skills and facilitate the development of working memory as children need to remember certain content and skills to be successful in the game (Fissler, Kolassa & Schrader, 2015).

2.2.3   Play-based Teaching and Learning in Grade R

According to Excell and Linington (2020), play is the optimal teaching and learning strategy for the early years. This is because a child can use play as a means to connect with the real world. It is accepted that in South Africa, learning through play is the main teaching and learning strategy with children aged three to six (Jensen et al., 2019). Children can learn about the world through exploration and discovery. This is supported by Piaget who stated that children are curious by nature and thus play is the best means of learning (Excell & Linington, 2015). Play allows for repetition of activities to enhance the cementing of physical and cognitive skills (Moyles, 2015). Thus, children are permitted to repeat activities as many times as needed for mastering a specific skill. Wood (2016) asserts that play allows for active learning which leads to this mastery. Furthermore, it is a way in which children explore their environment and come to terms with its realities. Else (2014) defines play as a self-motivated behaviour where children can choose activities which they enjoy. Play allows children to learn in an unstructured environment via self-discovery and experimentation which develops creativity and intellectual skills which are important for functioning positively in society (Moyles, 2015). According to Walsh, McMillan and McGuinness (2017), play does not put unnecessary pressure on the child as pressure could hinder a child's development. When play is appropriately directed, children are able to learn by building on the knowledge and skills that they have already acquired (Moyles, 2015). Through play, children are also able to improve their language and communication skills which enhances the quality of interaction opportunities. Furthermore, play enhances divergent and critical-thinking skills which assists in problem-solving development (Sicart, 2014). Action-based learning is more effective and efficient than instructional learning. This lends itself to a hands-on teaching and learning approach which is essential in a world where technology is at the forefront of most households globally. According to Ntuli (2017), the majority of children now spend their time after school hours watching television, but this

can be harmful to children's health as they sit passively while watching programmes that may have limited cognitive stimulation and possible unsavoury content (Gottschalk, 2019). With this in mind, it is essential for teachers to allow for maximum play time during the school day to counteract the negative effects of technology.

2.2.3.1   Using play to teach Mathematics

Grade R Mathematics aims to develop a "spirit of curiosity and love" for the subject (DBE, 2011c: 8). The CAPS document outlines the necessary mathematics skills required to attain the set outcomes in the Grade R year. Grade R Mathematics acts as a bridge between the child's preschool knowledge and the more complex skills needed for Grade 1 (DBE, 2011d). According to Excell and Linington (2015), an integrated and play-based approach is most efficient for Grade R Mathematics development because it promotes problem-solving, logical thinking, and reasoning. Furthermore, Excell and Linington (2015) point out that the main Mathematics learning areas are: numbers, operations and relationships; space and shape; measurement; data handling; and patterns, functions and algebra. The focus in Grade R should be assisting children in acquiring the understanding of basic concepts and skills that fall within these content areas (Davin, 2015). These concepts and skills can be integrated into purposeful play opportunities. Oldridge (2018) adds that play allows for the teacher to guide students to explore and discover the foundations of Mathematics. Real-life materials and concrete methods such as counting with blocks and measuring objects with string, allow for a hands-on learning approach. Incidental learning in Mathematics is also promoted when children explore problems using the sensopathic water trays (Rosback & Coulson, 2015). An example of this is children learning the concept of conversion by playing with different size cups and jugs. Furthermore, creative arts can have a Mathematical significance when focusing on space and shape (Wilmot & Schafer, 2015). By children experimenting with different shapes while painting, they can discover the names and properties of these shapes. Fantasy play is also an excellent opportunity to reinforce shape concepts. According to Naude and Meier (2018), when children pretend or actually bake, they practise and figure out the conceptual meanings of measurement, counting and numbers. For example, the child will fill one cup of flour into the bowl and once the biscuits have been baked, the child can divide them into equal portions.

2.2.3.2 Using play to teach Literacy

Literacy in Grade R focuses on emergent language skills as per the language of learning and teaching (LoLT) determined by the school community. According to Joubert (2015), the areas or topics of literacy are as follows: listening and speaking, reading and phonics, writing, and handwriting skills. Play facilitates the integration of these skills so that emergent language is developed in totality. Excell and Linington (2015) assert that the emergent literacy skills to be developed in Grade R are reading motivation, a love for reading, vocabulary development, phonological awareness, knowledge of letters and print, and narrative skills. Fostering a love for reading can be established through creating a book corner and reading stories to children. For example, paging through picture story books helps children make the connection between spoken language and written text and/or pictures (Dwyer & Harbaugh, 2020). This can be done during free-play periods. Moreover, the fantasy play area is an optimal learning environment for developing vocabulary extension and narrative skills as it is social by nature (Cabell et al., 2015). Hence, through exploring new themes and conversing with peers, children incidentally learn these emergent literacy skills which allows phonological awareness to develop. Children begin to discriminate between figure-ground auditory sounds which Hadley and Dickinson (2020), assert is the beginning of identifying sounds in words. Music can also be used to promote knowledge of rhyme and syllables as literacy and music complement each other (Burnard & Murphy, 2017). Music can be used during free-play sessions by simply playing appropriate songs on a CD-player. In support of this, Le Roux (2017), contends that listening to music during play time can increase a child's vocabulary. Creative arts also add value to emergent literacy development. When children paint or draw, they become aware that images on paper are meaningful and reflect spoken words or thoughts (Fox & Schirrmacher, 2015). Additionally, Koster (2015) explains that by manipulating art materials, children develop fine motor skills which are essential for enhancing the quality of a child's handwriting. Sensory play with sand and shaving creams also assists children in creating prewriting patterns which assist in letter formation.

2.2.3.3 Using play to teach Life Skills

The Foundation Phase Life Skills curriculum allows children to translate what they know, and what they believe in, into appropriate actions. Through Life Skills, teachers can

assist children to acquire independence, coping skills, and physical and cognitive development (Excell & Linington, 2015). These skills also promote the development of learners into active citizens. The Life Skills CAPS (DBE, 2011b) categorises Life Skills into four sections: physical education, creative arts, beginning knowledge, and personal and social well-being. Beginning knowledge incorporates the content from the social sciences. In this regard, sensopathic play allows children to experiment with scientific concepts such as change (Texley & Rudd, 2018). This can be seen when a child discovers that water and sand create mud. During outdoor play, children discover natural life such as insects and plants. Another example is when children are outdoors, they notice their shadow as well as the elements of the weather (Ashbrook, 2016). Personal and social well-being is an essential topic in Grade R as it is vital that children learn about their bodies, social health, values, and attitudes because they are still learning to look after themselves (Naude & Meier, 2019). Play as a way of learning these skills, allows children to push boundaries within a safe and secure environment, thus teaching them about morals and rules. This can be done in the outdoor play environment when children play on fixed equipment. Children learn that there are rules in place to keep them safe; and this can be transferred into other aspects of life, such as how to cross a road safely (Costa & Kallick, 2019). Play also allows children to co-operate and consider the feelings of other children around them. Cassano and Dougherty (2018) maintain that this social and emotional development is essential for a child's emotional intelligence development. As previously mentioned, physical exercise is essential for developing the gross motor skills needed for children to complete everyday tasks (Kostelnik, Soderman & Whiren, 2018). During outdoor play, children are free to explore the fixed equipment such as the monkey bars, jungle gym and swings which develop the core, shoulder and neck muscles which are vital for children to maintain correct posture while sitting at a desk (Joubert, 2015). Through navigating the play space, children can learn spatial awareness which is an essential pre-writing skill (Pica, 2013). Creative arts encompass the sub-topics of visual art, music, and drama. The creative art area, which is available during free-play periods, facilitates the learning of visual art skills (McConnon, 2016). According to Roberts (2018), the fantasy and outdoor play areas are also conducive to the learning of drama and music.

2.3 THEORETICAL UNDERPINNING REGARDING GRADE R TEACHING AND LEARNING

This study is supported by Vygotsky's (1978) socio-cultural learning theory. Vygotsky, a Russian developmental psychologist focused on the development of the whole child which is directly linked to CAPS regarding Grade R. Vygotsky (1978) maintained that learning is a social exchange and that it should be an active process which occurs in the ZPD (Vygotsky, 1978).

Vygotsky (1978) identified important elements for the successful development of the whole child, and he believed that true education is about developing each child's individual learning potential. According to Moll (2014), social experiences are conduits for children to process information and gain new knowledge. The social-cultural theory emphasises the importance of the individual's culture in shaping cognitive development by determining how and what the individual learns. Children's ideas, values and knowledge develop as they adopt the behaviour and thinking offered by their culture. In addition, children learn about their community through social interaction with more knowledgeable members of society. This is directly linked to the parent or caregiver of the child, as elements of culture and community begin within the home environment (Karpov, 2014).

In order to contextualise the study, Vygotsky's views on developmentally appropriate pedagogy, the zone of proximal development and scaffolding are discussed.

2.3.1 Vygotsky's View of Play-based Teaching and Learning

According to Vygotsky (1978), play is an essential part of facilitating developmentally appropriate learning for children to occur. That is, Vygotsky (1978) contended that through play, development is promoted because play is the optimal opportunity for children to make sense of the world they live in. The act of playing is a social interaction between children where they can share ideas and allow their imagination to run free (Berry, 2018). Vygotsky (1978) also posited that due to the aspect of natural human behaviour, learning firstly begins through social interactions. Children learn by observing the behaviour of their parents and then imitate this. When the child copies negative behaviour, parents should correct them and guide their learning towards

positive characteristics. Child-centred play encourages children to explore different language uses and role-play situations which aids in cognitive and internal knowledge development (Bruce, 2018). Through interacting effectively in a play environment, children begin to internalise and regulate their thinking; and this strengthens the ZPD (Miller, 2011).

2.3.2   The Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)

According to Vygotsky's (1978) socio-cultural theory of learning, at any given point in development there is certain knowledge that is within a child's reach. This is the zone between what a child already knows and what a child is not yet able to achieve. With adult guidance, the child is guided into the unknown and supported through the learning process (Karpov, 2014). Learning is a social process and is promoted through social interactions. When a problem is beyond the capabilities of a child, a more capable adult or peer can provide support in order to encourage independent problem-solving (Miller, 2011). Learning is therefore a collaborative process. Vygotsky (1978) proposed that what a child can do by himself/herself differs from what he/she can do with help. The area between what the child already knows and what the child is not ready to learn yet, is the dynamic and changing space where instruction can succeed as the child and teacher interact. This is known as the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). A child should be taught developmentally appropriate content and be guided by an adult. Vygotsky (1978) emphasises the importance of the presence of adults in a child's environment. According to Excell and Linington (2015), instruction from adults is essential for learning, and may take on a scaffolding approach.

2.3.3   Scaffolding

The ZPD requires a scaffolding approach to learning. Scaffolding within the education context refers to the type of assistance that is provided by an adult when a child is working to accomplish a task (Bruce, 2018). This assistance can be adjusted according to the needs of the individual child. In the classroom context, it is the teacher's responsibility to provide scaffolding so that the children can accomplish tasks that they would be unable to complete on their own. The teacher can slowly decrease the degree of scaffolding until the child is able to complete the task independently. The scaffold is therefore a temporary structure which can be readjusted depending on the child and the

task (Bryce-Clegg, 2015). Scaffolding is an effective teaching and learning method as it provides a supportive method for the child to build self-confidence and independence. Furthermore, this approach allows the child to move to an area of the unknown with the confidence knowing that they will receive the required support needed from their teacher or parent. According to Saracho (2019), the child is encouraged to explore and discover new knowledge, while having the teacher or parent available to guide their learning.

Vygotsky's theory of scaffolding is critical to this study, as a child's first teacher is the parent (De Witt, 2016). Therefore, it is essential that the home and school environment work together to promote developmentally appropriate teaching and learning practices that benefit the child.

2.3.4 Strength of Vygotsky's Theory in this study

Vygotsky's (1978) theory of the ZPD and scaffolding provides a solid foundation that can be used to understand how children learn in the Grade R year. This allows teachers to adapt their teaching and learning to the specific needs of each child in the classroom (Daniels, 2016). Furthermore, the safe environment created by scaffolding allows children to build their confidence when tackling more difficult tasks. Moreover, scaffolding acts as a motivational strategy to young children as they feel free to explore and discover learning under the guidance and supervision of their teacher (Holzman, 2016). Vygotsky (1978) emphasises the importance of learning through play, which is the most recommended teaching and learning strategy in Grade R. Play-based pedagogy provides teachers with a theoretical basis on which to facilitate the teaching and learning process (Naude & Meier, 2019).

Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory of learning is aligned to Excell and Linington's (2015) contention that the Grade R classroom should be an extension of the home. Parents and teachers should work as partners to accelerate the education of the child in totality.

2.3.5 Limitation of Vygotsky's Theory in this study

Although Vygotsky's (1978) socio-cultural theory provides a solid platform for teaching and learning, there are some limitations. An essential element of teaching and learning in Grade R is to understand the developmental milestones that children go through. This allows teachers and parents to have an indication of a child's strengths and weaknesses

(Davin, 2015). However, Vygotsky's (1978) theory does not speak to this, and this creates a large gap. Knowledge of the milestones further promotes the development of the whole child. De Witt (2016) posits that it is essential to develop the physical, cognitive, social and emotional development of the child in order to optimise the learning experience. Since children in the Grade R year are between the ages of 4 and 6, it is essential for teachers and parents to understand the milestones in each area. This age group is large and multi-faceted, and children before the ages of 7 develop rapidly (Pica, 2013). By acknowledging the age of the child and the theoretically-based milestones, teachers and parents can ensure that they have the correct expectations for each individual child. These should match the age of the child, as well as the skills required for formal schooling (Pepler, 2015).

2.4   ROLE OF THE TEACHER IN GRADE R TEACHING AND LEARNING

The South African Department of Education (2019) states that teaching is a noble profession and teachers are a critical part of child development. In the early years, the teacher has multiple roles, and this can be most challenging (De Witt, 2016). The teacher is responsible for ensuring that there is a balance between teacher-guided and child-initiated activities throughout the day to facilitate optimal learning. This includes the planning and execution of activities in an optimal learning environment. According to the Department of Higher Education and Training [DHET] (2017), the minimum requirements for a Grade R teacher qualification is an NQF level 6 Diploma in Grade R Teaching and Learning. This equates to a minimum of three years of study in order to become a Grade R teacher. The requirements of any Grade R qualification are to prepare the initial teacher to facilitate a play-based learning environment for young children (DHET, 2017). The qualification is underpinned by the theories of child development which includes the premise that the young child learns best in a play-based environment (South African Qualifications Authority, 2020).

Teachers are then responsible for creating lesson plans using the guidelines in the CAPS documents (DBE, 2011a; 2011b; 2011c; 2011d). This is known as syllabus development (Smith & Loughran, 2017). It should promote the "educational process, as well as the goal of providing quality education for all" (Carl, 2017: 201). Teachers are the core planners because they know the children best and have the necessary skills available to plan lessons that encourage all children to learn. Along with this planning,

teachers need to design assessment tasks for the children (Merlter, 2017). The CAPS document outlines the assessment criteria in a simple user-friendly manner. In terms of Grade R policy guidelines, the teacher needs to effectively facilitate mainly play-based activities. Hence, the teacher must have detailed planning in place to ensure meaningful play opportunities are available and executed (Davin, 2015).

2.4.1 Teachers' Perceptions of Play-based Learning

According to a study which explores teachers' perceptions of early childhood education in South Africa conducted by Excell (2011), teachers advocated for play-based teaching and learning strategies in Grade R and felt adequately qualified to facilitate this. Similarly, Bubikova-Moan, Hjetland and Wollscheid (2019), found that teachers in the United Kingdom perceived learning through play as being the most valuable teaching and learning method in building a foundation for child development. This alludes to Grade R teachers having a positive attitude towards children's learning through play as they feel equipped to promote this strategy in the Grade R year. This is further confirmed by Lynch's (2015) findings that the majority of teachers teaching 6-year-old children use play-based learning in their classrooms. In addition, a study by Aronstam and Braund (2015) concluded that South African teachers view play as the "work" of the child as this is the most effective way children learn.

2.5 THE ROLE OF THE PARENT IN GRADE R TEACHING AND LEARNING

In context, a parent is defined as "the biological parent of a learner" who is "the person who undertakes to fulfil the obligations towards the learner's education" (DBE, 2001:12). Parents are key stakeholders in a child's education. In the context of this study, the adult role-players in the child's life are the child's parents or caregivers, and the Grade R Teacher. According to Ackerman (2015), parents are the main role-players in a child's life. Additionally, Quan-Baffour (2020), agrees that the perceptions of a parent on what should be taught and learnt have a direct impact on the child's development. Parents are the best supporters of the school environment for many reasons. Being role-models for their children, they have a sense of what their child needs. According to Excell (2011), parents want their children to receive the best standard of learning and school experiences. However, Robinson and Harris (2014) maintain that this does not always align with the governmental requirements that are developmentally appropriate.

2.5.1 Importance of Parental Involvement

Parental involvement can be defined as a direct effort provided by the parent in order to increase the quality of the educational outcomes of their children (Davin, 2015). Parental involvement in the Early Childhood Development (ECD) stage is an invaluable resource. Mackenzie (2011) agrees that family involvement is critical to the educational success and advancement of children. Parents are the child's first teacher who can provide the teacher with information of the whole child – this helps the teacher to adapt teaching-learning situations in such a way to suit the individual child (Coleman, 2013). The DBE (2011a) states that parents should take the responsibility to involve themselves in the school system, including school governance structures. Furthermore, it is the parents' responsibility to elect the School Governing Body (SGB) to contribute to the smooth functioning of the school. Parents are also required to have regular discussions with teachers and their child regarding school matters. They are encouraged to be a part of the child's school life and support the teachers in curriculum decisions, amongst other duties (Fives, 2017). Accordingly, parents should partner and collaborate with teachers as they are a vital link between the home and the school, as emphasised in Epstein's (2002) parental model below.

2.5.1.1 Epstein's parental model

Epstein, Sanders, Simon, Salinsa, Jansorn & Voorhis (2002) proposed a framework for increasing parental involvement within the educational environment. This was with the aim to provide a structure that could be used to bridge the gap between the home and school environment. A professional learning community which promotes the team approach towards education is advantageous to a child's educational progress and success (Epstein & Salinas, 2004). Epstein et al. (2002) advocate six types of parental involvement: parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making, and collaborating with the community.

Type 1: Parenting

Parenting involves the activities needed to meet the basic needs of a child. It is the nurturing role of an adult to promote happy child-rearing. These activities will differ from parent-to-parent, but all should provide information regarding the child's development, home conditions and health. As such, parents are able to assist schools with the

necessary information regarding family background, culture, and personal goals the child may have (Epstein & Salinas, 2004). The school can work together with the parents to help instil sound morals and values to aid in the child's development.

Type 2: Communicating

Joubert (2015:43), defines communicating as "the ability to convey or transmit information, news or ideas". It is imperative that there is sound communication between the school and the home, and vice versa, as communication must be a two-way process to be most effective. Teachers can benefit from communicating with parents as the parents can provide important information regarding the child's physical and mental state. This will help the teacher to provide a supportive and individualised environment for each child (Coleman, 2013). Conversely, parents can benefit from communicating with teachers as it will inform the parent of the child's scholastic development, as well as accessing any recent positive or negative information of the child. Hence, effective communication avenues must be planned by the school to facilitate sound parent-teacher relationships. A popular method is using technology such as Email, WhatsApp and the D6 Communicator.

Type 3: Volunteering

Parents can be encouraged to become involved in school's functioning by volunteering their time and energy. Volunteering is the act of giving freely of your time and energy with no expectation of remuneration. Parents can assist in daily school activities to help the teachers. This could include assisting in the school library or helping children with their reading. The act of volunteering can help parents gain valuable insight into their child's learning thus empowering to the child to attain a better quality of performance at home and at school (Naude & Meier, 2019).

Type 4: Learning at Home

According to Excell and Linington (2020: 32), the home is the child's "first school" and the "parent is the child's first teacher". The home is the first learning environment that a child is introduced to, thus it is essential to maintain a positive connection between the home and the school. Parents can assist their children by helping them with school projects and homework. It is important for parents to allow their young children time to

play in the afternoons and then provide a stimulating environment with multiple experiences during the weekends (MacNaughton & Hughes, 2011).

Type 5: Decision-making

Parents can be involved by being part of a school's decision-making processes. Parents can be invited to be members of the SGB. Decisions made by the school will directly impact on children, thus persuading parents to be part of the decision-making process will strengthen school ethics (Reed & Walker, 2015).

Type 6: Collaborating with the community

The community is a great asset to both parents and schools as it provides, among others, essential services and facilities such as health-care and leisure activities. Collaboration with the community allows parents to access these facilities to promote the holistic development of the child (Coleman, 2013).

2.5.2   Parents' Perceptions of Play-based Teaching and Learning as an approach

Perceptions are pre-determined thoughts and feelings which have a powerful impact on opinions regarding aspects of education (Grusec & Danyliuk, 2014). Some parents are not convinced that their children are gaining benefits by "working" in a play-based environment (Moyles, 2015:164). Just as parents need their hobbies to relax and for pleasure, children also need the outlet and excitement of play. Some parents seem to overlook the importance and value of play for young children to learn, often regarding it as "unproductive and [therefore] its importance and value for the young learner is overlooked" (Davin, 2015:6). Some parents discourage play with the attitude that "sooner or later children have got to get used to the world of work, and the sooner the better" (Moyles, 2015:165). Unfortunately, some parents also have the tendency to impose adult standards onto children (Bryce-Clegg, 2015). They often respond negatively to play because they interpret it as simply having fun, and therefore a waste of time. Parents envisage a more academic approach, where children sit at the table with only direct-instruction and worksheet-based teaching and learning tasks (Bongiorno, 2018). In a study conducted by O'Gorman and Ailwood (2012), parents made a clear distinction between what they described as play, and what they deemed as learning. This reiterates that parents may not know the value of teaching and learning through play in early years education.

There is a wealth of literature that aligns with the understanding that children learn best through play. However, parents persist, and reservations still exist about this teaching and learning strategy in the Grade R year, thus the importance of play is often underestimated by parents (Excell & Linington, 2020). This can be detrimental to the development of the child as play is unique and most beneficial in that it caters for multiple methods of learning to suit individual needs, as learning through play enhances a child's ability to understand content knowledge and concepts (Isaacs et al., 2019). Hence, parents need to understand the pedagogical advantages of play-based activities to make informed decisions about its significance.

2.5.3   Parents' Expectations of Grade R Teachers

Dillon and Nixon (2018), advocate that a strong teacher-parent partnership is of great value to the young child. When interactions between the home and the school are positive, children have a sense of security and confidence within both environments. Lekli and Kaloti's (2015) study found that parents expected teachers to be committed, qualified and enthusiastic about their job. Frequent communication regarding their child's progress is also an expectation that most parents have (Toren & Van Schalkwyk, 2020). Furthermore, Jaiswal (2017) explains how parents expect teachers to identify aspects of their child's potential.

When there is a positive partnership between parents and teachers, there are very few challenges. However, when parents begin to have unrealistic expectations of the teachers, there can be difficulties within the school environment (Ackerman, 2015). Some parents do not trust that teachers have their child's best interests at heart. Additionally, some parents tend to blame the teacher's teaching methodology should their child not meet their academic expectations (Ellis, Lock & Lummis, 2015). This can put unnecessary pressure on the teacher. A study conducted by Meier and Lemmer (2015), found that certain parents expect the teachers to use their break times and "free" periods to provide additional lessons for their children, with the view that this will academically accelerate their child's development. According to Kruger and Michalek (2011), some parents expect an individualised education plan (IEP) for their child, despite their child not displaying any signs for special needs that would require an IEP.

2.5.4 Implications of Parents' Expectations of the Grade R Teacher and Child

According to a study conducted by Ackerman (2015) regarding parental involvement in pre-primary education, it was revealed that positive parental involvement with the school results in a more conducive and congenial partnership between the home and the school. This in turn develops a happier child who enjoys going to school. This kind of a child is readily open to sharing their school experiences with their parents. When parents trust their child's teacher, they are more likely to be supportive of the teaching and learning methods used in the school (Mackenzie, 2011). Parents who engage with the school and their child in a positive manner, help to foster a love for learning which is essential for future school success. Contrastingly, negative parental involvement can have negative consequences on the teacher and the child.

According to Ceka and Murati (2016), parental engagement is when parents and teachers share the responsibility to help the child learn effectively to meet developmental outcomes. The value of sound parental involvement cannot be disputed; however, parental pressure aimed at accelerating children's academic achievement have a deleterious effect on the child and the curriculum. Demanding parents can put a strain on teachers (Davin, 2015) and Moyles (2015) agrees that parents often wish to accelerate their child's learning with the erroneous view that their child is above that which is developmentally possible, thus making parents to become "pushy" and unrealistic towards the teachers and their children which puts unnecessary strain on all three parties. This may cause children to develop a tendency for over-dependence on parents. This infringes on the duties of early childhood teachers who are tasked with helping children gain independence for formal schooling (Stewart, 2019).

Children who are under tremendous pressure from their parents usually become confused and are unable to think for themselves (De Witt, 2016). How happy the child is with their achievements can often depend on how happy their parents are with the results (MacNaughton & Hughes, 2011). Schools and families do not always share the same notions on what is in the child's best interests, and this can cause a rift between the home and the school environment. According to a study conducted by Excell (2011) on exploring teachers' perceptions of early childhood education, it was revealed that this parental pressure had a detrimental effect on teaching practices, and on the child's learning and development. The dilemma is finding the balance between positive

parental engagement and where the parent is "interfering" within the school environment. According to Karabatak and Alanglu (2009), teachers who feel pressured by the parents inadvertently take out their frustration on the child by being less patient and understanding when the child does not complete tasks at the expected level. This affects teacher-child relationships and disrupts the optimal teaching and learning environment.

According to Avnet et al. (2019), the reasons for parents imposing their views regarding the teaching and learning of their child is twofold. The first is that parents may be ignorant to correct developmental teaching and learning strategies, and do not mean to come across as "pushy" - they just want the best for their child. The second is that parents lack respect for teachers and their qualifications (Avnet et al., 2019) as in a study conducted by Jezierski and Wall (2019), it was found that, due to parents being highly qualified in their own field, and having quick access to internet information regarding child development, they may display attitudes of superiority. Websites that boast people's blogs are mainly "unresearched" and may not be reputable and accurate concerning children's development. Also, parents may be ignorant in understanding that although there are developmental milestones developed by theorists for each age group, this does not mean that each child will develop at the same rate (Excell & Linington, 2020). These milestones should be used as a guide, and each individual child must be allowed the freedom to exploit his/her unique capabilities.

2.5.5 How Parents can access Information concerning their Child's Education

According to Magdalena (2014), most parents seek advice regarding their child's academic development from their family members, friends and the internet. Ironically, a study by Ackerman (2015) showed that parents in a high-resourced early childhood centre in South Africa, did not know what Grade R curriculum the school followed. This highlights the fact that parents generally are not *au fait* with the CAPS curriculum and may therefore be ignorant when it comes to optimal teaching and learning practices, which may impinge on the practitioners' methods of teaching if pressurised by such parents. According to Dillon and Nixon (2018), one of the main ways parents found information regarding the curriculum was during parent meetings in the evenings at the school when they were enlightened regarding what they can expect in a particular Grade R year. According to Jaiswal's (2017) findings, these evenings often have low

attendance and are normally attended by the parents who have a positive relationship with the teacher and the school. According to Reed and Walker (2015), parents should attend parent evenings in order to have their questions and concerns addressed at an appropriate time and place.

In accordance, the DBE launched a "parent booklet" on its website in 2018. This was in collaboration with the National Education Collaboration Trust. The booklet is titled: *Practical Guidelines: How parents can contribute meaningfully to the success of their children in schools* (DBE, 2018:1). The focus of this booklet is on parental involvement and on the health of children; but no guidance is offered regarding specific skills that children in Grade R should develop (DBE, 2018).

This study investigates how and where parents receive their information about their child's education. This will lead to the alleviation of the miscommunication between the school and the home environment.

2.6   CONCLUSION

This chapter focused on teaching and learning processes in Grade R classes, and the role-players who are involved in this process. Emanating from the literature review, it is clear that play is the optimal teaching and learning strategy in Grade R. This is supported by Vygotsky's (1978) socio-cultural theory, as well as the theory-based developmental milestones. It was revealed that teachers support Vygotsky's (1978) theory, the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), and play-based teaching and learning strategies aligned to the curriculum. However, there are some misconceptions regarding parents' views of play as a learning tool. To exacerbate the situation, some parents have unrealistic expectations of the teacher's role and children's achievements in Grade R classes, which is consistent with the researcher's experiences. Lastly, in order to bridge the gap between parents' understanding of age-appropriate teaching and learning methods, access to relevant information was outlined. Chapter three will discuss the research methodology.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1   INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter discussed the literature in regard to the study. This chapter presents the research methods that were utilised to answer the research questions of the study. The qualitative research approach was adopted. This included the research type of a case study, and the specific research methods such as an open-ended questionnaire, semi-structured interviews, and data analysis. The interpretivist research paradigm is explained, followed by the reasons for choosing the purposive sampling strategy which incorporated the criteria for inclusion in the study, who the participants are, and how they were sampled. Thematic analysis as a data analysis technique is discussed. Next, the measures for trustworthiness in terms of credibility and transferability within the study, are outlined. The ethical considerations of the study are discussed to ensure voluntary consent was obtained, in addition to the pledge to protect the participants' privacy and confidentiality. Furthermore, the secure storage of all data was guaranteed.

3.2   QUALITATIVE RESEARCH APPROACH

This research project is based on the qualitative approach which studies participants in their natural settings, while attempting to make sense of or to interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people assign to them. It involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter (Du Plooy-Cilliers, Davis & Bezuidenhout, 2017). According to McMillan and Schumacher (2014), qualitative research is a systematic subjective approach used to describe life experiences and then give them meaning. The research data was collected first-hand directly from the chosen participants. This was done by using semi-structured interviews guided by a pre-designed interview schedule, and a structured open-ended questionnaire. Following this, a document analysis of the three Foundation Phase Curriculum and Assessment policies was done to triangulate the findings. These qualitative methods allowed for participants to respond in as much detail as possible, and it did not limit time for probing. This was done to describe the in-

depth experience of a small group of parents. In order to circumvent the effects of the current Covid-19 pandemic, the interviews were conducted telephonically, and the questionnaire was available online using *Microsoft Forms*. These processes allowed the researcher to access participants for data collection as South Africa was in a state of Lockdown Level 3. This placed many restrictions on various activities, including workplace- access and group gatherings; thus, the study focused on a small sample in a single suburb, with a single type of research case study.

3.2.1   Research Type
The research type used in this study is a case study.

3.2.1.1   Case study

The research type used for this project is a single case study which was used to explore a relevant phenomenon in detail. This single case study helps to investigate a single setting or occurrence (Woodside, 2017) which examines a bounded system and a single entity (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014). Furthermore, a case study is a close-up and incisive study of one single community or group. It explores real-life content and provides an understanding of a complex issue or subject. McMillan and Schumacher (2014:344) define a qualitative case study as "an in-depth exploration of a bounded system" - a uniqueness according to participants' characteristics, the specific place, or the exact time. According to Yin (2013), case study research is also a flexible form of inquiry best suited for studying a phenomenon within its natural context.

Within the context of this research, the "case" is the ECD centres in Westville, KZN. A single case study was used to investigate parents' perceptions of Grade R teaching and learning in two ECD Centres in the Westville suburb. This research centred on a detailed analysis of parents' perceptions that led the researcher to make inferences pertaining to parents' beliefs concerning play as a strategic tool to facilitate teaching and learning.

3.2.2   Research Methods

The research methods applied in this study include semi-structured interviews, open-ended questionnaires, and document analysis. The research methods deal specifically with the way data is collected, analysed, and interpreted (Fallon, 2016). According to Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2018:285), "combining methodologies may be appropriate for the research in hand". For this study, the researcher began with semi-structured interviews with the two Grade R teacher-participants. This was done telephonically using an interview schedule (appendix F). The conversations were recorded, transcribed, and analysed. The researcher then emailed the open-ended questionnaire to the ten parent-participants who completed them online (appendix E). This was collected electronically and then analysed. Lastly, a document analysis was undertaken and completed by the researcher. The documents analysed were Foundation Phase Mathematics, Life Skills, and the English Home Language CAPS policy documents.

3.3   PARADIGM

According to White (2015), a paradigm is a set of beliefs or assumptions that guides action and provides a framework used by researchers to organise their observations. This study was based on the paradigm of interpretivism. Kivunja and Kuyini (2017:28) state that in the interpretivist approach each person constructs his/her own reality based on "subjective principles specific to that person". According to Curry (2020), the focus of interpretivism is to gain an in-depth insight into the lives of the participants with the intention of understanding why they act in the way that they do. The qualitative interpretivism paradigm was appropriate for this research as it was aimed at investigating parents' perceptions of Grade R teaching and learning, which is subjective in nature regarding each participant. For this study it was important to understand these perceptions to unpack what parents know about the Grade R year.

3.4   SAMPLING

According to McMillan and Schumacher (2014), sampling is when a group of people is selected from a larger population for measuring a particular phenomenon. In other words, it is when a researcher selects units from a population for observation and

analysis. Some of the subsets or subgroups of the population formed the sample for the researcher to observe such a group to make inferences about characteristics of the population from which it was drawn.

3.5   CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

The suburb of Westville in the Pinetown Education District was specifically chosen as this is the location where the researcher experienced the issue under investigation. This case study is based on two small ECD centres in Westville that cater for two-to-six year old children, with one Grade R Class. These centres were chosen because they have a play-based teaching and learning approach, in addition to having free-play areas, the appropriate setting, opportunities, and equipment for the Grade R class. The researcher was not employed at either of these ECD centres so there was no conflict of interest.

The Grade R class in ECD Centre 1 accommodates 19 children, and in ECD Centre 2 it accommodates 16 children. According to Harsh (2011), a small sample size is necessary and manageable to gain an in-depth understanding of participants' views; therefore, five parents were chosen from each school. There was a total of 12 adult participants in this study. There were five adult participants who are parents of children attending Grade R in ECD Centre 1, and five adult participants who are parents of children attending Grade R in ECD Centre 2. The Grade R teachers from each class were the other two adult participants.

3.5.1   Selection of participants

Participants were selected using a non-probability sampling method. Miles, Huberman and Saldana (2019) state that non-probability sampling is a non-random procedure where the selection of participants depends on the unique situation.

The sampling technique that was used in this study is purposive sampling. According to White (2015), this is a strategic technique where participants are selected based on their relevance to the research questions; in this instance the relevance to Grade R teaching and learning. This technique of sampling is crucial to interrogate parents' perceptions of Grade R teaching and learning.

3.5.2 Selected research participants for the Interviews

The participants chosen for the interviews were the practitioners (teachers) of the Grade R classes in ECD Centre 1 and ECD Centre 2. They were purposively chosen by the researcher to provide insight regarding their school's curriculum content.

Table 3.1 below illustrates the biographical data of the teacher-participants, their teaching qualification, and the number of years they have taught Grade R. Each teacher-participant was allocated a pseudonym for confidentiality purposes.

Table 3.1: Biographical data of the teacher-participants

Participant	Gender	Age	Qualification(s)	Number of years of teaching experience in Grade R
Teacher 1	Female	34	BEd Foundation Phase, UNISA	10
Teacher 2	Female	27	BEd Foundation Phase, UKZN	7

3.5.3 Selected research participants for the Questionnaires

The parent component consisted of parents of Grade R children in the two ECD centres. This was their first child entering the Grade R year, and hence they (parents) had no previous knowledge regarding Grade R teaching and learning processes. The researcher sought the assistance of a member of the School Management Team (SMT) in each centre to purposively select five families from each school. This sample group may qualify for participation only if they have their first-born child registered and attending Grade R for the first time. In addition, these ten participants must have no previous experience with the Grade R teaching and learning environment. One participant (parent), from each of the selected five families at each school, must answer the questionnaire.

Table 3.2 below illustrates the biographical data of the parent-participants and the age of their Grade R child. Each participant was also allocated a pseudonym for reporting purposes and to ensure anonymity. The order is based on the participant who answered the questionnaire first, and then progressed to last. It included parents from ECD Centre 1 and ECD Centre 2.

Table 3.2: Biographical data of parent-participants and the age of their Grade R child

Participant	ECD Centre	Gender	Parents' Age	Age of child
P1	ECD Centre 1	Female	29	5
P2	ECD Centre 1	Female	32	6
P3	ECD Centre 2	Female	36	6
P4	ECD Centre 2	Male	40	6
P5	ECD Centre 1	Female	27	5
P6	ECD Centre 2	Male	37	5
P7	ECD Centre 2	Male	35	5
P8	ECD Centre 2	Female	32	6
P9	ECD Centre 1	Female	28	5
P10	ECD Centre 1	Female	31	6

3.6   RESEARCH METHODS

A qualitative case study uses data collection methods to obtain rich descriptions of phenomenon (Taylor, De Vault & Bogdan, 2016). Various data collection methods were used; namely, semi-structured interviews, questionnaires, and document analysis. All the collected data was narrative and descriptive in nature.

3.6.1   The Questionnaire

Data from the ten Grade R parents was collected using open-ended questionnaires which required responses from the participants who later completed and submitted the forms to the researcher. This data collection method was question-based and allowed for ambiguous language structures to be used by the participants which could be understood in multiple ways (Atieno, 2009). The open-ended questionnaire was used to reveal how the participants perceived and responded to the questions under study (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014). The questions could be answered in detail, and it allowed for original and unique responses. There were no limitations to the participants' responses and this encouraged well-thought and genuine answers. Open-ended questions allowed the researcher to probe into the participants' true feelings and created the opportunity to discover something new (White, 2015). The participants were also given space and freedom to express themselves in a spontaneous manner as there were no leading questions that could influence their responses. This allowed the researcher to collect more details that were expressed in the participants' own words.

The questionnaire was distributed online using *Microsoft Forms* which is an application that allows the creation of shareable questionnaires via a link. This allowed for the questionnaire to be shared speedily and participants could access the link from anywhere via the internet. A new form was created, and each question was loaded as per appendix E. The question option was on the "text' setting to allow participants to type in their responses. The link was emailed to the selected participants to complete the questionnaire online. The application collated the information which was then downloaded as a *Microsoft Excel* document. This online method also circumvented any possibility of Covid-19 transmission thus allowing the researcher access to participants during the Lockdown period. The participants completed the questionnaire promptly: the first participant completed it on the day it was sent out by the researcher, and the last participant completed it 10 days later.

3.6.2   Semi-structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted individually with the two Grade R teachers. According to Miles et al. (2019), semi-structured interviews are categorised under the qualitative research method where the researcher is the interviewer who poses open-ended questions to the participant in order to obtain original and in-depth rich responses (White, 2015). The interviews were guided by a set of questions in the form of an interview schedule (appendix F). The semi-structured interviews were conducted telephonically and permission from the participants was sought for the interview to be recorded and transcribed at a later stage. A telephonic interview was necessary due to the current Covid-19 pandemic. Conducting telephonic interviews instead of face-to-face interviews complied with the regulations of the Lockdown.

Interviews were scheduled for the duration of 30 minutes per session and this suited the participants. The responses were recorded on the researcher's cell phone using the *Automatic Call Recorder* application which allowed the researcher to record the telephonic conversations automatically. This was then saved in the researcher's cell phone and then automatically emailed to the researcher. The recordings were later transcribed into typed text using the *Microsoft Word Voice* dictating tool. This tool activated the recordings and turned the audio- talking into text form. According to Andrew and Verbaan (2018), using a voice-to-text dictation tool is time-efficient and quicker than manual-typing. The positive experiences gained from the interviews

provided extensive knowledge to the researcher and the teacher-participants were excited to be a part of the study. The interview with ECD Centre Teacher 1 was of a 29 minute duration, and the interview with ECD Centre Teacher 2 was of a 22 minute duration. This is congruent to the designated time schedule of 30 minutes per interview.

3.6.3   Document Analysis

Document analysis was used to dissect the policy requirements for Grade R teaching and learning. According to McMillan and Schumacher (2014), document analysis is a method used in qualitative research where documents are reviewed by the researcher in order to obtain additional data. This is a non-interactive process of obtaining data. Document analysis provided the researcher with an in-depth understanding of DBE documents that guide Grade R teaching and learning. The researcher used the three CAPS documents ; namely, English Home Language (LoLT), Mathematics, and Life Skills, which contain the prescribed teaching and learning guidelines for the Grade R year. The researcher analysed each individual document and later summarised the details of the topics in each subject. They were then subjected to a process of comparison by tabulating similarities with regards to the Grade R learning environment, teaching and learning strategies, and the teacher's role in the Grade R class. These documents were analysed in order for the researcher to determine whether the participants' perspectives were in line (or not) with policy. The documents were freely available online and were downloaded by the researcher from the DBE website. This method was used in conjunction with the interview and questionnaire processes as a means of promoting triangulation (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014).

3.7   DATA ANALYSIS TECHNIQUE

Data analysis is the process of reducing a large mass of collected data to make sense of each component (White, 2015).

3.7.1   Steps followed in Data Analysis process

The collected data was recorded such that it facilitated the understanding of participants' perceptions. The data recording process involved the data being organised into predetermined categories which separated it into workable units (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014). The categories were developed according to the questions in the questionnaire (appendix E). The categories were as follows: purpose of Grade R, sources of information regarding Grade R, role of the Grade R teacher, Mathematics, Literacy, Life Skills, play-based teaching and learning, and recommendations for the Grade R year. These were organised and inserted into a table using the *Microsoft Word* application. These discrete segments were then analysed via the recognition of contextual keywords, after which they were coded. This then paved the way for the thematic analysis process to commence.

3.7.2   The generation of Themes

The thematic analysis process was inductive such that the researcher used the data categories to determine the themes. According to Nowell et al. (2017), a thematic analysis process is a rigorous and thorough method of analysing qualitative data.

Via the thematic analysis process, each segment was allocated a code using the colour-coding system. The researcher used the highlighting and text-colour changing tools in *MS Word*. A list of codes was drawn up to describe the data (Godwill, 2015). This method allowed relationships among the categories to emerge - these are known as patterns (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014). The researcher was able to identify these patterns by viewing the colour codes. The commonalities among the responses allowed for themes to emerge. From these patterns, the researcher generated themes. Irrelevant information was discarded via deletions from the table to focus on the relevant data. The researcher then ensured that the themes were relevant and accurate by re-looking at the original research questions. The four main themes identified were: the purpose of teaching and learning in Grade R, play-based teaching and learning, parents'

expectations of the Grade R curriculum, and the impact of parents' expectations on teaching and learning in Grade R.

3.8 MEASURES FOR TRUSTWORTHINESS

According to Watson (2018), a qualitative research study is considered trustworthy if it was credible and reliable. In order to enhance the credibility and reliability of the study, credibility and transferability were taken into consideration. These are discussed below.

3.8.1 Credibility

The credibility of a study refers to the truthfulness or authenticity of the results (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014). In other words, it is the truth, value, and the extent to which the research is believable and appropriate (Yin, 2016). This research is credible as there are well-defined research aims and questions. There is consistent and appropriate methodology which will elicit accurate findings. Also, there is a comprehensive literature review and appropriate data collection processes. Furthermore, the credibility of the research was assured by using triangulation. According to Gunawan (2015), multi-method strategies permit triangulation of data because different strategies offer different insights and information. Triangulation, which increases the credibility of the findings, refers to the practice of using multiple sources of data to cross-check information (Honorene, 2017). The researcher used multiple data collection techniques in this study; namely, semi-structured interviews, open-ended questionnaires, and document analysis.

3.8.2 Transferability

Transferability is the degree to which the results can be generalised or transferred to other contexts or settings (Flick, 2018). According to Meriam and Tisdell (2015), it is also related to the relevance of the concepts and findings to other settings. This research used purposive sampling which provided contextual information about the participants. Also, the sampling method was reliable as it can be reproduced in other high-resourced ECD centres in South Africa that has a Grade R class.

3.9   ETHICAL MEASURES

Love (2012) contends that ethical considerations are essential in qualitative research as this ensures integrity in the conduct of education research. The researcher obtained ethical clearance from the University of South Africa (appendix A). Permission was also granted by the principals of ECD Centres 1 and 2 on behalf of the School Management Board (appendix B). To ensure anonymity, schools were named in terms of pseudonyms such as ECD Centre 1 and ECD Centre 2. The participants gave their informed consent by agreeing to participate in the study through an online signature. The fine details of the study were explained to the participants, and they had the opportunity to ask the researcher any question for clarity purposes. The participants were informed that participation was voluntary and that they were free to withdraw from the research process at any time without being penalised in any way. The participants were made aware that the findings of this study will be processed into a research report, journal publications, and/or conference proceedings; but that their participation and contributions will be kept confidential. Pseudonyms were allocated in the order that the participants completed the questionnaire – that is, Participant 1 to Participant 10. The participants who participated in the interviews were named as Teacher 1 and Teacher 2.

To prevent the anticipated discomfort of inconvenience, the participants were accommodated by allowing them to complete the questionnaire in the comfort of their homes or workspaces, without the restriction of time. Furthermore, since it was an online questionnaire, there was no need for participants to return a hard copy of their responses. This worked well as evidenced by the quick response-time from the participants. The participants who were interviewed were called telephonically at a time that suited them.

Data was only stored as soft copies and no hard copies were printed. The raw data collected via *Microsoft Forms* was firstly stored electronically in a password-protected file in the researcher's computer. The second place of storing all information from the study was via *Microsoft Excel* on a password-protected private laptop. The telephonic interview recordings were stored in the researcher's password-protected mobile device, which could only be accessed by the researcher. All the passwords are only known to the researcher who memorised them. These passwords will not be written down

anywhere. The data will be stored for five years after which it will be destroyed by deleting the files and running a hardware cleaning programme.

3.10   CONCLUSION

This chapter presented details of how the research was conducted with twelve participants in two ECD centres in the suburb of Westville within the Pinetown District. The chapter also provided a description of the qualitative research methods, the interpretivist paradigm, the sampling procedure, the research instruments, the data analysis process, issues of trustworthiness, and ethical considerations. The following chapter (4) will discuss data analysis and the findings of the research.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA ANALYSIS AND PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

4.1   INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter explained the methodology of the study. This chapter presents the results of the study in accordance with the research questions stated in chapter one. The data was collected during individual teacher interviews, the parents' responses to the open-ended questionnaires, and the document analysis of the Foundation Phase CAPS documents. This chapter firstly explains the steps involved in the research process. Next, the data is analysed and presented according to the themes that emerged. Four themes were identified: the purpose of Grade R, play-based teaching and learning, the Grade R curriculum, and the role of the teacher in Grade R. Table 4.1 below indicates the research questions, aim and objectives of the study.

Table 4.1: Research questions, aim and objectives of the study

Research Question
What are parents' perceptions of teaching and learning in Grade R?
Sub-questions
•   How do parents feel about play-based teaching and learning in Grade R?
•   What do parents expect their child to know by the end of Grade R?
•   What is the policy expectation regarding teaching and learning in Grade R?
•   How do the parents' expectations affect teaching and learning in Grade R?
Research Aim
The main aim of this research is to determine the perceptions of parents regarding the teaching and learning of their children in Grade R.
Research Objectives
•   To determine Grade R parents' perceptions of play-based teaching and learning in Grade R;
•   To establish what parents expect their child to know by the end of the Grade R year;
•   To determine what the policy expectations are regarding the teaching and learning in Grade R classes; and
•   To determine whether the parents' expectations affect teaching and learning in Grade R.

4.2   PROCESS OF DATA COLLECTION

The researcher circumvented the circumstances surrounding the Covid-19 pandemic which caused delays in the progress of the research process. According to Sadeque (2020), the advent of the Covid-19 pandemic resulted in researchers needing to change traditional data collection methods; for example, face-to-face meetings were limited. The researcher therefore used email and telephonic communication to obtain permission from the schools, the online application of *MS Forms* for the questionnaire, and telephonic interviews. Due to the National Lockdown, schools were closed and therefore permission to conduct research was delayed. After overcoming these challenges, the data collection process was smooth, and participants responded timeously to the online questionnaire within ten days. These were practical and realistic alternatives which worked well. Furthermore, the individual interviews were conducted telephonically as per the original time-frame schedule with very willing teachers.

4.3   DATA ANALYSIS

Humble and Radina (2019) state that data analysis is a method of ordering, categorising, and summarising information in order to obtain answers to specific research questions. Data was collected through individual interviews with the respective Grade R teachers in ECD Centre 1 and ECD Centre 2. Additionally, the responses to the open-ended questionnaires by five parents from each Grade R class, strengthened the quality of the information making the data rich and in-depth. The Foundation Phase CAPS documents pertaining to Home Language, Mathematics, and Life Skills, were analysed in terms of the policy for appropriate practice, and curriculum requirements appropriate for teaching and learning in Grade R classes.

The researcher began the data analysis by transcribing and coding information from the interviews, questionnaires, and relevant documents. The data was carefully perused and critically dissected. Data was grouped into categories, and emerging themes were identified. These themes are outlined in Table 4.2 below.

Table 4.2: Themes emerging from the data

Number	Theme	Sub-themes
1	The purpose of teaching and learning in Grade R	School readiness
		The role of the teacher in Grade R - The teacher as the supporter of the child - The teacher as a mediator of learning - The teacher as the nurturer of the child
2	Play-based teaching and learning	Category 1: Participants in full support of play-based teaching and learning
		Category 2: Participants partially in support of play-based teaching and learning
		Category 3: Participants who disagree with play-based teaching and learning
3	Parents' expectations of the Grade R curriculum	Expectations regarding Mathematics
		Expectations regarding Literacy
		Expectations regarding Life Skills
		Where do parents access information regarding the Grade R curriculum
		Parents' recommendations for the Grade R curriculum
4	The impact of parents' expectations on teaching and learning in Grade R	Impact on teachers
		Impact on children
		Impact on the curriculum

The findings will now be discussed under the respective themes.

4.3.1   Theme 1: The Purpose of teaching and learning in Grade R

The theme concerning the purpose of the Grade R year emerged when analysing the data from the questionnaires and the CAPS policy documents.

4.3.1.1   School readiness

The first question of the open-ended questionnaire (appendix E) asked the participants to describe their understanding about the purpose of Grade R. The answers were similar indicating that the participants had a clear understanding that Grade R is the year before Grade 1. Furthermore, P1, P2, P5, P7, P8 and P10 all specified that the purpose of Grade R is to *prepare [their] child for Grade 1.* The description of getting children ready for "big school" was common in the responses of P5, P8 and P10. Teacher 1 also shared this sentiment that *Grade R is an essential year in getting children ready for big school.*

This aligned with the CAPS Foundation Phase Home Language document that specifies that the aim of Grade R is to prepare the child for Grade 1 (DBE, 2011a). Similarly, Davin (2015) agrees that Grade R is an opportunity to guide each child to be ready for the future formal years of schooling. Teacher 2 corroborated this by adding that *Grade R is the year that bridges the gap between preschool and formal education.* This corresponds to the researcher's understanding that the purpose of Grade R is to promote the development of emergent skills that are necessary to build a solid foundation for Grade 1 teaching and learning.

When responding to the question: *why did you choose to send your child to Grade R*, the majority of the participants responded that it was not a conscious decision, but more that it was seen as the next step (year) in the preschool stage that their children were already attending. The children had been in the previous Grade 00 class in the ECD centre, and Grade R was the natural progression. In addition, P10 mentioned that their *child is turning 6 this year and this is the age kids go to Grade R.* This is the correct perception as the South African Government legislates that children may begin school when they are five, but it is compulsory to enter Grade 1 in the year that they turn seven (DBE, 2011a). This positions the Grade R child between the ages of four and six (De Witt, 2016).

Responses from P1 and P3 implied wanting their children to *socialise with other children.* This aligns with the policy in the Foundation Phase Life Skills document which mentions that children begin to become aware of their social well-being at this stage (DBE, 2011b).

Further, P3 stated that their *son had not been to preschool before and needed to settle into the routine before attending formal school.* According to the Department of Basic Education (2011b), Grade R follows a routine daily programme which allows children to become used to the school day. During the interview, Teacher 2 stated that she *follows a daily programme in order to prepare children for the demands of formal education.*

The parents' perceptions regarding the purpose of Grade R align with that of the CAPS policy. This shows that parents have a clear understanding about the importance of their child attending Grade R.

4.3.1.2   The role of the teacher in Grade R

The researcher found that much of the data collected regarding the teacher's role in Grade R is congruent to the CAPS policy expectations from teachers. In the early years, the teacher has multiple roles, thus it can be one of the most challenging professions (De Witt, 2016).

a.   The teacher as the supporter of the child

A commonality that was identified among the three CAPS documents (Foundation Phase Mathematics, Home Language, and Life Skills), was that it is the teacher's responsibility to "address any barriers to learning in the classroom" (DBE, 2011a). This role was pointed out by P9 when she stated that *the teacher's main job is to help each child develop to [his/her] full potential.* This was supported by Vygotsky's (1978) theory of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). A child should be taught developmentally appropriate content under the guidance of an adult. Vygotsky (1978) emphasised the importance of adults' presence in the child's environment. According to Excell and Linington (2015), effective and age-appropriate instruction from adults is essential for learning. Teacher 1 corroborated this by commenting that she is a *guide on the side* in the school environment. This was also the researcher's experience in that she guided Grade R children's learning.

b.   The teacher as a mediator of learning

According to the Department of Basic Education (2011a:18), the Grade R teacher should be "pro-active" and act as "a mediator rather than a facilitator" with regards to Language and Mathematics education. Further, the curriculum must be based around "teachable moments" which the teacher is required to identify and allow for "incidental learning" (DBE, 2011a:20). This role was not mentioned by any parent-participant; however, it does align to the theory of scaffolding, where teachers must guide children in the ZPD to gain new knowledge in these identified "teachable moments" (DBE, 2011a:20). During a semi-structured interview, Teacher 2 explained how passionate she was regarding *Vygotsky and scaffolding* and that she had done further research on this teaching strategy. She (Teacher 2) added how she used the *zone of proximal development in order to ensure that the needs of the individual child are met.* Moreover, Teacher 2 spoke animatedly about how she has used *many scaffolding techniques in order to extend children's knowledge* in the Grade R classroom. An example of this was

revealed when she used modelling as a teaching technique and *guided the children through each step of the process while encouraging them to think aloud and ask questions.* According to Pepler (2015), the process of modelling includes the teacher demonstrating a new activity while the children follow instructions and imitate the teacher.

c.   The teacher as a nurturer of the child

The CAPS Life Skills document states that "one of the most important roles of the Grade R teacher is to provide children with an environment that is safe, clean and caring, with adequate opportunities to play and explore the world" (DBE, 2011b:10). This aligns with P5's and P6's view that the role of the Grade R teacher is to nurture young children, and to P8's comment that the teacher must *love and support [her] child.* This role was elaborated on by Teacher 1 who stated that she *guided children's learning through encouraging them to ask questions and explore within the safety of the nurturing environment [she] created daily.* This specific function of the teacher was congruent to Vygotsky's (1978) theory of learning through play, where the teacher's responsibility is to ensure that there is an optimal teaching and learning environment to explore play opportunities (Bruce, 2018). This was also the researcher's experience who played an important role as a Grade R teacher ensuring that the emotional needs of the child were also attended to.

In contrast to the above responses, P6 stated that the expectations were that teachers should always *listen to what the parents want for their child;* and then insensitively suggesting that teachers must *accommodate special requests of extra work* concerning their child. This statement infers that this parent developed a sense of entitlement to tell the teacher what work they would like for their child to be doing. This was similar to the researcher's experiences who was also confronted by demanding parents.

Overall, the responses were positive in that most of the parents had realistic perceptions of the teacher's role in Grade R. Interestingly, P7 commended the current teacher of her Grade R child by saying that she exhibited *love and support [to their] child - which she did so wonderfully everyday.* This was similar to the role of the teacher as a "caregiver" to the child in the early years (DBE, 2011b). Furthermore, Davin (2015) highlighted the importance of the Grade R teacher being a nurturing figure within the school environment.

4.3.2   Theme 2: Play-based Teaching and Learning

The responses gleaned from the questionnaires regarding play-based teaching and learning were organised into three categories: participants who support this strategy, participants who believe in some form of play during the school day, and participants who disagree with this method of teaching and learning. This is shown in Figure 4.1 below.
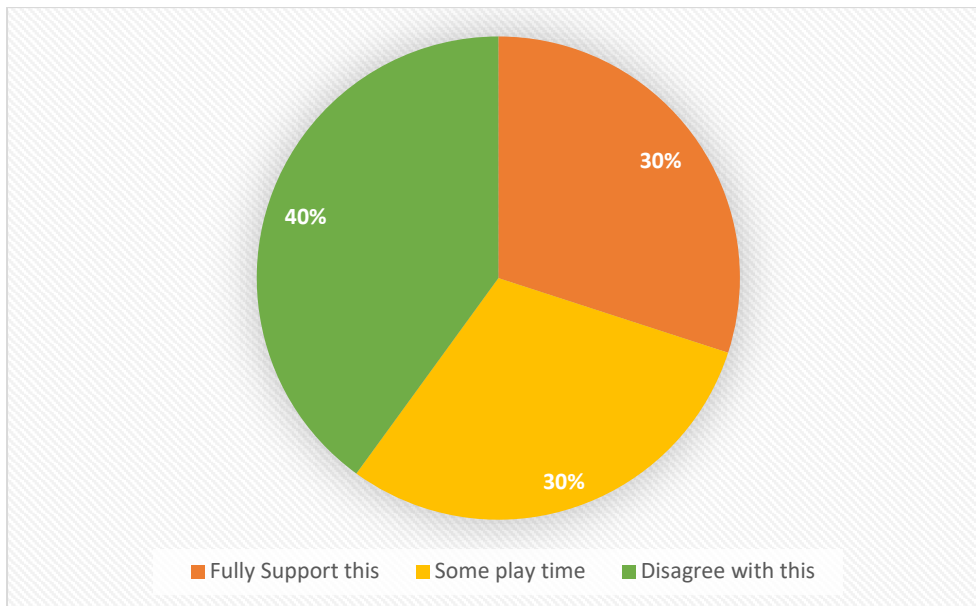
Figure 4.1: Parents' views on play-based teaching and learning in Grade R

It is evident that more parents (40%) disagreed with play-based teaching and learning than those (30%) who supported it, while another thirty percent (30%) suggested that some form of play-based activity is advisable.

4.3.2.1   Category 1: Participants who fully support play-based teaching and learning

Thirty percent (30%) of participants fully supported play-based teaching and learning in Grade R. This is evident in P1's statement that she *fully supports this teaching method.* Similarly, P8 held the view that *play time is very important for children.* Likewise, P10 *fully supports the school in whatever method they choose to teach with* as they *are the experts.* This aligned with the teachers' views on the advantages of play-based teaching and learning. According to both teachers, play-based learning is the main teaching and learning strategy in Grade R. Teacher 1 stated that *play is the work of the child.* Similarly,

Teacher 2 responded that *children are only young once, and play is a child's way of navigating through this overwhelming and complex world.* This is further supported by the CAPS policies as the three documents which were analysed were in line with curriculum stipulations pertaining to the use of play in the Grade R year. According to the English Home Language and Mathematics CAPS policy documents, the approach should be "based on the principles of play-based learning" (DBE, 2011a:10). Also, the Life Skills document states that Grade R children are "inherently creative and play is their natural way of learning" (DBE, 2011b: 9). The learning environment should allow "comfortable spaces" which should encourage children to "play and move around freely" (DBE, 2011b: 10). This is supported by Vygotsky's (1978) socio-cultural theory that regards play as one of the most important sources of development and learning for young children. Furthermore, Bruce (2018) advocated that through child-centred play, children are able to explore and attain new knowledge incidentally. This is supported by the researcher's own experiences with teaching and learning through play as she observed that children in her Grade R classroom grasped new concepts far quicker by using a play-based approach, compared to that of direct instruction. Moreover, in South Africa, learning through play is accepted as the main teaching and learning practice with children aged between three to six (Jensen et al., 2019).

4.3.2.2   Category 2: Participants who partially support play-based teaching and learning

Thirty percent (30%) of the number of participants supported some form of play time within the Grade R curriculum. Accordingly, P2 admitted to *not [knowing] much about playing during the school day,* whereas P3 held the view that it should be a balanced approach such that *half the day should be for play* and then the *other half more formal.* Similarly, P4 agreed that *some lessons like PE* should be *based around play.* According to the Department of Basic Education (2011), Life Skills can be taught using a play-based approach. During outdoor play, children are free to explore the fixed equipment such as the monkey bars, jungle gyms and swings. Such equipment develops the core, shoulder, and neck muscles - all of which are vital for children to develop and maintain the correct posture while sitting at a desk (Joubert, 2015). These skills that are required for children in Grade R overlap into other areas like Life Skills and English Home Language (DBE, 2011b).

4.3.2.3 Category 3: Participants who disagree with play-based teaching and learning

The largest number of participants which constituted forty percent (40%) of the sample, disagreed with employing a play-based approach in Grade R classes. The participants who disagreed with play-based teaching and learning voiced strong views against this strategy. This is seen in P5's response who felt that *play-based teaching is an 'easy-way out' for teachers* and that there should be more *work done at tables [desks] like when [she] was young.* This view was also held by P9 who stated that *the school day is very short, and play should be limited*. Further, P5 and P6 agreed that Grade R should be *more organised* in a formal setting where children have *workbooks.* These perceptions were also evident pertaining to the researcher's experiences of parents expecting a more formal teaching and learning approach. Teacher 1 commented that it is unfortunate that *so many parents do not see the value of learning through play.* Teacher 2 also experienced this as she *had many parents complaining that their children only play at school and no real work is being done, which is a sad state of affairs.* This misinterpretation, negativity, and being blinkered by not seeing play as being a powerful tool of pedagogy in Grade R classes, is regrettable which was also identified in current literature. Some parents do not understand the importance and value of play for young children to learn, often regarding it as "unproductive and [therefore] its importance and value for the young learner is overlooked" (Davin, 2015:6). According to Bongiorno (2018), parents look towards a more academic approach, where children formally sit at a table with only direct-instruction and worksheet-based teaching and learning going on. The DBE (2011a:3), cautions clearly in the CAPS policies that Grade R must not be a "watered-down Grade 1". This shows that the parent-participants have misconceptions of play and do not see it as a powerful instrument to develop Grade R children as revealed in current literature including the CAPS policy guidelines.

4.3.3 Theme 3: Parents' Expectations of the Grade R Curriculum

The participants' responses displayed that they had an overall understanding of the subjects that are taught in Grade R. According to P3, the subjects are *Life Skills, Maths and Language*. Teacher 2 stated that *the subjects taught in Grade R are English Home Language, Mathematics, and Life Skills.* The CAPS documents state that the main three subjects taught in Grade R are the LoLT followed by the school, which is English Home Language; Mathematics; and Life Skills (DBE, 2011a; 2011b; 2011c; 2011d). This evidences that this parent has a good understanding of the Grade R subjects.

The most prominent response suggested that one of the Grade R subjects is language-based. As such, P1, P4, P6 and P9 referred to *literacy*, whilst P8 and P10 referred to this aspect as *reading and writing*. Additionally, P5 wanted her child to develop *the ability to communicate*, which falls under Listening and Speaking in the Home Language curriculum (DBE, 2011a). The subject *English* was mentioned by P3, whilst P7 referred to *Language.* These align with the Foundation Phase English Home Language CAPS document where language concepts and skills are outlined (DBE, 2011a). According to Teacher 2, *English Home language includes listening, speaking, incidental reading and writing; as well as thinking and reasoning skills*.

The next common Grade R subject was Mathematics. This was referred to as *Maths* by five participants, with only one participant using the term *Mathematics*, while P1 and P6 referred to it as *numeracy,* and P8 specified that the subject is about *numbers*. This aligns with the Foundation Phase Mathematics CAPS document where numeracy and number concepts are explained (DBE, 2011d). Only P5 made no mention of Mathematics and focused solely on language skills. According to Teacher 1, Mathematics *is divided into sub-categories of numbers, operations and relationships, data-handling, measurement, space and shape, as well as patterns.*

According to the questionnaire responses, some of the parents had the impression that only certain Life Skills are being taught in Grade R. This is evident from the responses of P4, P9 and P10 who erroneously viewed *PE* as a subject, not realising that this stands for Physical Education which falls under the subject of Life Skills in the Foundation Phase curriculum (DBE, 2011b). Another confusion was demonstrated by P4, P8, P9 and P10 who erroneously identified *Art* as a subject, while P8 used the concept *drama and music*. These topics fall under the sub-heading of Creative Arts in the Foundation

Phase Life Skills document (DBE, 2011b). Moreover, P1, P2, P5 and P6 made no mention of any Life Skills topics as they focused specifically on Language and Mathematics. According to Teacher 1, *Life Skills is [her] favourite [subject] to teach* and *involves visual arts, PE, and music and drama.*

Each subject area will now be elaborated on:

4.3.3.1 Expectations regarding Mathematics

According to Teacher 1, the focus in Grade R is *all about pre-maths skills and getting children ready for future maths* and *this is mainly done during free-play times*. The researcher was able to identify four common concepts extracted from the participants' responses to the question regarding the Mathematics skills that parents expected their child to learn in Grade R.

The first concept was *counting*. Every participant specified that they expected their child to learn counting skills. Especially, P2, P3, P4, P5 and P8 expected their children to *count up to 100*. This was an accelerated view as the Department of Basic Education (2011) states that children in Grade R should learn to count to ten, with the focus being on understanding number concepts, rather than simply rote counting. Teacher 2 confirmed that she *specifically teaches rote counting of one-ten* and stated that *it is more important to focus on the concept of numbers*. However, P1 and P6 did not state a specific number they expected their children to count to, but instead focused on *counting skills*. Additionally, P1 commented that she expected her child to learn to *count forwards and backwards*. According to the Department of Basic Education (2011c), Grade R children are expected to count forwards and backwards; this shows that some parents' perceptions were curriculum-aligned. Moreover, P9 and P10 shared this view of *counting to and from* the number *50*. This was an accelerated view as the number range is 1-10 for Grade R children (DBE, 2011c). According to Bryce-Clegg (2015), children need to have an understanding of the number sense 1-10 in order to form the foundation for future numeracy activities. Moreover, Cook (2016) adds that the developmental milestone for a 6-year-old child is number 1-10.

The next identified subject was *sums*. Teacher 2 stated that *CAPS introduces children to basic summation skills.* It was noted that eight of the ten participants commented on learning sums in Grade R. P7 and P10 stated the single word "sums". With regards to

simple sums, Grade R learners should be able to solve addition and subtraction problems with solutions up to ten using concrete materials, such as their fingers or counters (DBE, 2011c). The other six participants were more specific as P1, P2 and P9 used the terms *plus and minus.* These number operational terms were echoed by P4 and P5 who also used the mathematics terms of *addition and subtraction*. This was an appropriate perception from parents as learners in Grade R perform mathematical tasks using terms such as "add and take away" (Naude & Meier, 2018:45). Aligned to these mathematical concepts, P6 indicated that her child should be taught the *ability to share/add/take away numbers.* This corroborated with the CAPS Mathematics document where children are "introduced to problems involving addition and subtraction with answers up to 10" (DBE, 2011c: 46). Further, P2 and P9 indicated the expectation of *multiplication and division* operations, whilst P10 commented that her child should learn *halves and timetables*. These were unrealistic expectations. According to the CAPS Mathematics curriculum, Grade R Mathematics "forges the link between the pre-school child's life and life outside school and the abstract maths needed for later on" (DBE, 2011d:11). The expectations of multiplication and division calculations are too advanced for a Grade R child, and these concepts are only introduced in Grade 2 (DBE, 2011d). Children in Grade R are not required to learn any multiplication or division sums. According to Excell and Linington (2015), it is developmentally appropriate for 6-year-old children to learn multiplication and division concepts but through play-based scenarios. The teacher will introduce the children to the concept of equal parts and grouping as a foundation (DBE, 2011c). Teacher 1 commented that *educational games can also teach the initial foundations for sharing and dividing [operations].*

Another identified concept was *shapes*. This falls under the area of *Space and Shape* in the CAPS Foundation Phase Mathematics curriculum (DBE, 2011d). Teacher 1 mentioned *Space and Shape* as a *sub-category in Maths,* while P8 maintained that *shapes are important to know* and suggested that their child should learn three-dimensional (3-D) shapes such as a *ball and cube*. This was echoed by P4 and P10 who expected their children to learn about *3-D shapes*. The participants had an age-appropriate perception of shapes where children in Grade R learn about two-dimensional (2-D) and three-dimensional (3-D) shapes. This aligned with policy where children should be able to recognise and name 3-D objects within the class environment (DBE, 2011c). According to P1, their child should learn to complete *tangram puzzles,*

while P7 responded to the question with simply the word *shapes*. With regards to policy, Creative Arts can have a mathematical emphasis focusing on space and shape (Wilmot & Schafer, 2015). Teacher 2 stated that she uses play time to allow children to *experiment with different shapes and they incidentally learn the properties of the shapes.* This aligned to the researcher's experiences of promoting an integrated daily programme.

The last common concept was *number recognition*. This was evident in the responses from P9 and P10 who indicated that children should be learning about *numbers*. Also, P8 commented that this should be about *number names*. This was echoed by P3, P6 and P7 who agreed that children should learn to *write numbers and names.* According to the Department of Basic Education (2011c), Grade R children should be able to recognise, read and identify the numerals 1-10. Two participants suggested the numbers 20 - 50, which is too high of an expectation for the young child. This notion was shared by P9 and P10 who suggested *counting to and from* the number *50*. This was somewhat closer to the curriculum expectations of 1-10 (DBE, 2011c); however, it was still not deemed to be age-appropriate. Cook (2016) agrees with the policy requirements and states that children need to have a good understanding of the base numbers 1-10 before they are able to complete more complex Mathematical tasks. Teacher 2 commented that *children begin to write the numbers* and that *using playdough is a great way to help them learn the correct number formation.*

4.3.3.2 Expectations regarding Literacy

Question 11 of the open-ended questionnaire (appendix E) asked parents to describe what Literacy Skills their child should acquire in Grade R. Four main concepts emerged from the data: reading, writing, phonics, and grammar. Nine (9) participants had strong views regarding reading skills. According to P1, P3, P4 and P6, Grade R children should read *short or simple books.* This was the highest reading level identified. The next reading level was suggested by P2 and P9 who expected their children to *read sentences*. These participants had a far higher expectation of reading levels than that of policy. In Grade R, the focus should be fostering a love for language and books (DBE, 2011a), and not learning to read sentences or short story books as expected by the participants. Teacher 1 commented that parents asked for *more difficult [levels] library*

books to be sent home which she felt revealed that *parents do not understand the literacy levels appropriate for Grade R.*

Three participants, P3, P8 and P10, had a more realistic view that their child should begin *reading words*, while P7 gave a vague response by commenting that their child should be *learning to read.* According to the CAPS policy, reading is divided into three focus areas: Emergent Reading Skills, Independent Reading, and Shared Reading as a class with the teacher. The Emergent Reading Skills teaches children to hold the book correctly, make the connection that oral words can be represented by written words, and develop the ability to "read" the story using the pictures (DBE, 2011a). Incidental learning of high-frequency words often occurs, and some children begin recognising these and other words which they often see (DBE, 2011a). Shared reading as a class with a teacher is done during the teacher-guided story-time. This is done daily but normally at the end of the day. Teacher 1 commented that that *daily story-time is also very important* to *promote a love for language.* This allows children to make connections to their own experiences while reading with the teacher (DBE, 2011a). Children will predict what happens in the story through pictures and be able to draw their own pictures which capture the main idea of the story (DBE, 2011a). Independent reading can be done during free-play periods. Children can read picture-books by themselves, and this encourages a love for reading (DBE, 2011a). According to Pepler (2015), it is essential to promote this love of reading during the early years as this will act as an internal motivator for children when the reading expectations increase and become more challenging in later years. Teacher 2 commented that *free-play time allows children to explore books and develop emergent [and incidental] language skills.*

The next identified concept was *writing*. The word *write* or *writing* was mentioned by eight of the participants. Two participants, P7 and P8, stated that their child should be able to *write their names*. This aligned with the Grade R Home Language requirements where children begin writing their names (DBE, 2011a). The researcher also experienced this where children were able to write their names by the end of the Grade R year. These participants (P7 and P8) appeared to have the same expectations as they both further mentioned the writing of *words*. The writing of words was also recommended by P3, P8, P9 and P10, whilst it was P3 who suggested that their child should write *rhyming words*, and P10 commented that their child should be *writing words by listening to their sounds*. Writing a *short paragraph* was suggested by P6. This was

also evident in P9's response that children should be *writing poems*. With regards to writing, the focus in Grade R should be on emergent writing, such that children should be able to manipulate writing materials and copy letters (DBE, 2011a). The participants' expectations of writing words, sentences and paragraphs were far too advanced for the 6-year-old child. According to Davin and Van Staden (2005), there should also be more focus on *Handwriting* skills than actual writing in Grade R. These include the building blocks of prewriting skills such as fine motor control, gross motor control and posture (DBE, 2011b). In this regard, Teacher 2 commented that *children develop pre-writing skills during free-play by playing in the garden to promote large muscle development.*

Another identified concept was *phonics* which was highlighted by five of the participants. The broad term of *phonics* was used by P5, whereas P3 specified that their child should know *the sounds that letters make*. This was reiterated by P8 who stated that their child should *know what sound the alphabet makes*, while P9 agreed with the idea of children knowing *the alphabet*. As mentioned previously, P10 was more specific and indicated that their child should be *reading and writing words by listening to their sounds*. The CAPS Home Language document states that phonic skills in Grade R must focus on children beginning to recognise that words are made up of sounds (DBE, 2011a). The participants had the appropriate perception regarding phonic skills in Grade R as they held the view that children should learn the alphabet which is in line with policy. According to Joubert (2015), phonetic knowledge is an important component that needs to be introduced to children in the early years. The researcher used the *Letterland* programme in her Grade R classroom to promote phonetic knowledge. This was a highly effective programme as children easily grasped the phonetic knowledge. Teacher 1 stated that she used *lots of singing and poems and rhymes.*

The last common concept was that of *grammar*. Here, P8 commented that their child should learn *basic grammar*, while P5, P9 and P10 had more in-depth notions regarding the aspects of grammar that should be learned: *verbs* and *adjectives*; *full stops* and *question marks;* and *capitals* and *lowercase* letters. This exceeds the developmental milestones for a 6-year-old as the introduction to basic grammar is only done in Grade 1 in a shared reading and writing context (DBE, 2011a). According to Naude and Meier (2019), children in Grade R should be introduced to various themes linked to their life-world, such as *My Family*, as this will promote vocabulary learning, and assist them in future years when they learn about the different parts of speech. As this (teaching of

grammar components) is not age-appropriate, it was not mentioned by either of the teacher-participants. The researcher did not have any experience of parents requesting grammar aspects to be taught.

A noteworthy comment was provided by P9 who indicated that she expected her child to *develop a love for language* and to *sing songs.* Teacher 1 commented that *CAPS says that the focus should be on developing a love for language.* This aligns with policy requirements where language is promoted through daily songs and rhymes, as well as teacher-guided stories (DBE, 2011a). The document analysis results proved that CAPS promotes a balanced, flexible, and language-rich daily programme so that literacy opportunities are offered throughout the day. Accordingly, Teacher 2 stated that she uses *the daily programme to ensure that language learning is developed continuously throughout the day.* This was similar to the researcher's experiences as she promoted an integrated curriculum.

Further, P10 suggested that her child should learn *listening skills* and *be confident when talking*. According to the Department of Education (2011a), children are constantly developing their speaking and listening skills, and these are integrated into all the subjects. In Grade R, children must listen and respond to simple questions, talk about pictures in books, participate in discussions, as well as ask questions (DBE, 2011a). According to De Witt (2016), children at the age of 6 should be able to tell a story by looking at pictures and make inferences.

4.3.3.3 Expectations regarding Life Skills

Three main Life Skills concepts were identified: health, the world, and social development. According to the Foundation Phase Life Skills CAPS document, the theme of *health* falls under the sub-topic of Personal and Social Well-being (DBE, 2011b). This was identified by P2 who commented that Grade R children should *learn how to keep healthy*. This aligns with one of the main aims of the Life Skills subject, where children "are exposed to a range of knowledge, skills and values that strengthen their knowledge of personal health" (DBE, 2011b: 8). Similarly, P4 and P8 indicated that their child should learn how to *be healthy*. This theme is covered in Term 1 of Grade R under the topic of "healthy living" (DBE, 2011b: 16). The concept of health is also accommodated in the daily programme during snack time and toilet routine. Teacher 2

remarked that it is *very important for Grade R children to learn about keeping healthy and washing their hands, especially now with the Covid-19 pandemic.* According to Moyles (2015), this can be done through role-playing and singing songs. Further, Epstein's Parental Involvement Model identified Type 1 (i.e. parenting), that involves activities needed to meet the basic needs of a child (Epstein & Salinas, 2004). This infers that it is the parent's and teacher's responsibility to inculcate good health habits in the child.

The next common concept identified was *the world*. This is identified as one of the main aims of the comprehensive CAPS curriculum from Grade R to Grade 12. According to The Department of Basic Education (2011b: 5), the CAPS curriculum aims to "produce learners who demonstrate an understanding of the world". With this in mind, concepts of the world around children are integrated throughout, as suggested in all three Foundation Phase documents. This aligns with the researcher's experience of using an integrated Grade R curriculum. With specific focus to the Life Skills curriculum, the topic of Personal and Social Wellbeing is directed to teach children "to respect the rights of others and to show tolerance for cultural and religious diversity" (DBE, 2011b: 9). Accordingly, P8 made specific mention of learning about *diversity and differences in the world*. This was echoed by P6 who remarked that his child should be *learning about the world around them*. Teacher 2 stated that it is *important that the teacher uses free-play time to promote different cultures* such as *using multicultural resources in the fantasy room.* This aligned to the researcher's experiences where puzzles, games and posters represented a variety of multicultural contexts. Bryce-Clegg (2015) asserted that it is essential for children to learn about the community they live in through the use of themes. This allows them to explore the unknown in a safe and secure environment. Furthermore, Vygotsky's (1978) socio-cultural theory proposed that the purpose of education is to introduce children to a full range of cultural tools that could be used to understand the diverse world around them.

The last common concept identified under Life Skills was *social development*. According to the Department of Basic Education (2011b), Grade R is a year that can guide children to understand their emotions and navigate social relationships. This was supported by P1, P4 and P6 who expect their children to *play well with others*, *to share,* and *to be kind*. As such, Teacher 2 commented that *the free- play environment allows children to interact naturally with each other and learn important social and emotional skills*. This is

supported by Vygotsky's (1978) socio-cultural theory where he purported that learning is a social exchange and that it should be an active process which occurs in the ZPD (Vygotsky, 1978). Social interactions and experiences drive what children may learn, and the processes through which they can learn (Moll, 2014). De Witt (2016) posits that it is essential to develop the social and emotional component of the child in Grade R in order to optimise the learning experience and to develop a well-balanced child. This aligned to the researcher's experience where play scenarios are enacted to help children learn to cope with their emotions and display these in socially acceptable ways.

Although there were no other trends identified in the data elicited from the questionnaire, it is important to note that some participants did comment on other aspects that fall into different topics of the Life Skills curriculum. For example, the Creative Arts curriculum encompasses Visual Arts and Performing Arts (DBE, 2011b). Hence, P5 remarked that her child should be learning *arts and crafts*, while P7 commented that his child should be learning *lots of music and dancing.* This was corroborated by Teacher 1 who stated that Life Skills *involves visual arts, music and drama*. According to the Life Skills CAPS document, two hours a week should be devoted to the teaching and learning of these Creative Arts (DBE, 2011b). The topic of Physical Education (PE) was also picked up in the data collected via the questionnaire; for example, P2 remarked that she thinks *Life Skills is equivalent to LO so maybe PE* as Grade R is allocated 2 hours per week for Physical Education (DBE, 2011b). Teacher 1 stated that PE is done *in the form of movement rings* and that *Busy Ballers come once a week to teach the ball- skills aspect of CAPS.* Teacher 2 commented that *once a week, the children have special PE time with sports coaches.* This appeared to be a common trend in ECD Centres in this suburb, as the researcher also had coaches assist with PE lessons with her Grade R class. Further, Teacher 2 stated that the *PE Focus Skills are encouraged daily through outdoor play.* Climbing on jungle gyms and using balancing equipment are essential to build core muscles in order to maintain a correct sitting posture for formal work periods (Naude & Meier, 2019).

It is evident from comparing responses elicited from the questionnaire and the Life Skills CAPS document that the parent-participants have a basic understanding of what is contained in the Life Skills curriculum. There are, however, gaps in their knowledge especially regarding the sciences which falls under Social Wellbeing (DBE, 2011b). This is further evident from Teacher 2 who commented that *parents seem to focus their*

attention on literacy and maths, with little recognition of life skills. The researcher had similar experiences where parents did not want their children to participate in PE lessons. To accommodate these parents, the researcher was told by the principal to explain the importance of physical education to the parents; however, if the parent persisted then the child would regrettably not participate. This was stressful for the researcher in that separate activities had to be planned for this particular child who also felt left out. This "leaving out" of children during PE activities is also evident in P5's comment that her *child should not be forced to do sport during school.* According to CAPS, Grade R children must "play sports and games" (DBE, 2011b: 35). This physical activity also promotes health as cardiovascular exercise is important for maintaining an appropriate body mass index (BMI), a strong heart, and effective lung development (Yogman et al., 2018).

4.3.3.4 Where do parents access information regarding the Grade R curriculum?

This section presents the parents' responses regarding where they should find information on their child concerning Grade R matters. Figure 4.2 below shows the responses.
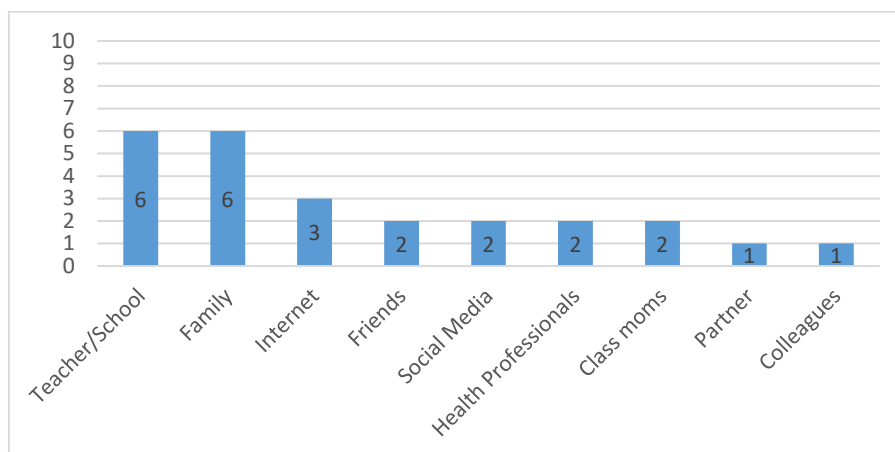
Figure 4.2: Where parents find information regarding their Grade R child

According to Magdalena (2014), the majority of parents use the internet to find information regarding what their child should do in Grade R. However, in this study the findings indicated that only half the number of the participants indicated that they used the internet or social media to find information. Two participants, P4 and P8, gathered information from *friends with children of similar ages.* Four participants who sought

advice from other parents, combined this with internet information. This was supported by literature as Jaiswal (2017) stated that parents from high-resourced schools do not ask the school for guidance but rather seek advice from family and friends. This was corroborated by Teacher 1 who commented that she *often has parents who send her pictures of what their friends' children are doing at other Grade R classes and demand to know why their child is not doing similar work.* However, P9 stated that *it is important to ask the qualified professionals who know your child*. To avoid confusion and for clarity purposes, it is important that parents receive their information from the school first. Regrettably, according to Teacher 2, *very few Grade R parents attend the parents' evening where the curriculum is discussed.* This was similar to the researcher's experiences where parent attendance at parents' evenings was very low. There is no mention of where parents can find information in the CAPS policies that were analysed. The Department of Basic Education launched a "parent booklet" on their website in 2018. This was in collaboration with the National Education Collaboration Trust. There was, however, no mention of how this would be distributed to the parents of children. This could be costly for schools to print. The focus of this booklet is on parental involvement and the health of children, but has no guidelines regarding specific skills that children in Grade R should acquire (DBE, 2018). Only half the number of participants stated that they used the internet to access information, which implies that the other fifty percent (50%) of these parents may not have the necessary information if they had not inquired at the school. Epstein identified Type 2 of the Parental Involvement model, that being communication. It is essential for the parents to ensure that there is effective and reciprocal two-way communication between them and the school in order to help the teacher (and parent) to provide a supportive and individualised environment for each child (Coleman, 2013).

4.3.3.5 Parents' recommendations regarding the Grade R curriculum

The final two questions of the open-ended questionnaire (appendix E) asked participants if they have any recommendations or comments to share about the Grade R year. The common topics that emanated centred on homework issues and the use of worksheets or workbooks. According to three participants, P1, P6 and P10, *more homework* would be their recommendation. The use of *workbooks and worksheets* was recommended by P3 and P4, while P3 held the position that worksheets will allow her child to *get a headstart for Grade 1*. Similarly, *P4* indicated that the *workbook structure* would *allow the children to accelerate their learning*. This aligned with the teachers' responses regarding what the parents expected. Both teacher-participants responded in agreement as they felt parents thought that Grade R should be a *watered-down Grade 1 year* with a *formal teaching approach*. They both mentioned that parents wanted *workbooks* and that children should *sit at desks* for the majority of the day. This aligned with the researcher's experiences where parents expected mainly written work and did not understand the value of learning through a play approach. This contradicted the CAPS policy that specifically stated that Grade R should not be a "watered-down Grade 1" (DBE, 2011a: 3). Furthermore, policy dictated that the learning environment should foster "comfortable spaces" which encourage children to "play and move around freely" (DBE, 2011b: 10). This was contrary to a formal "desk-like" classroom approach. According to Excell and Linington (2020), Grade R activities help children to become learning-ready for the formal Grade 1 environment. In addition, Davin (2015) states that children in Grade R are still developing their gross motor skills that are needed to be able to maintain a correct sitting posture to complete formal school tasks at a desk. However, these parents appear to have unrealistic expectations of the teaching and learning approach that is appropriate in the Grade R year. According to MacNaughton and Hughes (2011), teachers and families do not always share the same ideas on what should be done in the child's best interests.

4.3.4 Theme 4: Impact of Parents' Expectations on Teaching and Learning in Grade R

According to the researcher's experiences, unrealistic expectations from parents put undue pressure on the teacher, and on the child. The impact of parents' expectations on teaching and learning in Grade R will be discussed under the following subtopics: impact on teachers, impact on children, and the impact on the curriculum.

4.3.4.1 Impact on teachers

In response to the questions in the interview (appendix F) based on parents'
perceptions, a clear trend emerged. Both teacher-participants said that although there
were *parents who supported* them, they found that there were more parents who *thought
they knew better* and *pressured them* with regards to matters of the curriculum. Teacher
1 commented that she often *felt [un]appreciated by parents who did not see the hard
work that [went] into accommodating learning through play.* This was evident in P5's
comment that *play-based teaching is an easy way-out for teacher.* Teacher 2 also felt
undervalued by these parents. This was congruent to Avnet et al. (2019) who observed
that some parents lack respect for teachers and their qualifications. Furthermore,
Teacher 2 said that parents' expectations *affects [her] emotionally* to the extent that she
has *to spend the afternoon crying in the principal's office due to a demanding parent.*
This emotional stress was also mentioned by Teacher 1 who felt *emotionally exhausted
at the end of each term* due to trying to meet the *demands of parents while still ensuring
that age-appropriate teaching and learning is happening.* This aligned with the
researcher's experience of the emotional stress that the teachers experience due to
similar unrealistic demands from parents. This, according to Excell (2011), exerted
unnecessary pressure which had a detrimental effect on practitioners' teaching
practices, as well as their mental state.

4.3.4.2 Impact on children

According to Stewart (2019), demanding and pushy parents can cause children to
develop over-dependence on parents. This is evident in Teacher 2's comment that *many
children in the class lack confidence to complete simple tasks alone.* This aligned to
literature findings which revealed that children who are under tremendous pressure from
their parents, are usually unable to think for themselves (De Witt, 2016). The researcher
had similar experiences where parents sometimes did everything for the child and did
not allow the child to develop independence. Therefore, during class time children were
unable to unpack their notebooks from their bags or look after their personal belongings.
Moreover, these children were unable to follow simple class-based instructions such as
"pack away your pencils and crayons", without the teacher's one-on-one assistance.

Consequently, Teacher 1 stated that these unrealistic demands from parents impacted on *their child with regards to their emotional development*. She further stated that *a lot of anger stems from a child who is not yet ready to complete tasks but is being forced to do them by the parents*. Teacher 2 admitted that she has three children in her class who become very anxious when they do not have any *table-top work to show their parents when they get home.* She added that one child refused to take her artwork home because her *dad gets upset and will throw it away if it is not written work.* According to Ceka and Murati (2016), this can have a negative impact on the child psychologically. Children take great pride in their work, and by the dad discarding it, the child may feel unworthy (Koster, 2015). This highlights the researcher's concern regarding parents being "pushy" and negatively affecting the child's natural development. This is also substantiated by literature findings where Excell (2011) states that teachers found that this parental pressure had a detrimental effect on the child's learning and development as it can cause extreme anxiety and unhappiness which affects the child's psychological development. The researcher had similar experiences with regards to anxious and angry children.

4.3.4.3   Impact on the curriculum

Teacher 1 stated that she had *come across more than [her] fair share of parents who thought they knew better and pressured [her] with regards to the curriculum.* However, Teacher 1 held the view that it is part of her role to *educate parents regarding the curriculum and try to get them to understand that the school follows the prescribed CAPS curriculum set by the Department of Education.* Despite requests from parents, Teacher 2 commented that she *sticks to the prescribed curriculum which allows learners to develop towards the developmental milestones at their own pace.* Teacher 2 said that she accommodates *workbook requests by creating portfolios of students' work which can be sent home at the end of the term.* Teacher 1 often received *requests from parents for more difficult library books to be sent home.* She accommodated this *by explaining that the purpose of sending weekly library books home is for the parent to be doing the reading, not the child.* This differed from the researcher's experiences where the school expected the teacher to meet all the parents' demands. Both teachers mentioned that parents wanted *more homework.* Teacher 2 stated that she sends home *informal homework tasks that promote gross and fine motor skills.* Teacher 1 did not *send any*

homework as it is not prescribed in the curriculum. According to the Department of Basic Education (2011b: 6), the weekly "instructional time for Grade R is 23 hours". This equates to roughly 4 hours 30 minutes of Grade R per day. There was no mention of homework tasks in the three CAPS documents. Judging by the teachers' responses, although some parents have these unrealistic expectations of a Grade R curriculum, there was minimal negative impact on the day-to-day curriculum implementation.

4.4   CONCLUSION

In this chapter, the researcher discussed the findings of the qualitative single case study inquiry. The participants who participated in the individual interview sessions were the two Grade R teachers from ECD Centre 1 and ECD Centre 2. The participants who responded to the open-ended questionnaire comprised of 10 parents (five parents from ECD Centre 1, and five parents from ECD Centre 2). The data collected was classified into emerging themes. This was then compared to the teacher-interview responses and the document analysis for interpretation by the researcher. The literature review further directed the researcher in making inferences from the data. Generally, parents' perceptions were realistic with regards to the purpose of Grade R, and the role of the teacher. Chapter 5 will provide the summary of the key findings, the conclusion of the study and the recommendations for further research.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1   INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter presented the research findings. This study aimed to investigate and understand parents' perceptions of Grade R teaching and learning. The research was conducted using a qualitative single case study, individual interviews with two Grade R teachers, an open-ended questionnaire with ten parent participants, and document analysis of the Foundation Phase Grade R CAPS policies.

The purpose of this chapter is to summarise the findings in terms of the research questions, and to make recommendations to the Department of Basic Education, Grade R teachers, as well as parents of Grade R children. Avenues for further research are suggested, and the limitations of the study are outlined. The chapter concludes with a personal reflection from the researcher.

5.2   SUMMARY OF THE RESEARCH FINDINGS

5.2.1   Key Scholarly Review Findings

The Literature review (chapter 2) explored the current literature regarding Grade R teaching and learning. The theoretical underpinning regarding Grade R teaching and learning, and the roles of the teacher and the parent in the Grade R year, were interrogated.

It was established that the most appropriate teaching and learning strategy was a play-based approach, and that it was the teacher's role to facilitate a learning environment which encouraged incidental learning. This was further supported by the socio-cultural theoretical framework of Vygotsky (1978) on play-based teaching and learning in early years education. The developmental milestones that a Grade R child should achieve were discussed, with the understanding that these should be used as a guide. All children will develop at different rates and thus play is the optimal teaching and learning approach in Grade R. Findings show that play promotes opportunities for children to

explore their environment to gain new knowledge. The teacher's role was to work within the ZPD to scaffold the teaching approach to make the child to feel supported while developing new knowledge and skills. Regrettably, the majority of the parents disapprove of the play-based approach and would prefer a more formal school environment for their child. This is not favoured by experts because 6-year-old children are not developmentally ready to sit at tables for most of the day. Findings show that a play-based teaching is the best teaching and learning strategy for Grade R children.

The CAPS subjects of Mathematics, Literacy and Life Skills were discussed, and the use of play in teaching these concepts was explored. Through the open free-play setting with different play areas (fantasy, art, outdoor, sensopathic, and cognitive), children develop knowledge, skills and values from all three subjects daily through play activities. This would prepare the child for the formal learning required in Grade 1.

Unfortunately, some parents did not agree with the play-based learning approach and this could lead to possible discord between the school and the home environment. Parents are children's first teachers and it is essential in the Foundation Phase to have a positive school-home relationship. Parental involvement is important for a child's educational success; however, negative parental involvement can have deleterious consequences on the teacher and the Grade R child. Parents sought information online and from other parents regarding developmental milestones, which may not always be reliable and authentic and they may be misled by "un-researched", "fake" and "hearsay" information regarding appropriate teaching and learning strategies in Grade R. This situation needs to be remedied so that qualified and experienced experts (teachers) are left to assist children to develop to their full potential without interference and unqualified opinions of parents.

5.2.2   Key Empirical Findings

The key findings from the study will now be discussed.

This research study found that parents of Grade R children exhibited a clear understanding of the purpose of having a Grade R class. The participants understood that it was the year before Grade 1 and before formal schooling. Interestingly, the researcher discovered that the participants had a positive view on the role of the teacher in the classroom, which aligned to the Department of Education's (2011) expectations.

The parent-participants had a general idea regarding the subjects taught in Grade R, although they did not pinpoint the three main subjects. With regards to Mathematics, parents appeared to have a basic understanding of the skills required to be taught; however, the majority of the participants had a higher and unrealistic expectation concerning Grade R outcomes, and what was age-appropriate. Similarly, the parent-participants had unrealistic expectations with regards to Literacy teaching and learning. The focus from participants centred on reading and writing, and most participants indicated they expected a far higher level of reading and better writing skills than those deemed appropriate by the DBE. Lastly, the findings concerning the Life Skills curriculum were mixed. Each parent-participant mentioned different aspects of the Life Skills curriculum; and no one had a comprehensive understanding of what the Life Skills curriculum covered. However, it was important to the parents that their children learn how to keep healthy and learn about the world around them.

The teacher-participants both stated that they applied the play-based teaching and learning approach, but that they sometimes received complaints from parents who did not agree with this method. This was evident in the parents' responses, where forty percent completely disagreed with a play-based teaching and learning method in Grade R. Unfortunately, only thirty percent of the parents fully supported play-based teaching and learning stating that they must trust and accept the teachers as professionals.

5.3   RESEARCH CONCLUSIONS

To clearly explain the conclusions regarding this research, the initial research question and the sub-questions will be restated. An answer to each question will be provided. The aim of the study was to determine the perceptions of parents of Grade R children regarding teaching and learning in Grade R. In Chapter 1, research questions were posed to guide this inquiry. These questions will now be (re)addressed, beginning with the sub-questions and followed by the main research question (see 1.5.1).

5.3.1   Sub-research question 1: How do Parents feel about Play-based Teaching and Learning in Grade R?

From the ten parent-participant responses, thirty percent fully supported the play-based approach, whereas forty percent disagreed with it. The other thirty percent felt that some play time is necessary. Since there are more participants who disagree with play-based

teaching and learning, this supports the literature review findings. In addition, the teacher participants echoed the researcher's experiences that parents expect a more formal approach to teaching and learning. This was confirmed by the parent-participants commenting that they would like a formal classroom setting with worksheets and workbooks for their children. The researcher's concern that parents do not support the play-based approach was authenticated, as the majority of parents disagreed with play-based teaching and learning. The researcher's concern was also confirmed by the two teacher-participants who had similar experiences with parents in their ECD Centres.

5.3.2 Sub-research question 2: What do Parents expect their Child to know by end of Grade R?

The majority of the parents' expectations regarding the curriculum in Grade R appeared to be unrealistic. The data highlighted how parents wanted their children to learn things that are deemed developmentally inappropriate by the Department and Basic Education. The CAPS curriculum expectations for Grade R are supported by scientific theory and ECD experts, showing it is age-appropriate.

Concerning Mathematics, parents expected children to understand number concepts up to 2, 50 and 100. This included addition and subtraction operations of these numbers, but parents also wanted their children to do multiplication and division sums. These Mathematics expectations were higher than that deemed appropriate by the CAPS curriculum. The parents did, however, have an age-appropriate view on the learning of shapes. The parents expected children to know the basic 2-D shapes and begin to learn 3-D shapes. This aligned with the CAPS curriculum.

The expectations from the parents concerning Literacy learning in Grade R were also unrealistic. Parents expected their children to be able to write sentences and paragraphs. More surprisingly, parents expected their children to read short books. This included the understanding of basic grammar such as verbs, adjectives, and punctuation. These were higher expectations than those in the age-appropriate CAPS curriculum.

Parents had low expectations regarding the Life Skills curriculum. They expected their children to learn about the world around them, how to keep healthy, and socially develop. These responses had a place in the CAPS curriculum; however, the responses

from the parents were mixed, but most parents would like children to do Creative Arts such as Visual Art and Performing Arts. This aligned with the Life Skills CAPS expectations. Parents are also expected children to do some Physical Education within the school day and sports after school hours. According to policy, Physical Education is allocated two hours a week. There was no mention of after-school activities.

5.3.3 Sub-research question 3: What is the policy expectation on teaching and learning in Grade R?

According to the CAPS policy, Grade R teaching and learning activities should be structured as a daily programme by focusing on incidental learning and play-based teaching and learning strategies. Furthermore, teaching and learning should promote the emergent skills required for Mathematics, Language and Life Skills. These are the foundation skills that will assist children when beginning formal education in Grade 1.

With regard to Mathematics, Grade R children should focus on number-sense by using numbers 1-10. The concept of basic sums is introduced, and children learn about 2-D and 3-D shapes within their environment. Through play, children are exposed to measurement concepts, such as capacity.

Concerning Literacy in Grade R, this is centred on developing a love for language. Through the use of songs, children develop beginner literacy skills which serve as a foundation for reading and writing. Children learn how to hold a book correctly and learn to tell a story from the pictures in the book. This allows them to discover that verbal words can be represented by written text. Important pre-writing skills are developed through play, such as fine motor skills and gross motor skills that are necessary for handwriting development. The alphabet is introduced, and children learn that words can be broken up into sounds and syllables.

Lastly, the Life skills curriculum focuses on holistic child development. Through a thematic approach and play-based strategies, children acquire important values and social skills. Creative Arts allows children to express themselves while learning other subject-related skills, such as fine motor control for handwriting. Moreover, the Physical Education programme fosters the development of gross motor skills which helps honing handwriting abilities and coping with the formal demands of the classroom in later years.

5.3.4 Sub-research question 4: How do parents' expectations affect Grade R teaching and learning?

According to the Grade R teacher-participants and the researcher, unrealistic expectations from parents create undue stress on teachers. These unrealistic and impractical expectations pressurise the school to meet parents' demands for a more formal approach, thereby limiting the time allocated for play-based teaching and learning. This will therefore limit the incidental learning and teachable-moment opportunities. This also does not allow for the zone of proximal development for each individual child to be accounted for by the teacher. Furthermore, the emotional impact on teachers caused by demanding parents can affect the teacher's day-to-day teaching practices and psyche. The teacher may feel undervalued by parents, which can be demotivating. Alternatively, parents can become supportive and work as partners with the teacher to ensure the holistic development for the child.

The findings show that some young children feel anxious due to their parent's high expectations; and this hinders their natural development. Children of demanding parents also appear to become angry more regularly than those with parents who support the teacher (Excell & Linington, 2015). Angry outbursts from children can have a negative effect on classroom dynamics, which will affect teaching and learning processes.

Although the parent-participants had some unrealistic expectations regarding the curriculum, the teacher-participants both said that they will still ensure that they follow the CAPS curriculum, and not bow to parental pressure to deviate from the stipulations of the curriculum. This differs from the literature findings and the researcher's own experiences. According to Moyles (2015), teachers often change or make adaptations to the curriculum in order to satisfy the parents' expectations. Similarly, the ECD Centre that the researcher worked at required her to change the curriculum into a more formal one which was a deviation from the set Grade R approach.

5.3.5 Main Research Question: What are parents' perceptions of teaching and learning in Grade R?

The sub-questions led the researcher to answer the main question. The parent-participants in this study had unrealistic perceptions of teaching and learning in Grade R. Although these parents have a clear understanding that the purpose of Grade R is to ensure their children are ready for formal education, most parents expect a formal teaching and learning approach that is not based on the play-principle.

5.4 RECOMMENDATIONS

The research results of this study were important and noteworthy for school principals, Grade R teachers, and the parents of Grade R children. The research results will be emailed to the participants and the school principals of the ECD Centres used in the study. The following recommendations originated from this study.

5.4.1 Recommendation 1: Directed to the Department of Basic Education (DBE)

At the national level, policymakers could design a simple guide for parents regarding details or information of the Grade R year, as it is a unique year in a child's life. This could include the appropriate teaching and learning strategies and basic guidelines to the implementation of the curriculum. This could be given to each school together with Grade R workbooks for the school to pass on to parents. In a high-resourced context, this could also be emailed to the parents from the school to reduce costs.

5.4.2 Recommendation 2: Directed to Principals of ECD Centres

The researcher suggests that the school principals organise parents' evening or mornings where the Grade R parents are invited to a presentation regarding the Grade R curriculum and teaching methods. This can be presented to the parents to assist them to understand the inner-workings of this unique Grade R year. This should be done biannually at the very least. The first should be in December prior to children beginning Grade R which would allow parents to have the correct perceptions from the commencement of the Grade R year. This could be followed by a second meeting during

the first term of the Grade R year to answer any questions parents may have once the child has enrolled for the year. Preferably, once per term parents' meetings would be ideal to foster better parent-school collaborations.

5.4.3   Recommendation 3: Directed to Grade R teachers

At the classroom level, teachers could provide parents with a weekly schedule of the teaching and learning plan. This could be sent home via the children's "message" notebooks or uploaded onto a school communication application such as the D6 Communicator or via WhatsApp. This would allow parents to see what content and skills their children will be learning. This would be extra work for the teachers as prior weekly planning is required to be submitted to the school principal, but this will be beneficial in the long term as it would obviate unnecessary parental pressure on teachers who are normally being accused of using play to "kill time".

5.4.4   Recommendation 4: Directed to Grade R children's parents

Parents are strongly advised to attend interviews and meetings that are organised by the school. This would allow them to access information regarding the curriculum and to ask any questions they may have. Parents must also timeously read newsletters and other communication sent to their homes. It is essential that parents try their very best not compare their child to other children, as each child is unique and develops at his/her own rate.

5.5   AVENUES FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

The following recommendations for further research are suggested:

- Conduct a similar research study at a Grade R centre in a government school to see if the parents have similar perceptions of Grade R teaching and learning. Makeleni (2018) researched Grade R teaching and learning in rural schools, but parents' perceptions were not investigated.
- Conduct an in-depth study on parents' understanding of each subject area: Mathematics, Life Skills and Language. Although studies by Du Plessis (2016) and Mahan (2015) researched Language in Grade R, this was centred on

teachers' perceptions. Similarly, Makeleni (2013) researched Grade R Mathematics teaching and learning, but parents' understanding of the subject area was not included.

- Conduct a similar research study in other provinces to determine any commonalities which could possibly initiate a Parent's Guide to Grade R being designed by the Department of Education. Makeleni's (2018) research was conducted only in the Eastern Cape, and this study only in KwaZulu-Natal.

5.6   LIMITATIONS

The first limitation of the study was the use of the qualitative research method. This was a time-consuming and labour-intensive method. It was also difficult to verify the results (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014). To accommodate this, the data was compared to the literature findings and the researcher's own experiences.

Secondly, the use of a qualitative case study design meant that the findings could not be generalised. This was due to the small sample size, which according to Flick (2018), does not allow the findings to be extended to other similar circumstances. The researcher only used two private ECD Centres; therefore, the findings may not translate to public Grade R classes in the area. Nevertheless, it is likely that the findings could translate to other private ECD Centres in similar suburbs in South Africa.

Lastly, the Covid-19 pandemic was another limitation to the study. According to Sadeque (2020), Covid-19 resulted in researchers needing to adapt traditional data collection methods as face-to-face meetings were limited. Further, due to the extremely contagious nature of the virus, the researcher was unable to make any physical contact with the participants as there was a National Lockdown. This was overcome by using email, telephonic communication, and online data collection methods, which proved very successful.

5.7   CONCLUDING REMARKS

This master's degree journey has been a demanding yet rewarding experience. Each step became a learning experience and new knowledge was imbibed. The findings of the study are of great value to the researcher in that the topic is now far more relevant

and beneficial as it gives better insight into parents' perceptions of young children's learning. Conducting this research led to the researcher realising a personal goal during difficult times that she has been experiencing during the past few years, yet her passion for her profession and the children under her care never wavered. The teaching and learning of Grade R subjects using the play method for age-appropriate early childhood education, will always be her niche area. The teacher-participants made the researcher excited and hopeful that there are other such passionate teachers in the ECD sector. Their openness and willingness to answer the questions with complete candidness, in their limited spare time during Covid-19, proved their commitment to improving their own teaching practices. It was a privilege to be able to interview them and use their expertise to assist in this study.

The parents' responses were eye-opening and unearthed a world of new knowledge for the researcher, which can now add value to her own teaching practice. Once again, the fact that they were willing to participate in this study and sacrifice their precious time, is sincerely appreciated, as this also shows their commitment to their child's education. The love they displayed in their responses regarding their child's teacher was heart-warming and resonated with the researcher and her own experiences with parents.

Through continued research by passionate and committed people in the ECD Sector, parents' unrealistic perceptions of teaching and learning in Grade R will transform as they become more aware of the value and importance of teaching and learning through the play-based approach.

This will further benefit the youth of South Africa, as they are the future. May the teachers and parents remain committed to preparing young children for formal education, and for a brighter future.

"Let the children play; they are 100% washable".

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APPENDIX A: UNISA ETHICS CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE

UNISA | university of south africa

UNISA COLLEGE OF EDUCATION ETHICS REVIEW COMMITTEE

Date: 2020/06/10

Ref: **2020/06/10/42159172/30/AM**

Name: Miss JG Kirby

Student No.:

Dear Miss JG Kirby

Decision: Ethics Approval from 2020/06/10 to 2023/06/10

Researcher(s): Name: Miss JG Kirby

Supervisor(s): Name: Dr JS Rubbi

Name: Dr D Muranwa

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 2020/06/10 to 2023/06/10.

The **medium risk** application was reviewed by the Ethics Review Committee on 2020/06/10 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 will ensure that the research project adheres to the relevant guidelines set out in the Unisa Covid-19 position statement on research ethics attached.

2. The researcher(s) will ensure that the research project adheres to the values and principles expressed in the UNISA Policy on Research Ethics.

3. 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.

4. The researcher(s) will conduct the study according to the methods and procedures set out in the approved application.

5. 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.

6. 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.

7. 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.

8. No field work activities may continue after the expiry date **2023/06/10**. Submission of a completed research ethics progress report will constitute an application for renewal of Ethics Research Committee approval.

Note:

The reference number **2020/06/10/42159172/30/AM** should be clearly indicated on all forms of communication with the intended research participants, as well as with the Committee.

Kind regards,

Prof AT Motlhabane
CHAIRPERSON: CEDU RERC
motlhat@unisa.ac.za

Prof PM Sebate
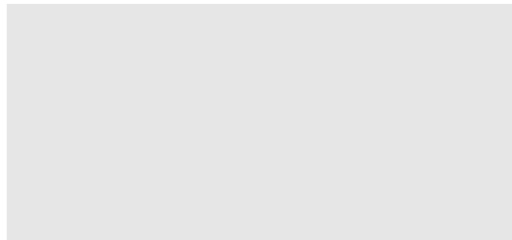**ACTING EXECUTIVE DEAN**
Sebatpm@unisa.ac.za

Approved - decision template – updated 16 Feb 2017

APPENDIX B: REQUEST TO SCHOOL PRINCIPAL TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

UNISA | university of south africa

Request for permission to conduct research at _____

Title of the research: Parents' perceptions of Grade-R teaching and learning

JUNE 2020

I, Joanne Kirby am doing research under supervision of Dr Julie Shantone Rubbi Nunan and Dr Muranwa Dagada who are Lecturers in the School of Teacher Education: Department of Early Childhood Education towards a Master of Education in Curriculum Studies degree at the University of South Africa. We are inviting you to participate in a study entitled: Parent's perceptions of Grade R Teaching and Learning.

The aim of the study is to investigate the perceptions that parents of Grade R learners have regarding the teaching and learning in Grade R.

Your school has been selected because you have a Grade R class that follows the CAPS curriculum.

The study will entail selected parents of Grade R learners to answer an online questionnaire.

The benefits of this study are that teachers can use this information to inform parents of the correct teaching and learning methods in the Grade R Curriculum.

No foreseeable risks are associated with the completion of the questionnaire which is for research purposes only.

There will be no reimbursement or any incentives for participation in the research.
Pseudonyms will be used to protect the identity of the ECD Centre and Participants and to ensure there is stricy confidentiality of information.
Feedback procedure will entail an electronic summary of the findings of the research which will be made available to you and the participants.

Permission to undertake this questionnaire has been granted by the school and the Ethics Committee of the College of Education, UNISA. If you have any research-related enquiries, they can be addressed directly to me or my supervisor/s. My contact details are: _____ com and my supervisor/s can be reached at 014-4294582; Department of Early Childhood Education, College of Education, UNISA, e-mail: **ru**_____**c.za**

Yours sincerely

Joanne Kirby MEd Student, UNISA

APPENDIX C: COVER LETTER FOR THE QUESTIONNAIRE

UNISA | university of south africa

Title of questionnaire: Parental Perceptions of Grade R Teaching and Learning

Dear respondent

My name is Joanne Kirby and I am doing research under the supervision of Dr Rubbi and Dr Muranwa, who are lecturers in the Department of Early Childhood towards a Master of Education degree at the University of South Africa. We are inviting you to participate in a study entitled **Parents' perceptions of Grade R Teaching and Learning**

You have been selected by a purposive sampling strategy from the population of the parents of the Grade R classroom at your child's ECD Centre. Hence, I invite you to take part in this questionnaire. The aim of this study is to investigate the perceptions that parents of Grade R learners have regarding the teaching and learning in Grade R. The findings of the study will benefit the teachers understanding of the parental perceptions of the Grade R curriculum and equipping parents with knowledge of the practices in Grade R classes.

You are kindly requested to complete this questionnaire, comprising of 14 questions as honestly and frankly as possible and according to your personal views and experience. No foreseeable risks are associated with the completion of the questionnaire which is for research purposes only. The questionnaire will take approximately 30 minutes to complete, depending on your personal responses and response time

You are not required to indicate your name or organisation and your anonymity will be ensured; however, indication of your age, gender, occupation position etcetera. will contribute to a more comprehensive analysis. All information obtained from this questionnaire will be used for research purposes only and will remain confidential. Your participation in this questionnaire is voluntary and you have the right to omit any question if so desired, or to withdraw from answering this questionnaire without penalty at any stage. After the completion of the study, an electronic summary of the findings of the research will be made available to you on request.

Permission to undertake this questionnaire has been granted by the school and the Ethics Committee of the College of Education, UNISA. If you have any research-related enquiries, they can be addressed directly to me or my supervisor/s. My contact details a   ail.com and my supervisor/s can be reached at 014-4294582; Department of Early Childhood Education, College of Education, UNISA, e-mail: **rub   za.**

By completing the questionnaire, you imply that you have agreed to participate in this research.

Researcher's Name & Surname: Joanne Kirby

JUNE 2020

Researcher's signature   Date

APPENDIX D: PARTICIPANT'S CONSENT SLIP

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY (Return slip)

UNISA | university of south africa

I, _____ (participant name), confirm that the person asking 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 (or had explained to me) and understood the study as explained in the information sheet.

I have had enough opportunity to ask questions and I 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, unless otherwise specified.

I agree to the recording of the open-ended questionnaire through Microsoft Form.

I have received a signed copy of the informed consent agreement.

Participant's Name & Surname (please print) _____

Participant's Signature _____   Date_____

Researcher's Name & Surname (please print)   JOANNE KIRBY
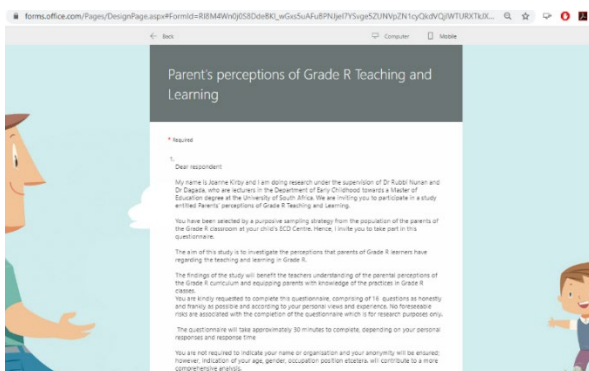
Researcher's signature

JUNE 2020
Date

APPENDIX E: QUESTIONNAIRE

(These questions were loaded onto MS Forms: anyone with the link is able to respond and does not require a Microsoft Email Address: please see snippet below)

1. Describe your understanding of the purpose of Grade R.
2. Why did you send your child to Grade R?
3. Where do you get your information regarding what your child should be doing in Grade R?
4. What are your perceptions regarding the Grade R Curriculum?
5. What are the subjects taught in Grade R?
6. What kind of school work do you expect your child to bring home?
7. What does your child tell you about their school day and how do you feel about it?
8. What information about your child is important for you to read on the end of term report card?
9. What is the teacher's job in Grade R?
10. Describe what Mathematical skills your child should learn in Grade R.
11. Describe what Literacy skills your child should learn in Grade R.
12. Describe what Life skills your child should learn in Grade R.
13. How do you feel about play-based teaching learning in Grade R?
14. How much break time should your child have every day?
15. If given the opportunity, what recommendations will you offer to the Grade R curriculum?
16. Do you have any comments to make regarding the Grade R year?

SNIPPETS FROM MS FORMS

APPENDIX F: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

1. What Mathematics skills does the Grade R curriculum policy expect you to teach?

2. What Literacy skills does the Grade R curriculum policy expect you to teach?

3. What Life skills does the Grade R curriculum policy expect you to teach?

4. How do you feel about play-based teaching and learning in Grade R?

5. How do you scaffold learners through the R Curriculum?

6. How do parents feel about play-based teaching and learning in Grade R?

7. What are the parents' expectations regarding teaching and learning in Grade R?

8. How does the parents' expectations affect Grade R teaching and learning?

9. What strategies do Grade R parents recommend for teaching and learning in Grade R.

APPENDIX G: TURNITIN REPORT

J_Kirby_M.ED Mini Dissertation_v3

APPENDIX H: LANGUAGE EDITING CERTIFICATE

590 Miami Road
Hibberdene
KZN
4220
Cell: 0842648401
brian.naidoo25@gmail

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CERTIFICATE FOR LANGUAGE EDITING DRAFT MASTER'S DISSERTATION
Parents' Perceptions of Grade R teaching and learning

JOANNE GRAFTON KIRBY
ID: ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮
Student number: ▮▮▮▮▮
University of South Africa

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

This certificate confirms that the above-mentioned student submitted her draft master's dissertation to me for language-editing, which included correcting in-text citations and the mistakes in the list of references. This was duly edited by me and sent back to the student for revisions as per suggestions from me. I make no claim as to the accuracy of the research content. The text, as edited by me, is grammatically correct. After completion of my language editing, the student has the option to accept or reject suggestions/changes prior to re-submission to the supervisor who will check the content and instances of plagiarism, if any.

B. Naidoo   ID: 5606255134081   **DATE: 19/10/2020**

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THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT

APPENDIX I: DECLARATION FROM FORMATTING SERVICE PROVIDER

23 4TH STREET
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21st October 2020

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

I hereby confirm that I have done the technical editing of the mini-dissertation: **PARENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF GRADE R TEACHING AND LEARNING**.by **JOANNE GRAFTON KIRBY**, submitted in accordance with the requirements for the degree of **MASTER'S in EDUCATION** at the **UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA.**

Sharon Baxter
Email: nbaxter@lantic.net
Cell: 0722502075

by

JOANNE GRAFTON KIRBY