PRACTITIONERS' EXPERIENCES IN SUPPORTING LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT OF PERI-URBAN PRESCHOOL CHILDREN

by

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DECLARATION

I, Sibongile Johannah Mahan, declare that **PRACTITIONERS' EXPERIENCES IN SUPPORTING LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT OF PERI-URBAN PRESCHOOL CHILDREN** 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.

November 2021

___________________	___________________
Signature	*Date*

DEDICATION

This study is dedicated to:

My dear husband, Dana Jarod Mahan, for the support and patience he has shown throughout my studies.

My sons, Owethu Simon Mahan and Tumelo Ezra Mahan, for allowing me the time to complete my studies and reminding me of the importance of education.

My mother, Emma Mamayi Nkonyane, for the foundation she laid by sending me to school, even though she herself never had the opportunity to get an education.

My late brother, Moses “Bro Moss” Nkonyane, for always cheering me on to pursue my dreams.

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ABSTRACT

Language matters have always been contentious, including the language of teaching and learning in schools. Despite policies enacted by the SA democratic government to promote and support early learning in the mother tongue, schools are allowed through the school governing bodies (SGBs) to offer education in a language other than the home language of the majority of the children enrolled in such schools. Research has proven the correlation between language and achievement and this study explored how early childhood care and education (ECCE) practitioners support the development of home language in the birth-to-four age group. A blend of Vygotsky's social constructivist theory, the funds of knowledge (FoK) theory, Bakhtin's dialogism theory and Bourdieu's cultural capital theory of language and symbolic power was used and resulted in a fused theory which I termed socio-cultural dialogic language development (SCDLD) theory.

A qualitative approach and a case study research design were employed. It focused on six ECCE practitioners from three different preschools in Mamelodi. Interviews, observations, field notes, casual conversations and document and visual data analysis were used as the primary tools for data collection.

An ethics application was made to UNISA and clearance was granted. A permission letter from the University was given to the contact persons on site, and a brief statement that conveyed the reasons for the study, its duration, information about the researcher, organisational affiliation, uses of the data and an assurance that the rights of human subjects would be protected.

The findings show the discord between practitioners' conceptions and their classroom practices of home language development. The children use multiple home languages, which differ from the practitioners' home languages. Practitioners speak and understand these home languages but opt to use English for teaching to accommodate children coming from minority languages. Unfortunately, practitioners are not conversant in English, thus wrongly used concepts are conveyed to the children. Making up for this, teachers resort to translanguaging, i.e., teaching in both English and majority languages to ensure that the meaning of the content is conveyed to the children.

The implications of this practice is that children do not develop language proficiency, be it in their home language or English. Robust professional development that focuses on upskilling practitioners in specialising in home languages will ensure that children from birth to four years old participate successfully in subsequent grades.

KEYWORDS

- Practitioner
- Support
- Home language
- Language development
- Learning
- Peri-urban
- Preschool children

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ANA	Annual national assessments
ANC	African National Congress
BEd FP	Bachelor of Education in Foundation Phase Teaching
CAPS	Curriculum Assessment Policy Standards
CERT	Centre for Education Rights and Transformation
DBE	Department of Basic Education
DHET	Department of Higher Education and Training
DoE	Department of Education
DSD	Department of Social Development
ECCE	Early childhood care and education
ECD	Early childhood development
ECE	Early childhood education
ERLU	Early Learning Resource Unit
FoK	Funds of knowledge
IIAL	Incremental introduction of African Languages
IKS	Indigenous knowledge systems
LAD	Language acquisition device
LiEP	Language in Education Policy
LoLT	Language of Learning and Teaching
MKO	More knowledgeable other
NAEYC	National Association for the Education of Young Children
NCCS	National Child Care Strategy
NCF	National Curriculum Framework

NDP	National Development Plan
NELDS	National Early Learning and Development Standards
NIECDP	National Integrated Early Childhood Development Policy
PIRLS	Progress in International Reading Literacy Study
RSA	Republic of South Africa
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SADTU	South African Democratic Teachers' Union
SCDLD	Socio-cultural dialogic language development theory
SGB	School governing body
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
ZPD	Zone of proximal development

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

"A person's language is in many ways a "second skin": a natural possession of every normal human being, which we use to express our hopes and ideals, articulate our thoughts and values, explore our experience and customs, and construct our society and the laws that govern it. It is through language that we function as human beings in an ever-changing world."

Dr BS Ngubane - Minister of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology, 2002

1.1 Introduction

According to Saikia (2013), the first few years of life are critical for language development. He goes on to say that it is a common fact that language plays a very important role in the life of a human being. Research shows that the first 1000 days (pre-birth, early and late infancy) of life are highly sensitive to environmental effects (DBE), 2015). Evidence from this research shows that the early years are building blocks for long-term health, as well as personal and social well-being. It is for this reason that, in South Africa, there is an increasing drive to value and support the development and learning of children in the early years.

Young children attending preschool are at a crucial stage of language acquisition and teachers have a significant role to play in the development of the linguistic competence of children in early childhood education (Hélot & Rubio, 2013). At a time when research lauds mother tongue instruction, this then begs the question: In preschools in peri-urban areas where English is chosen as a medium of communication while multiple languages are spoken, how are practitioners navigating the seemingly insurmountable task of supporting the language development of the children in their care?

Research by Alexander (2009) shows that there are a multitude of benefits in learning in a language that is familiar to a child, that is, a home language or mother tongue. The author states that language and achievement are closely linked, furthermore, learners who are being taught in their home language perform better than those being taught in a language other than their home language. In a study on the impact of mother tongue instruction on children's learning abilities in early childhood classrooms, Awopetu (2016) discovered that mother tongue as a medium of instruction in early childhood classrooms is very effective in improving pupils' learning abilities. The results also confirmed that there is a direct relationship between the language of instruction used by the teacher and the pupils' learning abilities.

This implies that, in their quest to develop the language competence of children, practitioners in early childhood education (referred to as ECE or ECCE hereafter) centres need to support the development of language. This study therefore aims to explore the experiences of practitioners' support of language development in peri-urban preschools where English is used as medium of communication amidst a variety of languages being used in the children's homes.

1.2 Rationale

My earliest encounter of early childhood education was in 2003 when I moved to America, specifically the city of Boston in Massachusetts. Boston is well known for its many universities and colleges amongst which are Harvard, Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Wheelock, to name but a few. These great institutions draw people from all corners of the world and that makes for a melting pot of cultures and languages. I was one of the many diverse practitioners at one of the English ECE centres, which catered mostly for students' and faculty's children from all over the world. At any given time, there were Spanish, Korean, Jewish, Chinese and Eastern European children and practitioners in a classroom. What caught my attention most was the way the children's faces lit up every time one of the practitioners happened to speak to them in their home language. Watching the children singing songs and saying nursery rhymes in their different languages taught me the importance of being in a familiar space – in this case, of a language – and the sense of pride this results in.

When I moved back home, I continued teaching, this time, grade one and two in the foundation phase. I was teaching at a former whites-only government school, commonly known as a former model C school. This meant that English was considered the home language, but the demographic profile of the school was that 60% was African children, for whom English was a second and even a third language. I would observe the children struggling with English concepts and also with expressing themselves in English. As an African, when I couldn't make out what they were trying to communicate, I would ask them to explain in their home language, and then, as if by magic, they would speak with confidence. I was one of the very few African teachers at the school, which means not all the African children had the luxury of explaining themselves in a language that was familiar to them.

Proponents of mother tongue instruction cite a 25- African country study conducted between 2004 and 2006 by UNESCO with the Association for the Development of Education. The study found that a child's mother tongue or local language is indispensable as the main medium of instruction during the phase from six to eight years of life. It also found that children can only learn when that learning is based on what they already understand and through a language that they understand (Heugh, 2017). This means that the practitioners can scaffold on top of the funds of knowledge (FoK) of the children. FoK, which is based on informal, every day, diverse knowledge and experiences found amongst families, teachers, children and community members (Moll, Amanti, Neff & Gonzalez, 1992) will be discussed comprehensively in chapter 3. The implication is that the language a pre-schooler is exposed to from the time they are born, is most probably the language they will excel at in all aspects of their lives, including learning.

Results from a study conducted by Bergbauer (2015) into the causes of poor learning outcomes in South Africa support this point, as it found that these were to a great extent a result of poor language proficiency and utility. The majority of learners are being taught in a second or sometimes a third language, and they are struggling with basic comprehension. Very little or nothing has been done up till now by institutions, the broader civil society or the education sector to address this perennial problem – a factor leading to the introduction of the incremental introduction of African Languages (IIAL) programme (DBE, 2014).

According to the Language in Education Policy (LiEP), languages are to be offered as (1) language(s) of learning and teaching, and (2) subject(s), and that it is up to school governing bodies to determine a school language policy (DoE, 1997). On the 27th of February 2017, a meeting of the Parliamentary Monitoring Group was held where the Department of Basic Education (DBE) gave a briefing on the evaluation of Curriculum Assessment Policy Standards (CAPS), specifically with regard to the introduction of African languages. It was at this gathering that Dr Suren Govender, DBE Chief Director of Curriculum, laid out the plans of introducing mother tongue instruction in the intermediate phase upwards. A certain Mr Khosa from the African National Congress (ANC) raised the time frame for mother tongue education, particularly the need to start by preparing the teachers (DBE, 2017). However, as far as the different language policies go, they are only applicable in the formal years of schooling beginning with grade R. This implies that ECE centres are not bound by any policies or guidelines when it comes to language practices. With all the studies conducted above leaning away from English as the preferred language of instruction, or in this instance language of communication, this study will explore how practitioners in peri-urban preschools rationalize their choice.

1.3 Statement of the problem

As stated earlier, language and achievement are closely linked. What this means is that learners who are being taught in a language for which they have a solid foundation achieve better than those being taught in a language that is their second or even third language. Research has shown that the use of English as a medium of instruction in most South African schools has greatly contributed to high failure rate of and dropouts among black students (Heugh, 2017).

However, in the DBE's standardised Annual National Assessments (ANA) for languages and Mathematics in schools, as well as other international standardised tests such as the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS), South African learners from township and rural schools usually performed badly (DBE, 2014). This is despite taking the tests in different African languages. This seems to indicate that teachers do not know how to teach reading in different African languages.

Universities have also neglected this, especially with the closing of teacher training colleges. Student teachers graduate with a Bachelor of Education in Foundation Phase Teaching (BEd FP) (DHET, 2011) without a module on the teaching of reading in African languages.

The South African Constitution, South African Schools Act (DBE, 2002) and the Language in Education Policy (LiEP) (DBE, 1997) afford learners the right to receive education in the language of their or their parents' choice (Ball, 2014).

The above-mentioned legislation and policy are also aligned with the South African National Curriculum Framework (NCF) for children from birth to four years old, which states that all children need to hear and learn to speak in their mother tongue. If they have a solid foundation in their mother tongue, they will find it easier to learn another language as they will have already found out how language is constructed and how to communicate with others (DBE, 2015).

This has certain implications for early childhood education practitioners, since their proficiency is one of the most important factors in early childhood language development. This is particularly applicable to the practitioners in this study, who opted to use English, which is not their home language, as a language of communication with their peri-urban preschool children. According to the DBE (2017), practitioners need to be trained and well versed in skills like storytelling, use of rhymes and singing of songs to be able to support the cognitive and first language development of children. De Witt and Lessing (2016) state that, through discussions with preschool teachers in the rural areas of Limpopo, it was revealed that there was a lack of knowledge with regard to the various aspects that contribute to children's success in school. The teachers also showed little knowledge regarding emergent literacy, language and phonological awareness in the development of preschool children's skills.

The need for ECE practitioners to be equipped in proper language instruction skills to be able to support and develop the children's language skills, can never be stressed enough. The skill transferred to children from birth to four years will ensure that they participate successfully in subsequent grades, because research has shown the importance of language development in the early years (Mphahlele, 2019; Law, 2015;

DBE, 2015). Before ECE practitioners can be equipped for language development, an investigation into their understanding of the support of language development in early childhood should be conducted. According to Awopetu (2016), in the last few decades, research has demonstrated that the quantity and the quality of the language of instruction has some influence on the learning abilities of preschool children.

In a 2014 progress review of early childhood development (ECD) in South Africa, the National Development Plan (NDP) indicated that "quality and coverage of early childhood development services for children aged birth to four is poor" (National Planning Commission, 2011). It was for this reason that the National Integrated Early Childhood Development Policy (NIECDP) (2015) was adopted by the cabinet of South Africa. One of the goals of this policy is to ensure that a comprehensive age and developmental stage appropriate, quality early childhood development programme is available and accessible to all infants and young children and their caregivers. This policy covers the period from conception until the year before children enter the formal school system, basically children from birth to four years old.

According to the NIECDP (2015), it is the responsibility of the DBE to coordinate, mobilise funding for and implement programmes to build the capacity of early childhood development practitioners. What this means is that the DBE will play a major role in delivering early childhood development practitioner training. This study therefore not only investigated the practitioners' understanding of what language development and support in ECD centres was, but also explored ways of upskilling, through training by the DBE, and supporting them in this regard.

1.4 Research questions

Before the primary goal of the research could be reached, that is, investigating ECE practitioners' understanding of support of language development in children from birth to four years old in peri-urban settings, a number of preliminary questions needed to be addressed.

Main question

- What are the experiences of ECCE practitioners' support of language development in the birth-to-four age group?

Sub-questions

- How do practitioners understand language development and support in ECD centres?
- How do practitioners promote and support language in ECD centres?
- What challenges do practitioners experience in language development and support?
- How do practitioners overcome the challenges they experience in language development and support?
- What does policy say about language development and support in the birth-to-four age group?

1.5 Aims and objectives of the study

From the research question and the sub-questions, the following are the aims and objectives of the study:

Aims

- To establish the ECE practitioners' understanding of support of language development.
- To explore ways of up-skilling and supporting ECE practitioners to provide language development support.

Objectives

- To establish how practitioners understand language development in ECE centres.
- To establish how practitioners promote and support language in ECE centres.
- To establish the challenges practitioners experience in home language development and support.

- To establish how practitioners overcome the challenges they experience in language development and support.
- To determine what policy says with regard to language development and support.

1.6 Literature review

My review of the literature will focus on the ECE practitioners' experiences of supporting the development of language in young children, aged from birth to four years old, in peri-urban settings, as well as the practitioners' understanding of policy on language development in ECD settings.

The issue of language has always been a bone of contention in South Africa. The 16th of June 1976 is a day never to be forgotten. Hundreds of youth took to the streets of Soweto, to protest against being taught in Afrikaans. At the time, they were already being taught in English, which was not their home language in the first place. This was the work of Hendrik Verwoerd, the then apartheid government's Minister of Bantu Affairs and later Prime Minister (Atmore, 2013). The system enforced teaching in African languages until the end of primary schooling. In terms of the Bantu Education Act of 1953, the education of black people was controlled, effectively keeping them away from the mainstream economic activity (RSA, 1953). One consequence of the apartheid policy on the use of African languages for education was that, by virtue of Bantu education being substandard, those learners who were educated in African languages received an inferior education.

According to Christie (2006), in July 1990, when Mr Pallo Jordan of the ANC addressed the People's Education workshop, he highlighted a very important point:

> *"A major challenge facing the education policy makers of the new South Africa is to develop an overall education policy for the country, which will address all levels of education, from preschool through university and also address different needs such as adult literacy, rural education, worker education and so on."*

Five years later, in 1995, ECD provision was acknowledged as a priority for development. This came about with a Department of Education (DoE) publication, the White Paper on Education and Training, which recognised that ECD covers all areas of young child development (DoE, 1995). This also brought with it the declaration of indigenous languages alongside English and Afrikaans as official and deserving the same status (Tshotsho, 2013).

The participants in this study chose English as a medium of communication in their centres because there are no laws binding them to use any specific language, by virtue of these preschools being private entities.

Drawing from my personal experiences of early learning, for as long as I can remember, I was educated in three languages at school. From sub-standard A, now known as grade 1, I had to learn a vernacular (one of the languages spoken by black South Africans), English as a second language and Afrikaans as a third language, courtesy of Bantu education, an education system put in place by the apartheid government. Of all the subjects we did, we excelled most in our home language, since it was the language we had learnt from childhood. This resulted in code switching, where teachers relied heavily on home languages when English, which was not their best language, failed them. This study aims to explore how practitioners in peri-urban preschools are navigating an almost similar situation, albeit by choice.

Awopetu (2016) discovered that mother tongue as a medium of instruction in early childhood classrooms is very effective in improving pupils' learning abilities. The results also confirmed that there was a direct relationship between the language of instruction used by the teacher and the pupils' learning abilities. This study seeks to establish from the experiences and perceptions of practitioners at grassroots level whether the findings from studies such as the one conducted by Awopetu are a misconception or not.

1.7 Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework is one of the most important aspects in the research process. It is the foundation from which all knowledge for a research study is

constructed (metaphorically and literally). According to Grant & Osanloo (2014) a theoretical framework is the “blueprint” for the entire dissertation enquiry, and it serves as a guide supporting the study and on which the study is built. It also provides a structure within which to define how you will philosophically, epistemologically, methodologically, and analytically approach the dissertation as a whole.

In this study, a blend of Vygotsky’s social constructivist theory, the funds of knowledge (FoK) theory developed by Amanti, González, Greenberg, Moll and Vélez-Ibáñez, Bakhtin’s dialogism theory and Bourdieu’s cultural capital theory was applied and triangulated and resulted in a combined theory which I termed socio-cultural dialogic language development (SCDLD) theory (see chapter 3). The SCDLD framework underpins this study. Theoretical triangulation was beneficial to this study in that it allowed me to look at the research into practitioners’ perceptions of supporting language development from more than one perspective (Turner & Turner, 2009). Following is a brief discussion of the theories. A comprehensive discussion is presented in chapter 3.

1.7.1 The social constructivist theory of Vygotsky

The main assertion of the Vygotsky theory is that the cognitive development of children is advanced through social interaction with other people, particularly those who are more skilled (Vygotsky, 1978). Vygotsky focuses on language, because of the importance of language in learning.

1.7.2 The funds of knowledge (FoK) theory

The funds of knowledge (FoK) theory, which is informed by Vygotsky’s (1978) sociocultural theory, attempts to apply his theoretical concepts to change and improve instruction. This sociocultural theory maintains that social interactions are the basis of all psychological phenomena and that the cultural contexts surrounding individuals determine what is learned and developed. Moll, Amanti, Neff & Gonzalez (2001) state that FoK is based on informal, every day, diverse knowledge and experiences found amongst families, teachers, children and community members.

1.7.3 Bakhtin's dialogism theory

Dialogism refers to a philosophy of language and a social theory that recognises the multiplicity of perspectives and voices. According to Lyle (2013), any debate of dialogic approaches to learning and teaching owes a debt to Vygotsky, who emphasised social and cultural influences on child development, and especially recognised language as the driving force behind cognitive development.

1.7.4 Bourdieu's cultural capital theory (language and symbolic power)

Bourdieu (1991) considered language to be not merely a method of communication, but also a mechanism of power, thus, language is as much an instrument of power and action as of communication.

1.7.5 The relationship between the four theories and justification for the proposal of a socio-cultural dialogic language development (SCDLD) theory

It is worth noting that the social nature of learning is common among all four theories in this study, to which both the pre-schoolers and practitioners are central. The proposed SCDLD theory provides a framework for adequately answering the research question, which is: What are the practitioners' experiences of support of language development in early childhood education? This will be discussed comprehensively in chapter 3.

1.8 Research methodology

The research methodology comprises of the research design and research method. The research design, research paradigm and research approach to be applied in this study are explained. The discussion on the research methods, which will include the sampling methods, participants, data collecting methods, data analysis techniques and ethical considerations of the study will then follow. All these will be discussed further in chapter 4.

1.8.1 The research design

The research design consists of the research paradigm, the research approach and the research type.

1.8.1.1 The research paradigm

In educational research, the word paradigm is used to describe a researcher's worldview (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). This worldview constitutes the abstract beliefs and principles that shape how a researcher sees the world, a general philosophical orientation about the world and the nature of research that a researcher brings to a study (Creswell, 2014; Kivunja *et al,* 2017).

The study was embedded within the social constructivism paradigm, in the quest to finding out the practitioners' perceptions of support of language development in their classrooms, by "relying as much as possible on the participants' views of the situation being studied" (Creswell 2014:38). In the constructivist paradigm, every effort is made to try to understand the viewpoint of the subject being observed, rather than the viewpoint of the observer. According to Munyua & Stilwell (2012), a paradigm defines the nature of an inquiry by a researcher, in a three-dimensional fashion, with the focus on ontology, epistemology and methodology. In addition, Creswell & Poth (2018:21) argue that, where "all researchers bring value to a study, qualitative researchers explicitly make their values known" in the study.

Ontology

Creswell & Poth (2018) state that, in a social constructivism paradigm, ontology is a philosophical belief that multiple realities are constructed through our lived experiences and interactions with others. In this study, the ontological assumption is that I report on the different perspectives of the participants with regards to their experiences and classroom practices in the support of language development in early childhood education.

Epistemology

According to Creswell & Poth (2018) reality is constructed between the researcher and the researched and is shaped by individual experiences and endeavours to understand the subjective world of human experience. It is the nature of knowledge or nature of the relationship between the researcher and how knowledge is acquired (Munyuwa & Stilwell, 2012). For this study, I relied heavily on the participants' point of view as evidence. I also spent much time in the "field", that is, the centres where the participants work, to get to know them and get first-hand information on the practitioners' experiences and perceptions of their support of language development in ECE settings. This was very important for me, as the context gave me an understanding of what the participants were saying.

Axiology

The axiological assumption is the belief that individual values are honoured and negotiated among individuals (Creswell, 2009). For this qualitative study, I had to admit the value-laden nature of the study and report on my values and biases which are based on my race, personal, cultural and historical experiences as well as professional beliefs (Creswell & Poth, 2018). All these values and biases had an influence on my interpretations, as they relate to or tie in with those of the participants.

Methodology

Qualitative research methods are characterised by the use of an inductive method, which builds conclusions from the ground up from emergent ideas obtained through the use of strategies such as interviewing, observing and analysing text (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Using the social constructivist paradigm helped me to have a broader understanding of how practitioners in early childhood educational settings understand and experience the support of language development in their classrooms. My own background shaped my interpretation, as I positioned myself in the research, acknowledging how my interpretation flows from my own personal, cultural and historical experiences

(Creswell & Poth, 2018). In the next section, the research approach that guided the study is discussed.

1.8.1.2 The research approach

The methodological approach to this study was qualitative in alignment with the research question and nature of the study, which explores a social/human problem and is conducted in a natural setting (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Furthermore, a qualitative researcher collects data in face-to-face situations by interacting with selected persons in their settings (Macmillan and Schumacher, 2010). The main purpose of this study was to explore ECE practitioners' understanding of the support of language development of the birth-to-four age group in peri-urban areas. As a researcher, this approach allowed me to build a complex, holistic picture, analyse words, and give detailed reports of the participants' views (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

According to Macmillan and Schumacher (2010), qualitative studies are important, amongst other things, for the improvement of educational practices.

Creswell (2013), states that qualitative research is an approach for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. The process of research involves emerging questions and procedures, data typically collected in the participants' settings, data analysis inductively building from particulars to general themes and the researcher making interpretations of the meaning of the data. Such is the case in this study, as qualitative data collection involved observations, interviews, casual conversations, document and visual data analysis and field notes.

1.8.1.3 The research type

I chose a case study as the most appropriate design for this study. Case study research involves the study of a case or cases within a real-life, contemporary context or setting (Creswell & Poth, 2018). According to Yin (2014) the essence of qualitative research is to view events through the perspective of the people who are being

studied; the way they think, and their view of the world, etc. Rule & John (2011), posit that a case study examines a bounded system or a case, over time, in depth and employs multiple sources of data found in the setting. In this study, I aimed to explore the experiences of practitioners' support of language development in ECE centres catering for children from birth to four years old.

According to Creswell & Poth (2018), the use of multiple sources of information to provide depth to the case characterizes good case study research. Yin (2014) recommends that the researcher use as many as six different types of sources in a case study. For this study, I used observations, field notes, interviews, casual conversations and document and visual analysis as sources of evidence. I also did a multisite selection for the case study, which means the three sites chosen were at different geographic locations.

1.8.2 The research methods

By employing the qualitative method, which necessitates critical exploration and reflection, this research project hopes to add to the corpus of available literature, direct future research, and offer opportunities for informed empowerment. Following is a discussion of the research methods that were applied in this study.

1.8.3 Population and sampling

1.8.3.1 Site selection

According to Macmillan and Schumacher (2010), choosing a site is a negotiation process aimed at obtaining freedom of access at a relevant location that is suitable for the research problems and feasible for the researcher's resources of time, mobility and skills. Based on this, three sites were identified, and initial informal contact was made with a number of community-based preschools in Mamelodi township. I chose multilingual preschools to study how practitioners experience, promote and support children's language development, against the backdrop of research that lauds mother tongue instruction.

The reasons for choosing the sites is that they are in a community that is well known to me and I speak and understand the different languages of the children and practitioners. This proved to be a very valuable asset, in that I was able to verify the data with the participants in a language that they were comfortable with. This, in turn, yielded fruitful data. Good relations and a relationship of trust were established with the practitioners at the chosen sites.

A letter of permission, which was obtained from the University, was given to the contact persons at the sites. The letter was accompanied by a written statement that specified the reasons for the study, the length of time of the study, information about the researcher, organizational affiliation, and general uses of the data as well as an assurance of the protection of the rights of human subjects. Because of the coronavirus and subsequent lockdown, clauses pertaining to the regulations of Covid-19 safety guidelines were included in all the letters.

1.8.3.2 Participants

For the sake of relevant results, six ECE practitioners were selected, two from each site. Initially, a maximum of ten practitioners in the birth to four-year-old group were meant to be selected, but because of Covid-19 and the lockdown, the numbers dropped to six because the sites lost large numbers of pre-schoolers and therefore had to let some practitioners go. All Covid-19 safety guidelines, as set out by the University under the different levels of lockdown were observed: both the researcher and participants wore cloth masks, sanitized and practised social distancing.

1.9 Data collection

The first step to data collection is to locate and gain permission to use a site. In the early stages, the researcher establishes a rapport, trust and reciprocal relations with the individuals and groups to be observed (MacMillan and Schumacher*,* 2010). Furthermore, Creswell & Poth (2018) posit that, when thinking about data collection, the researcher has to anticipate ethical issues involved in not just gaining permission, but also implementing a good qualitative sampling strategy, recording information, responding to issues arising in the field and ensuring secure data storage.

The sites were selected based on the fact that I, the researcher, had a personal interest in them. I have worked at former model C schools, where English was the language of teaching and learning and African learners from peri-urban areas did not do well, as the language of instruction was a second or maybe even their third language.

In order to focus on the participants' perspective, opinions and experiences with regards to language development practices, multiple methods of data collection were used over the course of this study, including observations, field notes, interviews, casual conversations and document sourcing.

1.9.1 Observation

According to Creswell & Poth (2018), observation is one of the key tools for collecting data in qualitative research. Observations on site, meant to familiarise the researcher with the topic, and to document current practices, further ensured that the spirit of qualitative research was embraced, given the manner in which it complimented this particular project.

To gain first-hand experience of the current practices as far as language development is concerned in peri urban ECE centres, a period of two months was spent in the field. At first, limited participant observation was utilized in order to obtain acceptance of the researcher's unobtrusive presence (MacMillan and Schumacher, 2010). I had casual conversations with people and comprehensive field notes were documented during such conversations. Again, this was done while following the Covid-19 safety guidelines.

1.9.2 Semi-structured interviews

An interview is regarded as a social interaction based on a conversation where "knowledge is constructed in the interaction between the interviewer and interviewee" (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015). One-on-one interviews were conducted with ECE practitioners who were identified with the help of their principals. The study employed

the use of in-depth interviews, as described by Macmillan & Schumacher (2010), the emphasis being on open-response questions to obtain data of participant meanings – how individuals conceive of their world and how they explain and make sense of important events in their lives. During the interviews, questions which arose as events happened were entertained and field notes were taken, which formed part of the casual conversation data. Both researcher and participants kept their masks on and observed social distancing at all times. With permission being obtained, all interviews were recorded and the recordings were then transcribed verbatim.

1.9.3 Document sourcing and visual data

Official documents from the identified sites – learning programmes, lesson preparations, reflection sheets and assessment records, visual data and teaching aids – were used to analyse and corroborate raw data.

1.10 Data analysis

Data analysis consists of examining, categorizing, tabulating and testing of evidence to address the initial propositions of a study. It is a process of reducing data to a story and its interpretation (Yin, 2014).

The collected data from observations, field notes, casual conversations, document and visual data and interviews was subjected to a combination of both content analysis and thematic analysis and methods. According to Leedy & Ormrod (2013), content analysis is the detailed and systematic study of a particular set of materials to find patterns, topics and biases and involves coding, categorizing, looking for recurring patterns, similarities, inconsistencies or contradictions. Archer (2018) defines thematic analysis as the process of identifying themes in the data which capture meaning that is relevant to the research question, and perhaps also to making links between such themes.

The data was analysed using the five-step approach suggested by Creswell (2013) and Creswell & Poth (2018). The five steps are discussed comprehensively in chapter 4. A coding system was developed from the data, whereby the data was divided into

parts and the parts were studied to get a sense of the whole, generate codes from the data and then compare the codes to eradicate duplication.

1.11 Trustworthiness

In a qualitative study, the researcher is the data gathering instrument. As a researcher, I "considered *dependability, credibility, transferability and confirmability* as trustworthiness criteria to ensure the rigour of qualitative findings" (Schwandt, Lincoln, & Guba, 2007). All the trustworthiness criteria are discussed comprehensively in chapter 4, section 4.9. I used the triangulation method to cross-validate among data sources, to enhance validity.

1.12 Ethical considerations

Qualitative research is more likely to be personally intrusive in nature, because it focuses primarily on human beings (MacMillan and Schumacher, 2010). Creswell & Poth (2018) point out that researchers sometimes encounter challenges with ethical issues related to participant protection from "harm and disclosure of comprehensive findings" during the data analysis and representation process. That considered, the following ethical guidelines were employed: informed consent, confidentiality and anonymity, privacy and empowerment. A permission letter obtained from the University was given to the contact persons/principals at the sites, as well as a brief written statement that specified the reasons for the study, the length of the study, information about the researcher, organizational affiliation, general uses of the data as well as an assurance of the protection of the rights of human subjects (Creswell, 2014).

An application for ethical clearance was made to the University and was granted (See appendix J). Permission was also sought from the ECE practitioners in the birth to four-year-old classrooms. Participants were made aware that, if they wished to withdraw from the study, they would be free to do so. Since the study was conducted during levels 3 and 1 of the lockdown, the University's Covid-19 guidelines were adhered to.

1.13 Explanation of terminology

Definitions of terms used in this study are as follows:

Code-switching

Code-switching is the systematic alternate use of two or more languages in a single utterance or conversational exchange for communicative purposes (Cahyani, de Courcy & Barnett, 2016). In this context of this study, code-switching is to be understood as teachers switching between one or more African languages and English, which is the medium of instruction, to ensure that the children understand the instruction or content being taught (Daries, 2017).

Early childhood development (ECD)

According to chapter 6, section 91(1) of the Children's Act of 2005, early childhood development (ECD) is the process of emotional, cognitive, sensory, spiritual, moral, physical, social and communication development from birth to school-going age. This term will be used interchangeably with early childhood care and education (ECCE), as well as early childhood education (ECE).

Early childhood development sites

These are the places where children go to be provided with the services mentioned above. They are referred to as preschools, crèches and nurseries.

Language development

I define language development as a process of children moving from knowing the basic structures of a language to acquiring more advanced language skills, through the assistance of an adult (Vygotsky, 1978).

Practitioner

A person who is working in the ECD sector is interchangeably referred to as a practitioner, educator or teacher (Modise, 2019).

Pre-schooler

This refers to children in the birth-to-four age group.

Support

I define support as assistance given, and in this study, it is to be understood as the assistance provided by practitioners in the development of language of the children in their care.

Translanguaging

According to Hornberger & Link (2012), translanguaging can be defined as a purposeful pedagogical alternation of languages in spoken and written, receptive and productive modes. It is the mixed and alternate use of languages valorising speakers' complex linguistic repertoires that embed and interweave languages into one another (Makalela, 2015).

1.14 Chapter division

Chapter 1: Introduction and background to the study

In this chapter, a general introduction and an orientation to the study is provided. A problem statement is given and a further discussion of the aims and objectives, as well as the rationale for the study is provided. The theoretical framework and research methodology are also provided.

Chapter 2: Literature review

Chapter 2 gives an in-depth description of the contextual literature that is important for this study. The purpose of this chapter is to orientate the reader to ECD and its importance and also to account for the various aspects of the support of language development.

Chapter 3: Theoretical framework

This chapter provides a framework based on a collection of theories that underpin the study and are relevant to language development in ECE.

Chapter 4: Research methodology

In this chapter, a detailed description of the research methodology of this study is provided. It describes the research design and research methods while addressing

trustworthiness and taking into consideration ethical considerations that are relevant to the empirical nature of the study.

Chapter 5: Data analysis and interpretation

This chapter gives an in-depth analysis of the data that was obtained from the observations, field notes, casual conversations, documents and visual materials and interviews. The data is presented for the three cases that were studied.

Chapter 6: Discussion of findings, implications, suggestions for future research and reflections

This chapter completes the study with a summary of key findings from the literature and empirical data. Research conclusions answer the research questions. Recommendations and suggestions on the implications of the study for policy and practice in the development of language in ECE are offered. The chapter concludes with reflections on the limitations of the study, as well as suggestions on future research.

1.15 Conclusion

"Without language, one cannot talk to people and understand them; one cannot share their hopes and aspirations, grasp their history, appreciate their poetry or savour their song" (Nelson Mandela, 1992). This study considers the vital topic of language, as the issue of language has been a bone of contention in South Africa for the longest time. In this chapter, the introduction and background to the study were presented. The research problem as well as the rationale behind the study were explained. Furthermore, the aims and objectives of the study, theoretical framework and research methodology used in this study were highlighted. Finally, the chapter division of the thesis was highlighted. In the next chapter, a detailed discussion of the literature on the importance of language development in early childhood education is provided.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

"Language is a political institution: those who are wise in its ways, capable of using it to shape and serve important personal and social goals, will be the ones who are "empowered"…, able, that is, not merely to participate effectively in the world, but able also to act upon it in the sense that they can strive for significant social change."

Halliday (1989)

2.1 Introduction

The study of language development provides vital information for educators because language is an important medium in which to exchange information with children. According to Hélot & Rubio (2013), young children attending preschool are at a crucial stage of language acquisition and teachers have a significant role to play in the development of the linguistic competence of children in early childhood education.

The purpose of this chapter is to review literature on practitioners' support of language development in the early years. In this chapter, I provide a review of the existing literature on language development support given to children in the early years. The literature was drawn from ECCE academic writings, policies, as well as briefs. This chapter will start with a brief history of language issues in South Africa, which is amongst the reasons why I chose to undertake this study.

The chapter then explains the concepts of language development and acquisition from different perspectives. It also examines ECCE practices regarding support of language development in the early years. The next section is a brief discussion of the historical language problems in South Africa, as well as the current state of affairs.

2.2 Language history in South Africa

South Africa has a history of overt racial and ethnic segregation that was based on perceived language differences (Nkadimeng & Makalela, 2015). It is therefore close to impossible to have a language discussion without addressing this part of our history and the impact it still has in present day South Africa. Under the apartheid regime, that is, pre-1994, South African indigenous languages were relegated to a lower status, while Afrikaans and English were elevated to a higher status. The same government also extended the use of Afrikaans as a medium of instruction in township and rural schools as yet another weapon to further an agenda of linguistic discrimination (Tshotsho, 2013; Makalela, 2014). This linguistic discrimination, together with subsequent labour migration from the Southern African Development Community (SADC) countries and between the provinces over the last 27 years, has shaped the current state of multilingualism that South Africa is witnessing. Preschools sprung up in peri-urban areas because of parents having to go to work and needing to have caregivers watch their children. As stated above, because of the movement of families from other provinces and neighbouring countries, more diverse languages were introduced into the melting pot of South African indigenous languages. Languages such as Shona are now widely spoken in townships and have added to the diverse nature of languages spoken in South Africa. Following is a discussion of what is currently happening in educational spaces, specifically in early childhood education, with regards to language matters.

2.2.1 Current state of affairs

In present day South Africa, schools and ECCE centres have become more diverse in terms of their social, racial, linguistic, cultural and religious make-up. The practitioners and parents also come from diverse cultural backgrounds. There has also been calls for ECCE leaders to be considerate of the above facts when planning programmes. According to the National Child Care Strategy (NCCS), leaders in the ECCE sector are required to provide guidance and support to ensure a shared commitment by ECCE practitioners towards anti-discrimination practices, a major focus of which is linguistic discrimination (Modise, 2019).

Furthermore, the strategy states that ECCE services need to be sensitive to the cultural and linguistic needs of migrant children as well. This current state of affairs has meant that practitioners have had to come up with creative ways of teaching and communicating, as a means of accommodating the multi-linguistic children in their care. This is done by foregrounding English, as the language that is supposedly universal. According to Daries (2017), in instances where children attend English classes and come from multilingual backgrounds, research has shown that teachers will accommodate children's home languages by switching between two or more languages. This is referred to by Daries as code switching – a process whereby teachers switch between one or more African languages and English, which is the medium of instruction, to ensure that the children understand the instruction or content being taught. Teachers and practitioners have been known to use such translanguaging strategies in their practices. Following is an elaboration on translanguaging and how practitioners apply it in their teaching.

2.2.2 Translanguaging

Makalela (2015) posits that the unprecedented rise in mixed marriages, virtual spaces, and transnational and translocal movement among people has affected ways in which people communicate, and boundaries between languages are fading. People tend to mix languages for the sake of communicating messages and that has resulted in translanguaging. According to Hornberger & Link (2012), translanguaging can be defined as a purposeful pedagogical alternation of languages in spoken and written, receptive and productive modes.

Duarte (2020:1) states that, "in the context of multilingual education, translanguaging has been put forward as a means of including several languages in education". According to Makalela (2014), even though there has been an increase in the body of research on translanguaging recently, most of these studies are focused on translanguaging successes in classrooms that are restricted to only two languages.

However, according to Cenoz & Gorter (2015), multilingual education is when two or more languages are used in education, given that schools aim at multilingualism and multi-literacy. This is a more applicable definition in the South African context, since,

in the preschools in this study, at least five languages are spoken by both the children and practitioners.

In a study on translanguaging at preschool level, Duarte (2020) found that, in Luxembourg, which is a trilingual country with many Portuguese immigrants, preschool education is from birth to six years of age and it is done in Luxembourgish, and then children are alphabetized in German, with the gradual addition of French as a school subject. Furthermore, the findings were that the ministry of education in Luxembourg included Portuguese in preschool education to accommodate the children of the immigrants. They did this by using the competence in the family language as a resource to learn Luxembourgish by exploring connections between languages, which is very similar to the funds of knowledge (FoK) approach.

According to Makalela (2014), South African students who are from linguistically hybrid townships where at least four identifiable languages are spoken, are prone to being educationally disadvantaged because they cannot be compartmentalized by schools who follow a monolingual approach. Furthermore, these students are seen to be defying traditional labels such as 'mother tongue' as they are able to use languages flexibly across a wide range of language clusters. In the preschools under study, many of the children speak at least three of the five or six languages (if you include foreign languages such as Shona) spoken across the sites.
Language is also known as the building block for all higher cognitive processes (Perez-Felkener, 2013 & Sadia, 2016) and practitioners would be wise to exploit the opportunity presented by the children's multilinguistic abilities by supporting the development of all these languages, the end result of which will be rich cultural and linguistic capital (Bourdieu, 1991). This, however, requires certain linguistic competencies from the practitioners. In another study, Makalela (2015) investigated the success of a teacher preparation programme which introduced teaching African languages to speakers of other African languages so as to produce multi-competent and multi-vocal teachers. This was done with a group of pre-service teachers in their second year of a four-year Bachelor of Education (BEd) programme. The findings were that the use of translanguaging approaches "disorganized ethno-linguistic divisions and separatist ideologies of the past, liberates languages that were historically excluded and affirms the fluid linguistic identities of multilingual speakers" (Makalela,

2015: 128). Furthermore, the results showed that translanguaging builds the multi-vocal competencies of teachers, which are needed for South Africa, it being a linguistically diverse country (Makalela, 2015).

Having provided the historical background and current state of affairs in matters of language in early childhood settings, including translanguaging and its place in early childhood classrooms, I proceed on to the next section, which is on the different definitions of language.

2.3 What is language?

Language is such a complex phenomenon that different scholars and linguists have not come up with a single, “cast in stone” definition of it. This study, however, attempted to put together the different definitions of language by different scholars and linguists. Both early and modern-day definitions of language were interrogated.

Aristotle (384 BC) defined language as a speech sound produced by human beings to express their ideas, emotions, thoughts, desires and feelings. Chomsky (1957) defined language as “a set (finite or infinite) of sentences, each finite”. Wardhaugh (2006) provides a concise definition of language by simply stating that it is what members of a particular society speak.

According to Hammarstrom (2016), human language may be defined as a human-learnable communication system with conventionalized form-meaning pairs capable of expressing the entire communicative needs of a human society. Language is a way of communicating and it helps us conduct our day-to-day lives (Macaulay, 2011).

Language is a very important communication tool that can affect a child’s intellectual development. Along with language, there is a strong need for social interaction in the development of cognition and intellect and, therefore, language becomes an important parameter for communication (Sadia, 2016).

In the indigenous languages of South Africa, the word for language is the same word used to name the body part, tongue. This is important because, as the saying goes,

the tongue is the most powerful organ in the human body, meaning, spoken words have power.

In light of all the different definitions of language above, I coined my own definition of language which denotes the importance of language, as it pertains to this study: Language is a tool with which an individual can express information, emotions, beliefs and opinions to other individuals, as well as influence the outcomes of these expressions. Following is a discussion on the importance of language for children.

2.4 The importance of language in the early years

Language is not only central to our lives, it is also a cultural tool that sets human beings apart from other species (Evans, 2014). Evans (ibid) argues that language is unlike any other cultural tool in that it is blind to demographics, socio-economics, and ethnic difference, and that all human beings are destined to acquire at least one language in their lifetime.

Even during biblical times, there are stories which were told, that highlighted the importance of language. In the book of Genesis, chapter 11, we read the story of the whole world having one language and a common speech. It is assumed that this universal language was acquired from a young age and supported through generations, by using it to communicate. The story tells of how mankind built a tower of Babel, wishing it to be so high that it reached heaven and God having to punish them by turning the one language into many different languages. Humankind was unable to communicate, and this led to confusion, which in turn led to the destruction of the tower. A hypothesis can be made that the inability to communicate was a result of the confusion caused by the lack of foundational structures of the different unknown languages.

According to Hoff (2013), young children's language competencies are important to their interpersonal and pedagogical success. She goes on to postulate that, by the time children reach the age of sixty months, they have basically mastered the sound system and grammar of their language and acquired a vocabulary of thousands of words. This study, therefore, sought to understand the success rate of practitioners in

their support of language development in peri-urban preschools, where children speak multiple languages.

As noted in the different definitions of language in the previous section, the ultimate use of language is communication, which children need for socialization, and the degree to which children learn how to participate and be accepted by society have important consequences for their development and future lives. Language is also known as the building block for all higher cognitive processes (Perez-Felkener, 2013; Sadia, 2016). The next section is a discussion of some of the functions of language.

2.5 The functions of language

In the life of human beings, language is one of the most important aspects. It is through language that we are able to interact with and understand those around us. According to Bhat (2008), language is a significant force of socialisation, an integrated unit of culture, a token of social and cultural identity, a means of communication and representation. Obiweluozo & Omotosho (2014: 147) state that "all the information a child gains, language skills acquired, and habits formed at the formative years of life frame the personality of an individual". What, then, are the functions of language in children?

2.5.1 Language as an expressive tool

McIntyre, Hellsten, Bidonde & Doi (2017) define expressive language as a child's capability to use language to convey him/herself every time he/she communicates his/her thoughts, needs and ideas to others using words, phrases, and sentences. Children generally start babbling around six months and usually use their first real word at around twelve months, but there's a wide variation on when they reach this milestone. By the time children get to twenty-four months, many of them will have between two hundred and three hundred words and by age three, the length of their sentences grows rapidly (Rahimpour, 2011). It is at this important stage of language development that the parent or caregiver and siblings can play a contributing role towards the language acquisition of the child. This is likely to happen in the context of a home, where language is tied to other practices such as culture and religion, as well

as at preschool, which is the child's first educational encounter outside of the home (Moll *et al, 1992*). The socio-cultural context is pivotal to any child's development, as they interact with adults and peers (Msila, 2011). In this study, these would be the practitioners and other preschoolers.

According to Rahimpour (2011), a child usually acquires most of the grammatical forms of its native language by age five. He continues to state that, at age four to five, a child typically uses sentences with four or more words, and they will be able to tell an adult about things that happened to them at preschool with occasional errors.

2.5.2 Language as power

"Language is power, life and the instrument of culture, the instrument of domination and liberation" (Carter, 1983: 72). Power is a notion that is broadly used for the analysis of human behaviour, including communicative behaviour. Foucault (1977), in Prados (2014), made an observation that power is situated in knowledge. For him, knowledge and power are integrated with one another. He asserts that power dons many outfits; one of them is knowledge. When children are steeped in their language, they are bound to wield a certain amount of power associated with the status of that particular language.

Effective language use gives children the power to have a say in what they want and need. If language is synonymous with power, it stands to reason that all languages, if used effectively, wield a certain amount of power. Therefore, this study focused on the development of language in peri-urban preschools in South Africa, and the capacity of language to be developed into an economic, political or educational tool.

2.5.3 Language as culture and identity

Language is the carrier that reflects our identity to others and delivers our culture (Alshammari, 2018). It is through the language or languages that children speak that they form their sense of identity, community and belonging. The way the languages that they speak are perceived also influences the way they feel about themselves. According to Amaro-Jiménez & Semingson (2011), research proposes that

capitalizing on experiences that students have accumulated from home, family, friends and community, in other words, the funds of knowledge (FoK, can assist teachers in understanding these experiences and connecting them to the classroom curriculum in practical and meaningful ways. Furthermore, they propose that, for practitioners to be able to strategically connect these experiences to their classroom practices, they (the practitioners) need to "adopt the role of a reflective practitioner who can critically reflect on what they do and identify areas of improvement" (2011: 7). FoK, is discussed comprehensively in chapter 3.

Wodak (2012) draws our attention to Bourdieu's focus on the relationship between identity and symbolic power. He points out that the value attached to speech cannot be understood or weighed apart from the speaker who is uttering it and the speaker cannot be understood apart from larger networks of social relationships, many of which are unequally structured. Language seems to have an undisputed interrelatedness with power, culture, identity and social standing. It can thus be concluded that practitioners can play a pivotal role in creating an environment conducive to language learning, where they empower and support through scaffolding, the language of the children in their care. The next section is on how children acquire and develop language.

2.6 Language acquisition and development in children

The development of language can never be detached from the holistic development of children. Studies have shown that language development has been correlated with specific changes in brain development (Rosselli, Ardila, Matute & Vélez-Uribe, 2014). Essa (2007) states that, because language is innate, it is linked to biological maturation and follows an internal clock, needing to emerge during the "critical age" for language acquisition. Essentially, language learning is better and faster in the early years of life than it is in later years. According to Hoff (2013), the course of language development is very similar across children and even across languages, which suggests that there is a universal biological basis to this human capacity.

However, the rate of development varies widely, depending both on the extent and nature of children's language experience and on children's capacity to make use of

that experience. For most children, early experiences with language occur with an adult, usually their mother or other primary caregiver. These early experiences of language development will naturally move from home to preschool, where the practitioners will then carry the process forward. Skinner (1957) argued that, grownups mould the speech of children by reinforcing the babbling sounds like words of babies.

According to Obiweluozo & Omotosho (2014), certain aspects of learning, like language learning, can only be acquired effectively during the first seven years of life. They go on to suggest that practitioners would be wise to exploit the opportunity that is presented only once in every child's life and only for a short space of time, when a child has a phenomenal ability to learn language.

According to research, there has been almost no disputing the fact that language is acquired under the direct influence of the learner's environment, since all children learn just the language they hear (Chaparro-Moreno *et al*, 2019). Omego (2014) states that language acquisition and development are dependent upon some factors such as the milieu or the type of contacts that a child has during his or her linguistic puberty. She goes on to argue that the development of language in children is sensitive to the kind of environment in which they live. The implications are that, in an environment conducive to learning, the way caretakers communicate with each other and with the children in their care can influence language learning. In the first years of life, the child benefits from interacting with a helpful and knowledgeable speaker. Where the child's linguistic skill is weak or incomplete, the practitioner can fill in, or scaffold –a term coined by Bruner in the 1980s. Fourie (2014) confirms the importance of a conducive environment to learning when she concludes that the school learning environment influences the teachers' ways of teaching, their attitudes towards teaching and learning and the learners' academic achievement.

The big debate among researchers is whether nature or nurture plays a more important role in language development in children. On the one hand, we have the nativist theorists who say that language acquisition is a result of innate knowledge that already exists in humans. Nativists also claim that the underlying principle of language is deeply rooted in the human brain and that humans are born with a language acquisition device (LAD) (Shanawaz, 2011; Chomsky, 1988). On the other hand, we

have the behaviourists, who state that language acquisition is a result of exposure to and interaction with the environment. Behaviourists argue that language is learned by association and therefore consider it as an associative process (Keating, 2012; Skinner, 1957).

However, recent research has proven that the argument is not one of nature versus nurture, but that both components are necessary for language development (Sameroff, 2010). Keating (2012) asserts that it is rather nature and nurture in concert that shape developmental pathways and outcomes. Researchers add that nature and nurture work together to determine how developing people interact with the surrounding environment. The innate knowledge of language faculty that children are born with is not enough to acquire language unless they are triggered or get input from the outside environment (Shanawaz, 2011).

2.7 Stages of language development

The development of speech and language begins when an infant can produce sounds at will through conscious effort. This kind of sound production is called *babbling,* which begins towards the end of the third month of life. Between four and twelve months, a child reaches the *reduplication* stage, whereby they repeat phonological material within a word for semantic or grammatical purposes (Franks, 2018).

What follows after reduplication is the *jargon* stage, which happens at around ten to eighteen months. At this stage of language development, a child begins to use a few recognizable words which he/she invents for himself/herself. After the jargon stage, follows the *holophrastic* stage. The holophrastic stage happens when a child is about eighteen months old and it involves the use of about twenty meaningful words and a great number of jargon words. During the holophrastic stage, the child's communication with others is limited to single word utterances (Rahimpour, 2011).

The holophrastic stage is followed by the *telegraphic* or *two-word* stage, which is compared to a telegram, because it has just enough words to make sense. During the telegraphic stage, a child begins to produce utterances that are longer than two words. These utterances appear to be "sentence-like"; they have hierarchical, constituent

structures similar to the syntactic structures found in the sentences produced by adult grammar (Hutauruk, 2015; Nordquist, 2020).

By age five, children essentially master the sound system and grammar of their language and acquire a vocabulary of thousands of words (Hoff, 2013). According to Nordquist (2020), by the age of five, most English-speaking children can actively use around 3 000 words, and more are added fast, often quite long and complex ones. However, these studies were conducted with middle class English-speaking children. It therefore stands to be tested whether the same can be said about township children growing up in underprivileged conditions.

As children grow older and out of the infancy or baby stage, the way they acquire language also evolves into what researchers have called language play and verbal humour. Kroll (2017) states that play provides opportunities for language development in children when they get involved in activities such as dialogues, negotiating the sharing of toys and fantasy play, where they talk to themselves or imaginary playmates.

Airenti (2016) proposes that humour is a form of communication that children acquire as they do all other forms of communication. According to her, developmental pragmatics assumes that children acquire speech acts, or communicative units, that initially entail only acts and subsequently include language and acts. Practitioners can use this as one of the ways to support the development of language in young children. Following is a discussion of the universality of the stages of language development.

2.8 Universal stages of language development

Hoff (2013) states that, although all normal children in normal environments acquire the language (or languages) they hear, children’s rates of development and thus skill levels at any age vary enormously, depending both on the extent and nature of children’s language experience and on children’s capacities to make use of that experience. There is no one point at which a child learns to talk. Children acquire language in stages, and different children reach the various stages at different times.

The order in which these stages are reached, however, is virtually always the same (Birner, 2017).

According to Gxilishe (2017), children learning any language progress through similar stages of development. One remarkable feature of this sequence of development is that children all over the world, regardless of the language they are learning or culture they are part of, progress through these major phases in the same order and at approximately the same ages.

Research states that children who acquire proficient use of language in the early years succeed in schooling (Hoff, 2013). The preschool is generally the first educational context that young children get into, after being home with the parents or caregivers. In the preschool setting, the practitioner and peers would be the people with whom the child engages, on a daily basis, in the chosen language of communication.

2.9 Benefits of language mastery

According to Madiba (2013), the issue of language and academic achievement has been the subject of much discussion and research in South Africa, as language and achievement have been proven to be closely linked. Awopetu (2016) confirmed that there was a direct relationship between the language of instruction used by the teacher and the pupils' learning abilities.

Mashiya (2010:21) states that, "for a child to communicate and become a fully functional being, the primary language of children should be well developed". This is where practitioners are well positioned to continue supporting the language that children would have been exposed to at home. The children have a greater chance of successful learning, since the learning is taking place in a language that they are confident expressing themselves in. According to Prinsloo & Heugh (2013), reading and academic achievement throughout formal schooling is greatly affected by language and literacy development in the early years of a child's life.

The next section is a discussion of indigenous knowledge systems and language development in the local context.

2.10 Indigenous knowledge systems (IKS) and language development in the South African context

Nomlomo & Sosibo (2016), argue that IKS have always existed in South Africa but have been invisible in education due to Eurocentric views, which perceived them as barbaric and inferior to Western knowledge. As a result, school knowledge has been perceived as the only means of education and literacy, while home literacy has been ignored or marginalised.

According to Seroto (2011), before the arrival of the Europeans in the Cape Colony in 1652 (referred to later as the pre-colonial period) children of indigenous peoples learned in different ways. In the early years of childhood, the child's education was largely in the hands of the biological mother and the community, which assumed a greater role as the child approached adolescence. Language was learned mainly from the mother and the extended family. For the most part, language learning happened orally through folklore like folktales, songs, rhymes, riddles, proverbs, legends and myths, which were of cultural, educational and entertainment value (Letsekha, Wiebesiek-Pienaar & Meyiwa, 2013).

My personal experience growing up in a rural area in the Mpumalanga province, South Africa, was of living in an extended family context. This means I had older siblings and cousins looking after me and my younger nieces and nephews. Grandparents and aunts and uncles were also part of what I will refer to as role players in my language education. For entertainment, they would tell *izinganekwane* (folktales), around the fire in the evenings before bedtime. Before they could tell us more *izinganekwane* the following evening, they would ask that we retell the folktale from the previous evening in detail, which was a way of teaching us recall skills.

All the interactions were in isiSwati, the language I was eventually taught in when I started school. As already pointed out in paragraph 1.6 of chapter 1, I, together with other schoolmates, excelled the most in the home language, as it was the language we already knew and were confident in. The teaching and learning of language through IKS yielded positive results in my experience, and the next section will be a

discussion on whether IKS have a role to play in contemporary early childhood contexts.

2.11 IKS strategies and their place in the modern-day early childhood classroom

The focus of this study is practitioners' support of language development of children in the birth-to-four age group. In this age group, most of what the children are learning is still delivered orally by the practitioners. As indicated earlier, IKS are highly reliant on oral transmission. Following is a discussion of some of these strategies.

2.11.1 Folktales

Folktales are stories passed down orally through the generations, including fairy tales, fables, and trickster tales (Folk Tales: Definition, Characteristics, Types & Examples, 2015).

Folktales are interactive as they involve a performer and an audience who interact in a specific context. They are multi-voice discourses which lay a good foundation for reading, writing, creative thinking, meaning-making and expression of voice, which are important literacy elements. They also instil important values such as appreciation, empathy and understanding as children construct meaning from the stories. In the preschool classroom, these values could be enhanced through discussion, responding to reading activities, repetition, analysing the structure of the story, problem-solving, role playing, evaluating and summarising stories (Ntuli, 2013; Sivasubramaniam 2013). According to Mweli (2018), the reason for telling stories is to equip siblings with skills and behaviours needed to survive and to sustain their lives within their environment. In the preschool context, the incorporation of storytelling into classroom learning and teaching is of great importance and an asset for promoting deep learning and development of language.

2.11.2 Traditional songs

According to Kalinde & Vermeulen (2016), music and language are cultural phenomena that share a communication role in human life. They go on to assert that

children’s active participation in music activities, acquired in their own culture through the processes of enculturation and socialisation from family, friends, and the larger community, play a role in language acquisition.

One of the main characteristics of songs is repetition. According to Cotton (2011), songs commonly contain recurring, predictable and memorable structures that are useful in fostering language acquisition and developing literacy skills. Cotton goes on to say that singing songs provides a unique mode of language immersion, as it involves repetitious language practice without feeling laborious. This translates into children developing language in a fun and an informal way. Children are exposed to singing long before they are born. It starts when the mother is pregnant, when feeding the baby, when lulling the child to sleep and during nappy changing (Partanen, Kujala, Tervaniemi, & Huotilainen, 2013). Music and dance are part and parcel of black African culture.

Mkhombo (2019) explains that, if education is to be effective, it must not be separated from a child’s real life and that the curriculum must reflect both the real-life situation and be child-centred at the same time. For children in the birth-to-four age group, the common practices that reinforce language development would include practitioners telling folktales that involve songs and encouraging the pre-schoolers to join in singing along repetitive verses in the stories. Practitioners can also teach nursery rhymes to the children.

Mkhombo (2019) posits that the singing of African indigenous music does not only encourage children to appreciate and uphold the values of black consciousness but also helps them stand on their own and not feel inferior to anyone. It builds self-identity, which is crucial to appreciating one’s own language.

2.11.3 Playing indigenous games

According to the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) (2018), play is one of the most important ways in which young children gain essential knowledge and skills. The use of indigenous games promotes critical thinking, mathematical skills, physical development, healthy living and command of the

indigenous language (Mweli, 2018). This can be in the form of *Diketo* and *Morababa* which involves mathematical skills such as counting, and *Khathu,* which involves running and dodging a ball while stacking cans.

Looking at the IKS strategies above, one can conclude that they worked in the past, and they can work in the present and still have relevance in the modern-day preschool classroom. Both Ntuli (2013) and Sivasubramaniam (2013) assert that, educationally, folktales and traditional songs which form part of folklore and IKS are important tools of language and literacy teaching and learning. They go on to state that folktales, in particular, form part of storytelling, which is an important aspect of literacy development, arousing learners' curiosity and critical thinking, and that they are important components of transformative teaching (instead of transmission teaching) which entails collaboration and active participation by learners.

My study sought to find out what the perceptions of early childhood education practitioners' support of language development were, and whether and how they use IKS strategies to supplement their current classroom practices of language development. The following section discusses current practices in peri-urban homes and early childhood centres, and the effects these have on children's language development.

2.12 Language practices in peri-urban South African homes and early childhood centres and how they affect children's language development

2.12.1 The home front

Msila & Gumbo (2017) assert that both fathers and mothers play a crucial role in language development when children are very young and acquiring cognitive, language and social skills that support later development. They go on to state that parent language input is crucial, and that parents should engage young children in dialogue, promote talkativeness and provide specific language stimulation and feedback. Having been raised in the peri-urban areas of South Africa myself, I can attest to the fact that parents in those homes interact and communicate with young children in one or two African languages. In some instances, one or both languages

of communication in these homes is not even necessarily either of the parents' language, but a common language of the neighbourhood called *ulimi lwesigodi*. *Ulimi lwesigodi* is a language or dialect spoken in a particular area. As stated earlier, township children develop multilingualism at an early age as a result of these interactions during play.

Gumbo (2017) contends that sometimes two languages are used in a home, and, as a result, people become bilingual from birth, which is known as native bilingualism. I also have personal experience of native bilingualism, having been born and raised by a Swazi father and a Tsonga mother. The two languages I grew up speaking were isiSwati and isiZulu. My teachers at school happened to be Swazi and the language of teaching and learning was isiSwati. As I had already acquired the foundations of the isiSwati language at home, I did not experience any barriers to my learning. As a matter of fact, even when the family had to move from the village to a township where the language of learning and teaching was isiZulu, I was able to learn successfully because of the strong foundations of my home language. However, I never learnt my mother's language, Xitsonga because it was not commonly spoken in the neighbourhood.

2.12.2 The ECCE front

According to the Language in Education Policy (LiEP) (1997), parents have the right to choose the language medium through which they want their children to be taught, but that is geared towards formal schooling, from grade R to grade 3. There are policies such as the National Early Learning and Development Standards and the National Curriculum Framework (NCF), which stipulate that pre-schoolers should be taught in their home language.

Alexander (2009) asserts that, in early childhood, effective teaching begins with and builds on what children already know and can do, which presumably is the child's home language. However, there are obstacles to implementing home language instruction in some preschools in South Africa. Practitioners are being pressured by parents to speak and teach their children in English, even when the majority of, if not all the learners, speak African languages. This is because of the historic economic and social advantage or status given to English and its speakers. Some of the reasons

behind this is the fact that many preschools are regarded as businesses, and in order not to lose business to other preschools, they have to succumb to the pressure from the parents.

Another factor lies with the practitioners themselves, choosing to opt for code-switching and translanguaging and using English as a language of communication, because of the multilingual nature of the children in their care, as discussed in section 2.2.2 earlier. These practitioners also do not see the importance or benefits attached to home language teaching in the early years, as they have hardly any resources in the home language (Alexander, 2005).

Literature is clear on the discord that exists between parental influence, the child's immediate environment (home and community), the language of teaching and learning and communication in ECE centres, bilingualism and the practitioners' language knowledge or competencies (Msila, 2011). As mentioned in paragraph 2.9 above, research has proven that children learn better in the language best known to them.

This therefore means parental attitudes towards language development play a vital role, and practitioners need to acknowledge and support the development of language in their classroom practices. One way this can be achieved is to look to other countries for examples of success stories in implementing language development in their preschools and applying what is applicable to our context.

2.13 Language development in other countries

According to UNICEF (2007), different countries have different preprimary schooling. Several countries have strong programmes which share characteristics such as supporting parents from as early as when the child is born, nutrition and health services that are integrated with educational activities and easing children's transition from home to school. South Africa holds its own in this regard, with the introduction of the National Integrated Early Childhood Development Policy (NIECDP) (2015), which contains elements similar to those mentioned above.

It is the integration of educational activities, with a particular focus on language development that is the focus of this section. This section will find out how the

acquisition and development of language in children in the early childhood educational space take place in different countries. This section will also interrogate how practitioners take cognisance of the experiences children have at home and how these foundations are used to build children's linguistic capabilities.

2.13.1 Developed countries

Finland

According to Nuolijärvi (2011), the Finnish National Curriculum Guidelines on Early Childhood Education and Care states that, although the primary responsibility for retaining and developing a child's own language and culture rests with the family, early childhood centres together with the parents, draw up plans to support children's mother tongue development. In Finland, they have what they call language nests. A language nest, as defined by Olthuis, Kivelä & Skutnabb-Kangas (2013), is an early childhood day care/nursery/crèche/kindergarten/preschool arrangement for children from birth to school going age. They go on to explain that these language nests are used by indigenous peoples, and allow for fluent elders to support the staff who are not necessarily fluent in the indigenous language. At these language nests, only the indigenous language is spoken, so as to help with revitalizing that language. As stated above, these language nests are for children from birth to school going age.

Singapore

In 1965, when Singapore obtained full independence, new policies were put in place and amongst them, the bilingual education policy was implemented. According to the Ministry of Education in Singapore, the bilingual policy is the cornerstone of their education system and it requires all students to study the English language and their home language. Singapore believes that the early years are the best years to introduce the learning of language because children are able to learn a language with greater ease at a younger age (Singapore Ministry of Education, 2006). According to Curdt-Christiansen & Sun (2016), bilingual education starts in preschool, which caters for children aged two months to school going age. Furthermore, the preschools can

decide on the curriculum and number of hours afforded to English and mother tongues, and some of the materials for the mother tongues is imported directly from native-speaking countries such as Chinese storybooks published in mainland China.

France

According to Caporal-Ebersold (2018), France is faced with the same reality as that of the rest of Europe, that is, the reality of diversity and migration which includes the ECCE sector. Linguistic and cultural diversity was recognized in 2002, but it was not until the ministerial curriculum for preschool education was published in 2015 that concrete pedagogical approaches were mentioned to raise awareness of linguistic diversity.

Furthermore, Caporal-Ebersold (2018) states that, in the constitution of the country, French is regarded as the language of the republic but there is provision for learning other languages, starting in preschool. Even though France has decided to take the route of bilingualism and multilingualism, some preschool children are still disadvantaged because for children whose home language is not French, the teacher's interactions with them are poor compared to children whose home languages include French. This is the case for children whose dominant home language is Turkish. Meanwhile, adult interaction in the classroom with children whose home languages include French with Turkish are richer (Hélot & Fialais, 2014).

2.13.2 Sub-Saharan countries

Ethiopia

According to Teshome (2007), Ethiopia is the only country in Africa to offer the option of up to eight years of mother tongue medium instruction. Further studies conducted in the country have shown that "mother tongue-based instruction has had a positive effect at all levels of schooling and has increased the percentage of the sample completing six years or more of schooling, by 12 per cent" (Ramachandran, 2012: 108). According to him, this is made possible by having in place systems such as a three-year programme of teacher training, community reading activities, and age

appropriate local-language materials to support emergent literacy skills among early grade children. In a study conducted by Heugh, Benson, Bogale, & Yohannes (2007), Ethiopian educators agree to the use of mother tongue teaching up to the end of primary schooling, to enhance understanding of content.

However, in a study conducted by Fadila (2020) in Ethiopia, the evidence was that communities do not support early learning and teachers do not agree that learning happens before four/five years, and it seems there was little to no attention placed on children from birth to four years old. This means that students are not exposed to formal early learning until they go to preschool at age four, and the language policy is lost in that the teachers in the classrooms for four- and five-year-old children used Amharic and English. The assumption would be that the children are first exposed to one language at home, and when they come to preschool they are then exposed to another language. The implication is that teachers then develop both Amharic and English rather than only one of the languages.

Nigeria

According to Obiweluozo & Omotosho (2014), Nigeria's National Policy on Education (FRN, 2004) recommends that the mode of language transmission at pre-primary school level be the mother tongue or the language of the immediate environment for its cognitive, social and emotional advantages. The policy states that it is better to use the mother tongue or local language since it helps the child learn better as he/she can move readily and connect with things and expressions he/she is familiar with (Ugwu, 2010).

In their research called "Strategies for enhancing language development as a necessary foundation for early childhood", Obiweluozo & Omotoso (2014), found that at Nigerian preschools for children from birth to four years old, there was an inadequate number of language specialist teachers, as well as undesirable language models, in that the teachers had no firm grasp of the English language. Furthermore, they recommended that teaching children should be started early with the home/native language which should be followed immediately with the official language and other languages within the linguistic community of the child.

The following section is on language policies in South Africa and how they apply to the ECCE sector.

2.14 The language policy landscape in South Africa and its relevance for children in the birth-to-four age group

South Africa has a few language policies in place, of which only three are of interest to this study. However, there are currently two language policies that are specifically geared toward the birth-to-four age group, within which the focus of the study is located. The two policies are the National Early Learning and Development Standards (NELDS) and the National Curriculum Framework (NCF). Following is a discussion of NELDS, NCF and LiEP, the Language in Education Policy.

2.14.1 The National Early Learning and Development Standards (NELDS)

The National Early Learning and Development Standards (NELDS) is a curriculum-related policy initiative focusing primarily on the early learning needs of children from birth to four years old. Amongst the envisaged approaches this policy aims to implement, is children's language and communication learning (DBE, 2009).

Although there are no exhaustive and specific guidelines on the development of language, NELDS offers some strategies for adults to use when teaching the birth-to-four age group of pre-schoolers language. The policy states that practitioners need to support children in their mother tongue, because when children have a firm grounding in the mother tongue, it becomes easier for them to learn new languages and concepts (DBE, 2009).

2.14.2 The National Curriculum Framework (NCF)

The National Curriculum Framework (NCF) (DBE, 2015) is aimed at improving the quality of basic education by laying a solid foundation in the early years, specifically the birth-to-four age group. Two out of the nine key ideas shaping the NCF that are relevant for this study are language and indigenous and local knowledge, skills and

behaviours. The curriculum framework promotes the use of indigenous and local knowledge and practices applicable to babies, toddlers and young children which supports their development and learning. It also states that all children need to hear and learn to speak in their mother tongue. If they have a solid foundation in their mother tongue, they will find it easier to learn another language as they will have already found out how language is constructed and how to communicate with others. This will help them if they are cared for in a place where more than one language is spoken (DBE, 2015). In the same way that the NELDS offer strategies for adults to support children's language learning and development, the NCF offers examples of developmental guidelines with suggestions for support from adults. The NCF places strong emphasis on the design of programmes and activities for children and their families according to indigenous, local and traditional knowledge, skills and behaviours which enhance children's development and learning.

2.14.3 The Language in Education Policy (LiEP)

The Language in Education Policy (LiEP) (1997) is a guideline for how languages should be used in schools in South Africa. The policy recognises the multiplicity of languages (that is, languages as referred to in the Constitution of South Africa, 1996) used in South Africa and gives recognition to the use of each of them in schools. However, this policy is geared towards primary and secondary schooling. Even though nothing is said on the language rights of pre-schoolers, particularly the birth-to-four age group, this policy is important to this study in that, combined with the NELDS and NCF as launch pads, it can be interpreted so as to be applicable to the pre-primary education sector as well. Practitioners would need to interpret and implement it in the same way that educators in the formal years (grades R to 3) are doing.

Having interrogated the three policies, one important factor is clear: in a sea of language policies in South Africa, the NELDS and NCF are the only two that are specifically applicable to the ECCE sector. However, it should also be pointed out that both the policies come out sounding more like suggestions or guidelines instead of policies to be implemented. This is because of the nature of ECCE not falling under the auspices of formal education, meaning that the sector is not regulated or bound by many laws, as it is privately owned. Therefore, more research needs to be done in

order to come up with a proper, clearly stated early childhood education language policy that practitioners have to implement in line with the recommendation by Lafon (2009: 20), to “Impose and monitor a pro-mother-tongue language policy in crèches and pre-primary schools”. This would not be a difficult task to take on, since both the policies above link and flow into the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS), which stipulates the specifics of the language policy for learners from grade R to grade 3.

2.15 Language policies and their pertinence to practitioner qualifications

According to Biersteker, Dawes, Hendricks & Tredoux (2016), between 1994 and 2013 a number of policies and plans have been piloted towards the expansion of ECCE services. Presently, South Africa’s concern is both professionalisation of and professionalism in the ECD field, as many teachers in the ECD sector hold minimum teacher qualifications at level 4 and 5 on the NQF (Daries, 2015; RSA DHET, 2011).

The first Policy on Minimum Requirements for Programmes leading to Qualification in Higher Education in ECCE (the birth-to-four age group) for teachers is opening pathways to further qualifications (RSA DHET, 2016). The policy pathways start with diplomas in ECD and continues with higher degrees which can be obtained from universities and colleges across SA. This will go a long way towards producing quality early childhood education practitioners, whose focus will be on “improved provision of educational activities, scaffolding of learning, and attention to language stimulation of young children” (Biersteker *et al,* 2016:342). The next section is a discussion of the possibility of different stakeholders coming together as a possible solution to the language development conundrum in the birth-to-four age group classrooms.

2.16 Synergy between the Department of Basic Education, the ECCE sector and non-government organizations as a possible solution

According to Modise (2019), practitioners in early childhood classrooms are in need of enormous support to function in multicultural, and therefore multilingual classrooms on a daily basis. She goes on to state that, because South Africa has 11 official

languages, practitioners are “confronted with the realities of understanding and communicating with learners of diverse languages in class” (Modise, 2019: 198). As stated in section 2.14, of the three language policies discussed, LiEP is directed towards formal schooling, and the NCF and NELDS are guidelines rather than laws that have to be enforced and the sector under this study is not regulated by any formal body per se.

This, therefore, calls for a collaboration that includes, among other stakeholders, the DBE, non-government organizations (NGOs) that have been providing support to ECCE centres for a long time. Take for instance Ilifa Labantwana that has been providing support and language development resources to practitioners in as many as six different languages (South African Early Childhood Review, 2017). The Lego Foundation has also been instrumental in assisting preschools with resources in South African languages in the form of the Nali’bali books, stories and rhymes, available in eight local language combinations.

This collaboration will help, especially in the case of practitioners who might not have the means to go back to school for upskilling, or have no inclination because they feel they are too old to be worrying about learning new ways of supporting the language development of children in their care.

2.17 Conclusion

The literature consulted clearly indicates that children learn through imitating the actions of adults around them. As Skinner (1957) argues, adults shape the speech of children by reinforcing the babbling of infants that sounds like words. With the correct language development practices, practitioners are best positioned to support the learning of language at the very early stages of the child’s development. Researchers argue that government should match policies with action in order to address some of the challenges children face in language development at the early childhood level (Storkbeck & Moodley, 2011; Daries, 2017).

Stroud (2018) states that language may be used as a mechanism by which speakers and communities are disadvantaged and disempowered. This statement is very true

of the indigenous languages in South Africa, both historically and currently. In order to change the narrative, he argues that language should be used to empower by serving as capital for individuals to establish and change social and personal identities and by granting access to crucial socio-economic and political platforms. The focus of this study is to explore the perceptions held by ECCE practitioners regarding the support of language development. The information gleaned from the literature reviewed will help put into practice what many research studies have concluded, that is, language and achievement are closely linked, and children learn better if the instruction is in a language that is familiar to them.

Countries where the students' first language is the language of instruction are likely to achieve the goal of education for all (Ball, 2014). This can be ensured by putting in place and implementing policies that support home language instruction in ECCE centres in South Africa. The implications for practitioners are that they need to rise to the occasion and support the development of language in their preschool classrooms. In 2018, at an Education Indaba in Pretoria, the South African Democratic Teachers' Union (SADTU), a trade union, asked for more funding to be directed towards the development of teaching in mother tongue languages at schools to improve education in South Africa, more so in early childhood education. SADTU suggested that South Africa look to countries such as Singapore and Cambodia, who are doing well in education because they prioritize teaching learners in their mother tongue (SowetanLIVE, August 2018).

This chapter highlighted the relationship between language mastery and achievement. Furthermore, it highlighted the importance of developing the language of children while they are still young and their brains malleable, and the important role that practitioners can play towards supporting the development of language. The next chapter focuses on the theoretical framework chosen to underpin this study.

CHAPTER THREE

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

“To learn a language is to have one more window from which to look at the world.”

Chinese proverb

3.1 Introduction

Chapter two provided a review of literature on early childhood care and education (ECCE)practitioners’ support of language development in the early years. The chapter also gave a review of the existing literature on language development support given to children from birth to four years old. The literature reviewed was drawn from ECCE academic writings and briefs. ECCE policies regarding language support in the early years were also examined. The aim of this chapter is to present the theoretical framework that underpins the phenomenon at the core of this study, which is practitioners’ support of language development in peri-urban preschools.

A theoretical framework provides structure to define how you will philosophically, epistemologically, methodologically, and analytically approach the dissertation as a whole. It serves several purposes, such as to inform the problem you have identified, the purpose and significance of your research, and demonstrating how your research fits with what is already known or its relationship to existing theory and research (Lysaght, 2011; Heale & Noble, 2019).

According to Grant & Osanloo (2014:13), a theoretical framework is one of the most important aspects of the research process. It is the foundation from which all knowledge for a research study is constructed (metaphorically and literally). They go on to use the metaphor of a theoretical framework being the “blueprint of a house” for the entire dissertation inquiry, and how its main purpose is to serve as a guide that supports the study and on which the study is built.

This chapter provides a framework based on a collection of theories that underpin the study and are relevant to language development in early childhood education. In discussing, therefore, the combined framework of the study, the different theories are taken up each in turn and their relevance explored. Vygotsky's social constructivist theory, which focuses on the child's interactions with people (Charlesworth, 2016) is deliberated on.

The funds of knowledge (FoK) theory, a term which was coined by Wolf (1966), was developed by Moll, Amanti, Neff & Gonzalez (2001) and is based on Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory. FoK maintains that social interactions are the basis of all psychological phenomena and that the cultural contexts surrounding individuals determine what is learned and developed and is based on informal, every day, diverse knowledge and experiences found amongst families, teachers, children and community members.

The Bakhtinian theory of dialogism, which refers to a philosophy of language and a social theory that recognises the multiplicity of perspectives and voices, is elaborated on. Finally, Bourdieu's cultural capital theory (language and symbolic power) is interrogated. Bourdieu holds the stance that language is a powerful tool which individuals can use to influence the outcomes of their lives in a positive way. This culminates into a triangulation of the different theories.

Theoretical triangulation is the use of more than one theory or hypothesis when investigating a phenomenon. It is a means by which an alternative perspective is used to validate, extend or challenge existing findings. In theoretical triangulation, the perspectives or hypotheses used in the study may be related or may come from opposing viewpoints (Turner & Turner, 2009). Theoretical triangulation is beneficial to this study in that it looks at the research into practitioners' perceptions of supporting language development from more than one standpoint.

Finally, an explanation of the relationship between the four theories and ultimate fusion into a final framework termed socio-cultural dialogic language development theory

(SCDLD) is provided. The next section is a discussion of each theory and its relevance to the study.

3.2 The social constructivist theory of Vygotsky

The main assertion of the Vygotsky theory is that the cognitive development of children is advanced through social interaction with other people, particularly those who are more skilled (Vygotsky, 1978). In other words, Vygotsky believed that social learning comes before cognitive development, and that children actively construct knowledge. Vygotsky focuses on language because of the importance of language in learning. According to Rose, Feldman & Jankowski (2009), it has long been clear that language learning for children depends on social interactions. For the teaching and learning of language, Vygotsky's theory proposes that the importance of adults, that is, teachers, caregivers and parents' involvement and support in the development of language concepts be emphasised.

Parents and teachers have to create ample opportunities for activities through which children can learn language. For example, parents can unconsciously teach children language by talking through routines such as feeding or singing nursery rhymes in the home language during bath time. Practitioners can support language development by using morning circle time to talk with the children in their care, singing nursery rhymes and songs in the target language, storytelling and listening, reading books etcetera.

Vygotsky's theory focuses on social interaction between a child and her/his peers, a child and older children and a child and adults. He was interested in the way human beings learn by engaging with other human beings through language. When practitioners engage with the learners and learners engage with each other, they use words, which build up the vocabulary. Charlesworth (2016) states that Vygotsky's view on education was that it is not only central to cognitive development but that it is also the core sociocultural activity of humans. He saw the cooperative relationship between adult and child as the main part of the educational process.

Vygotsky believed that there are at least three ways in which children learn. These are, observing and then copying, listening to and carrying out instructions, as well as

working with other children or with an adult, or a combination of other children and an adult in a group (Vygotsky, 1978). In this study, the social interactions for the birth-to-four age group children would be with primary caregivers like parents and practitioners, as well as their peers. In this instance, children can learn language from parents by observing and imitating. For example, children can play house and take on different characters found in their own homes, a father, mother, sibling or grandparent. They may imitate the way these characters talk and sound. Children can also play school, where one is a practitioner and the peers are learners. They can pretend class is in session and they will likely use the words they've heard the practitioner use before, whether reading them a story, or asking them to carry out instructions. Below is a diagram showing social learning.

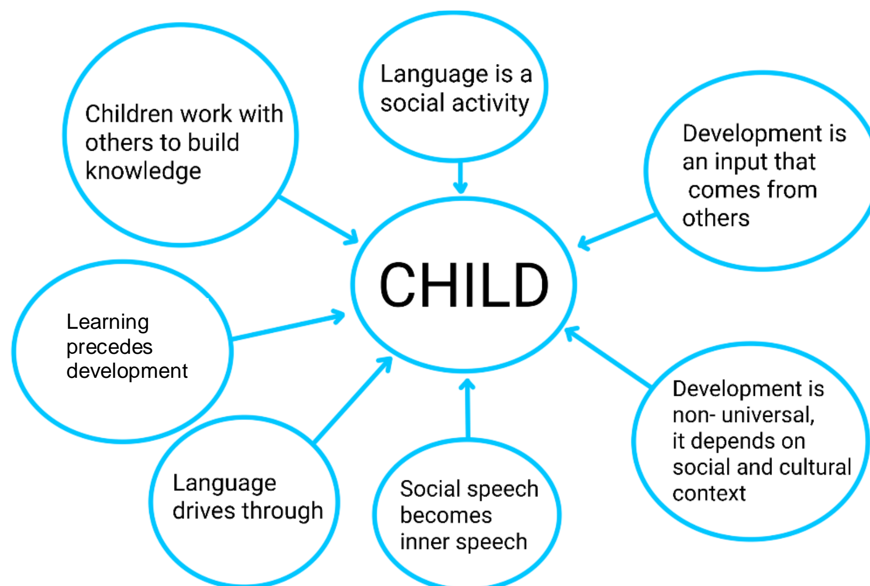


Diagram 3.1: Vygotsky's model of social learning (adapted from Muech, 2019 & Robles-Goodwin, 2018)

Vygotsky's theory on cognitive and language development has two main principles, namely, the more knowledgeable other (MKO) and the zone of proximal development (ZPD). Following is a discussion of these two main principles that underpin Vygotsky's theory and the implications they have for practitioners' support of language development of the birth to four-year-old age group of children.

3.2.1 The more knowledgeable other (MKO)

In Vygotsky's opinion, much important learning by the child occurs through social interaction with a skilful tutor. The tutor may model behaviours and/or provide verbal instructions to the child through scaffolding, which is the process of a teaching method that helps students learn more by working with a teacher or a more advanced student to achieve their learning goals (Brunner, 1976). Vygotsky refers to this as cooperative or collaborative dialogue. The child seeks to understand the actions or instructions provided by the tutor (often the parent or teacher) then internalizes the information, using it to guide or regulate their own performance (Vygotsky,1978).

Teachers have been recognised as critical agents of effective educational change. In this scenario, the ECCE practitioners would be the more knowledgeable others (MKOs) supporting the development of language of the children from birth to four years old through scaffolding. Scaffolding is a process through which a teacher supports students in order for them to learn and master tasks. An adult supports the child's learning by providing care as the child moves from the current level of development to a higher level (Vygotsky, 1978; Charlesworth, 2016).

According to Van der Stuyf (2002: 3), "caregivers help young children learn how to link old information or familiar situations with new knowledge through verbal and nonverbal communication and modelling behaviours". She posits that observational research on early childhood learning has shown that parents and other caregivers facilitate learning by providing scaffolds. For this study, an example of an activity where a practitioner would provide scaffolding would be during a storybook reading, where the practitioner will ask the children questions based on the story.

3.2.2 The zone of proximal development (ZPD)

Lev Vygotsky's theory of language development focused on social learning and the zone of proximal development (ZPD). The ZPD is a level of development obtained when children engage in social interactions with others; it is the distance between a

child's potential to learn and the actual learning that takes place (Vygotsky, 1978). This, according to Vygotsky, happens through the process of scaffolding, defined as "a process through which an adult supports a child's learning, providing support as the child moves from the current developmental level to a higher level" (Charlesworth, 2016: 639). As the learning in a preschool classroom still happens mostly orally, practitioners are presented with ample teachable moments through which they can support the language development of the learners by providing them with correct terminology, and helping them with correct vocabulary. This can happen through a variety of activities such as getting learners to act out a fable that the practitioner would have read and discussed with them earlier.

For Vygotsky, cognitive development results from an internalization of language. Adults transmit their culture's tools of intellectual adaptation that children internalize. He, therefore, sees cognitive functions, even those carried out alone, as affected by the beliefs, values, and tools of intellectual adaptation of the culture in which a person develops and therefore socio-culturally determined (McLeod, 2018). Practitioners as the knowledgeable others can also use their indigenous knowledge and skills mentioned in paragraph 2.4 of chapter 2, as tools to promote the development of language skills of children in the birth to four-year-old age group. Vygotsky's ZPD encapsulates the dialogue that ensues between the knowledgeable other and the child, for example a conversation between a parent and a child, or a shared reading activity in the classroom. According to Brannon & Dauksas (2012), parents' participation in shared storybook reading is positively related to young children's language development at four years old and it also helps with predicting language competence. The activities above result in a dialogic teaching moment in that both the child or children and more knowledgeable adult have to use language to talk about the story, which then results in improved vocabulary for the child. Below is a diagram explaining the ZPD.

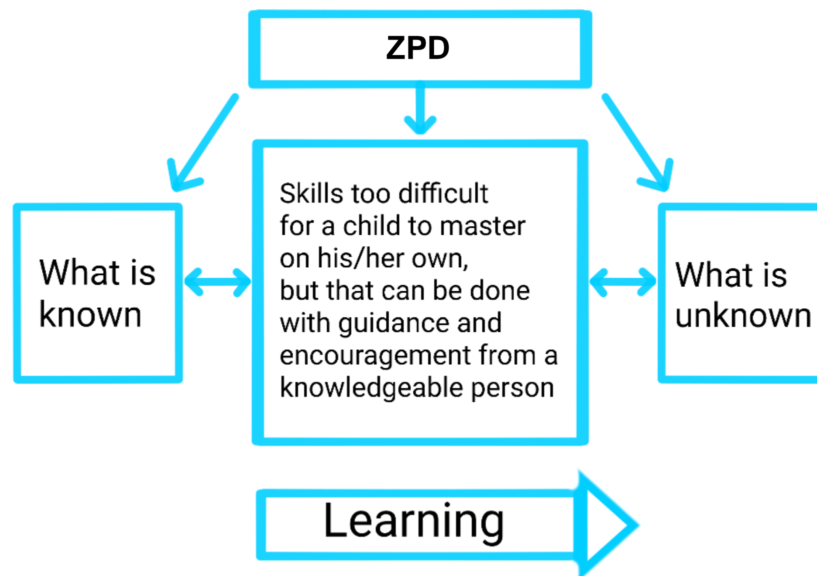


Diagram 3.2: ZPD and scaffolding (adapted from Mcleod, 2019)

3.3 Funds of knowledge (FoK) theory

Funds of knowledge (FoK), a term first coined by Wolf (1966), is based on Vygotsky's (1978) socio-cultural theory and attempts to apply his theoretical concepts to change and improve instruction. In this socio-cultural theory, Vygotsky maintains that social interactions are the basis of all psychological phenomena and that the cultural contexts surrounding individuals determine what is learned and developed. Moll, Amanti, Neff & Gonzalez (2001) state that FoK is based on informal, every day, diverse knowledge and experiences found amongst families, teachers, children and community members.

Yamauchi, Ponte, Ratliffe & Traynor (2017) assert that, following this approach, family and community members contribute knowledge, skills, artefacts, and other resources that promote children's development. According to Daries (2017), in South Africa, very little is known of ECCE practitioners' knowledge, specifically their FoK, and practice. In her study, the aim was to make a modest contribution through a mind shift towards value that practitioners can add to the education of preschool children through their FoK capitals, such as social and linguistic capitals. Daries (2017: 36) also states that FoK "celebrates the competence of what people bring to their places of work" rather than a focus on what is lacking.

In the same line of thinking, Rios-Aguilar, Kiyama, Gravitt & Moll (2011) argue that a shift in focus to children's FoK is necessary to pay attention to the assets they bring to the learning environment. These researchers note that, for teachers to enhance children's learning, they should draw from the experiences and prior background knowledge children have. Knowledge that children have accumulated in their homes with their parents, guardians, siblings, peers and community members is valuable. This can give teachers better insight into and understanding of the ways in which children's FoK and experiences can be practically and authentically connected to the classroom curriculum (Rios-Aguilar *et al*, 2011).

In this study, the transition is between home and preschool, and therefore, FoK that the children bring to the school from home can be built upon and expanded by the practitioners. This can start in a simple way, for example, when practitioners greet the children when they receive them from their parents or guardians in the morning. The greeting and exchange can be done in the target language.

In my line of work as a former preschool teacher, I have personally witnessed many tearful and frustrating moments where children refused to be left at the centre by the parents because of language barriers. You would see the child hold on to their parents' legs while screaming, and when the parents eventually managed to peel them off and leave, the child would stand alone on the playground, because they didn't speak the language of the practitioners and peers. During meetings with the parents, they would explain to the practitioners that their children get frustrated at preschool because they don't understand the language spoken and no-one understands their language either.

At another centre, in order to mitigate the frustrations caused by language barriers, the practitioners would encourage the parents to offer vocabulary words in the child's language for them to use to communicate with, and also label items in the classroom, so the child could "read" sight words written in the familiar language.

According to Modise (2019), in the Gauteng province, where the Mamelodi township is located, there is a continual influx of people from surrounding provinces, as well as immigrants from neighbouring African countries and the around the world. This is

because Gauteng is the economic hub of the country and these people come in search of jobs and a better life. Modise (2019) confirms that local, national and international migrant families have children enrolled in ECCE centres across the province. The implication is that these preschools not only have to cater for the local multilingual children, but also children of immigrants from the neighbouring countries and the world. This therefore means that practitioners need to be sensitized and have certain skill sets to be able to accommodate the diversity of the children in their care. Practitioners can gain some knowledge from the children and their families, so that they are able to meet them in the middle, so to speak. This can be achieved through FoK.

According to Hedges, Cullen & Jordan (2011), frequently, children's interests are cited as a source of early-years curricula, and yet, research hardly considers the nature of these interests beyond the play-based environment of early childhood education. Furthermore, in their study on children's FoK as a framework for the early-years curriculum in New Zealand, the findings suggested that, while the centres had warm and positive teacher-parent relationships, the teachers' recognition of and engagement with children's FoK was lukewarm in that the teachers seemed unaware of the interdependence of family and community experiences and the nature of the relationship with individual children.

However, in a study on FoK for teaching, Moll, Amanti, Neff & Gonzalez (1991) used the approach of connecting homes to classrooms, with the goal of developing innovations in teaching that would extract from the knowledge and skills found in local households for classroom instruction. During the study, it was discovered that there was much that teachers did not know about their students or families that could be immediately helpful in the classroom, but by reaching out and asking the families to come into the schools and speak to the teachers about their home experiences, while also inviting the teachers into their homes, proved to be a feasible approach. The main finding was that teachers ultimately became a bridge between the students' world, their family's FoK and the classroom experiences if they intentionally collaborated with families. It is therefore clear that both practitioners and children can benefit, through teaching and learning from each other's FoK, which could help with the transition from home to the preschool.

According to Harper (2016), transition refers to the process of change and encompasses the events and experiences that occur when a child moves from one setting to another. Harper goes on to highlight the importance of transitions for providing children with continuity. Phatudi (2007:8) states that transitions are usually stressful for the child as they require "reorganisation of both inner life and external behaviours" and can only be successful if there is a cordial relationship between the role players influencing the course the child has to navigate. In this instance, the role players would be the parents and the practitioners.

Continuity with earlier educational experiences show increased motivation, improved relationships with peers and adults, and higher achievement. According to Dockett & Perry (2014), during transition, changes are not just evident for children –families and educators also experience changes when a child or children start school. They go on to posit that "recognising, respecting and responding to cultural and linguistic diversity is one essential element of transition" and positive relationships between and among the children, families and educators are the basis for continuity of learning between home, prior to school, and school (Dockett & Perry, 2014:14).

If the children transition from home to preschool and they hear a familiar language that they speak and understand, their chances of making a smooth transition and learning better are increased. They will be able to communicate with their peers and practitioners confidently.

The FoK theory is based on the premise that all families have a wealth of knowledge and resources thanks to their socio-economic, ethnic, cultural, linguistic, or educational background. Yamauchi, Ponte, Ratliffe & Traynor (2017) and Benson (2002) argue that parents are more likely to communicate with teachers and participate in their children's learning if it is in a language that they also understand and are comfortable with. This statement means that parents can have promote language development by supporting the practitioners in continuing with what they practise at home.

In a study on sources of practitioners' FoK, Daries (2017) found that teachers were accessing their formal and informal knowledge and social capital from peer and community resources. There was collaboration and guided participation with colleagues in the school, where more knowledgeable teachers would guide the less experienced teachers through their FoK. The teachers also came from the same community where they taught, which means that "they had the FoK about children and their lives in order to help them to navigate better possibilities for early-childhood education" (Daries, 2017:100).

According to Moll (2019:131), the significance of work done around FoK has been to advance theory and methods that educators can use to document the FoK and "re-present them on the basis of the knowledge, resources and strengths they possess", therefore disputing the deficit orientations that are governing, in particular, where the education of working-class children is concerned (Kendrick & Kakuru, 2012). Hedges *et al* (2011) discovered that culturally valued conceptual knowledge such as literacy, mathematics and science begin to grow through children's FoK-based interest, as the children engage with teachers and families in a non-didactic teaching approach.

In a study investigating the FoK of children in child-headed families in Uganda, Kendrick & Kakuru (2012) documented how these children were able to draw on their current knowledge and learn new knowledge to be able to survive on their own. The researchers documented multilingual cultural resources as tools for teaching and learning in child-headed families. The resources took the form of language practices like songs, riddles, stories and proverbs. The children were also translanguaging between Luganda and English in their storytelling and proverbs. The findings were that the children had the ability to build on existing FoK and to learn new knowledge, which in turn helped them foster relationships within their family unit and community. This provided them with an opportunity to claim some agency in determining their futures and the language practices become resources for them, as they had been for their parents.

The implication is that practitioners do not have to rely only on their individual skills but can also rope in networks out of school to contribute to advancing children's language learning and development (Yamauchi *et al*, 2017). This can be achieved through the

promotion of home-school collaborations, whereby parents can pass IKS to practitioners to build on in their classrooms. In a book on contributions made by home-school collaborations, González, Moll & Amanti (2007) state that the entire study proceeded from Vygotsky's premise that the construction of knowledge is mediated by the tools of language and culture. Teachers were sent into the learners' homes on a journey of discovery into what knowledge and skills families already possessed and how those could be used to make valuable connections to school learning.

For this study, it might be impractical for the practitioners to visit the homes of each and every child in their classrooms because of lack of resources, but what can be done instead is to have the parents and guardians visit the school and become living resources for FoK. Parents and community members can volunteer their time at the centre and offer indigenous knowledge through storytelling, teaching of songs and dance, amongst other things. This will ensure that the children are capacitated in a language by people known to them. It will furthermore build their confidence and enable them to do well in school because the language is familiar. Below is a diagram depicting the FoK.

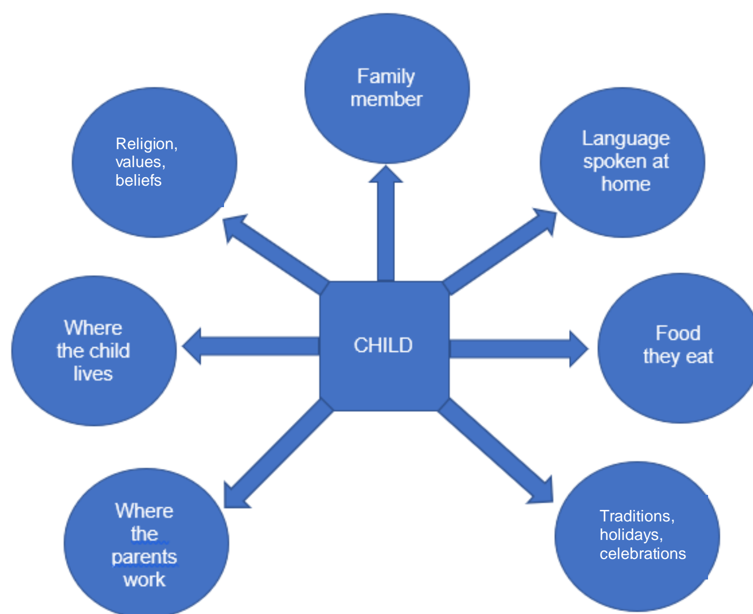


Diagram 3.3: Funds of knowledge (FoK) (adapted from Daries, 2017)

3.4 Bakhtin's dialogism theory

The Bakhtinian theory of dialogism was developed by Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin, a Russian philosopher. Dialogism refers to a philosophy of language and a social theory that recognises the multiplicity of perspectives and voices. In an excerpt from Vygotsky's translated Thought and Language, Kozulin (1986), asserts that, even though Vygotsky was primarily interested in the development of language in its relation to thought, a study of concept formation in educational settings led him to another insight, namely, the dialogical character of learning.

According to Coghlan & Brydon-Miller (2014) life is dialogic and a shared event and living is participating in dialogue. Dialogic teaching has increasingly been the subject of discussion in the last few years and a number of authors have suggested that dialogic teaching holds the greatest cognitive potential for learners, whilst at the same time demanding the most of teachers (Lyle, 2013). A dialogue, in its simplest definition, is a verbal interaction or exchange between people. Again, in a preschool classroom, most teaching takes place verbally, and practitioners can use dialogue as a way of scaffolding the language development of children from birth to four years old, by asking questions, and guiding the learners where they struggle.

According to Lyle (2013), any debate of dialogic approaches to learning and teaching owes a debt to Vygotsky, who emphasised social and cultural influences on child development, and especially recognised language as the driving force behind cognitive development. Vygotsky's theory has shown how central language is to children's development, hence the big body of research into the impact of language on learning. It should be highlighted that the studies on the impact of language on learning have proven that language and achievement are closely linked (see section2.9 in chapter 2).

Other studies such as those of Awopetu (2016) and Heugh (2017), who were looking at the correlation between language and achievement, have confirmed this correlation by proving that home language as a medium of instruction in early childhood classrooms is very effective in improving pupils' learning abilities. These studies also

found that children can only learn when that learning is based on what they already understand and through a language that they understand.

Therefore, support of language development in the early years is critical and the implications for practitioners is that they are strategically positioned to apply dialogic teaching strategies in their preschool classrooms to support the development of language of the learners. The practitioner is the MKO who initiates the dialogue. This can be through morning ring time when the practitioner and children are talking about the theme for the week, or when the practitioner is reading a story to the children. The practitioner will then proceed to ask leading and open-ended questions based on the story. When the children respond, it provides the practitioner with opportunities to scaffold and guide them in a dialogue with one another.

The scaffolding does not happen in a vacuum, however, because it facilitates a learner's ability to build on prior knowledge and internalize new information (Rios-Aguilar *et al*, 2011). The children's prior knowledge and the practitioner's new information, which are both FoK, are then used as leverage for building on the experience they both bring to the centre. The children do not come to the centre as empty vessels that need the practitioner to pour knowledge into them, but they come already in possession of their own FoK. Below is a diagram of the process of dialogic teaching.

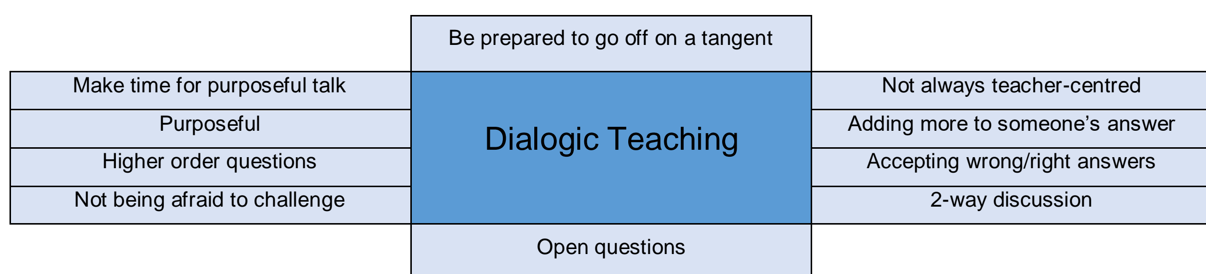


Diagram 3.4: Dialogic teaching (adapted from Hennessy, Dragovic & Warwick, 2017)

3.5 Bourdieu’s cultural capital theory (language and symbolic power)

Bourdieu (1991), considered language to be not merely a method of communication, but also a mechanism of power, thus, language is as much an instrument of power and action as it is of communication. Bourdieu asserted that language and symbolic power are inextricably intertwined, and dominant and legitimate languages are the result of historical processes and conflicts. According to Roth (2019:40), fluency of the apotheosized language is not enough, in order to be empowered, one has to also master the “context-specific expressions and linguistic strategies which are associated with power and authority”. As a result, those with no language skills or linguistic capital are excluded or silenced. Children who go to multilingual preschools in the townships are at the risk of being linguistically marginalized if the practitioners have the expectation that the children should learn the practitioners’ preferred “official” language or languages.

Imagine a world where children in peri-urban areas wield a language that is a powerful instrument and gives them the same advantage that their counterparts have always had, the advantage of learning and succeeding in a language they master.

Westerlund (2015: 3), asserts that language is a very powerful tool that we use every day to achieve our own purposes, but that many language users do not know how to use language to their advantage. She goes on to suggest that we need to think of the language that students need to succeed in school in terms of “opportunity instead of a deficit, and not to treat language as this ambiguous, unattainable power other people have, but as a malleable and flexible, dynamic tool that they can hold, manipulate, change, shape, and use to their advantage”. This means practitioners, as the MKO, have to plant the seed and nurture the love for, acceptance of and pride that children must take in their language. This can be achieved by practitioners’ intentional support of language development through modelling in speaking and scaffolding the children’s language.

Schleppegrell (2009: 16) argues that, “in the absence of an explicit focus on language, children from certain backgrounds continue to be privileged and others to be disadvantaged in learning, assessment and promotion, perpetuating the inequalities

that exist today". This is the case in many South African preschools in peri-urban and rural areas. Children come from diverse linguistic backgrounds, but it is the most commonly spoken languages that children are exposed to for reasons ranging from these languages being the languages that practitioners speak, to practitioners not knowing particularly the more uncommon languages of the children. It can be said that there needs to be a shift from a mindset that one language or some languages are deemed powerful, towards one that recognizes all languages are powerful and should enjoy the same status.

If practitioners support the development of the languages of the children, it will result in a group of empowered, confident learners who excel in their academic learning in the long term. Practitioners can support the development of language by following Schleppegrell's (2009) suggestion of using oral language in the classroom. The recommendation is that oral interaction in the classroom can build on the language students come to school with as a resource (FoK) for further learning and can make the reasoning in different subject areas visible to students (Schleppegrell, 2009).

According to Bourdieu (1991), cultural capital is a family legacy that the school as a system largely fails to influence, even though it is of great importance with regards to school or educational achievements. This assertion is in agreement with what the proponents of FoK believe.

The next section highlights the similarities between the four theories, which resulted in their fusion into a new socio-cultural dialogic language development theory – see diagram 3.6.

3.6 The relationship between the four theories

It is worth noting that the social nature of learning is common among all four theories referenced in this study and therefore the development of a new blended theory is central to the study. The proposed socio-cultural dialogic language development (SCDLD)theory can be used to adequately answer the research question, which is: What are the practitioners' experiences of the support of language development in the birth-to-four age group?

The first theory, Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory, asserts that knowledge and language are acquired in social settings; in this instance, learning is supported by the community the child is born into. This theory ties in with FoK, which contends that the community has a wealth of knowledge that is transmitted to its young members through day-to-day practices. However, following a FoK approach, this knowledge should not reside just within the family and community, but must be mainstreamed in the classroom curriculum for continuity.

As stated earlier, dialogic teaching holds the greatest cognitive potential for learners, whilst at the same time demanding the most of teachers (Lyle, 2013). The nature of teaching and learning in preschool classrooms is mostly oral because children in the birth-to-four age group are not expected to read and write. Therefore, practitioners must take advantage of oral interactions to empower the children in their care through language support and development.

Language as power is a form of social and cultural capital. It generates profits, which have to be shared and transferred to children. Children who are in multilingual preschools where their languages are neither supported nor developed are automatically rendered powerless.

My study interrogates the role of the family in the language development of children through various strategies such as IKS and FoK. The role of the communities the children come from, is also interrogated. Finally, the role of the practitioners, who are the main subject of the study, will be interrogated. The socio-cultural dialogic language development (SCDLD)theory, which is a culmination of the four theories discussed above, will be used to guide the study, with the ultimate goal of answering the main research question.

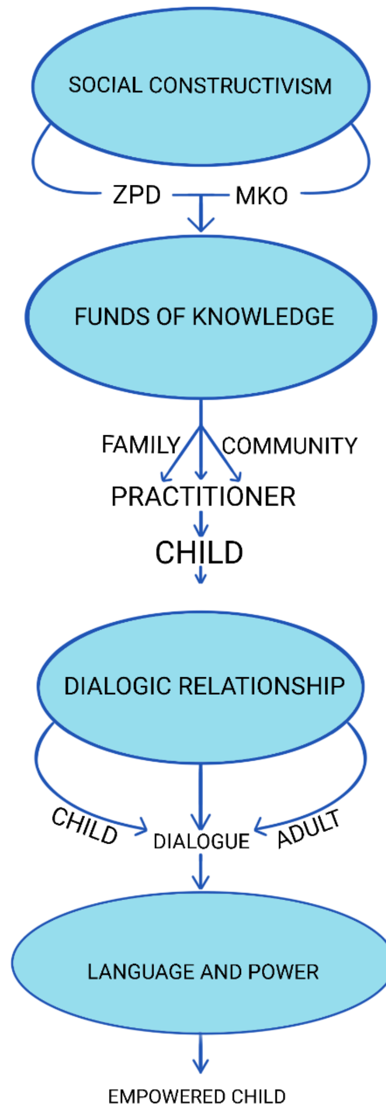


Diagram 3.5: Socio-cultural dialogic language development (SCDLD) theory

3.7 Conclusion

In this chapter, four theories were discussed. Deliberations on Vygotsky's social constructivist theory, which focuses on the child's interactions with people, were made. The funds of knowledge (FoK) theory, which was developed by Moll, Amanti, Neff & Gonzalez (1991), and which is based on Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory, was discussed. The Bakhtinian theory of dialogism, which refers to a philosophy of language and a social theory that recognises the multiplicity of perspectives and voices, was elaborated on. Finally, Bourdieu's language and symbolic power theory

was interrogated. Bourdieu holds the view that language is a powerful tool, which individuals can use to influence the outcomes of their lives in a positive way.

In the next chapter, the research methodology employed in the study will be presented. As part of the research methodology, the research instruments, the data collection and data analysis processes and methods will also be discussed and described.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

"Without language, one cannot talk to people and understand them; one cannot share their hopes and aspirations, grasp their history, appreciate their poetry, or savour their songs."

Nelson Mandela, Long Walk to Freedom.

4.1 Introduction

The literature review and theoretical framework relating to the support of language development in ECE as presented in the two previous chapters serve as a framework for the research methodology. Furthermore, this chapter aims to indicate the approach that was employed in answering the research questions of this study. I explain the research design, research paradigm and research approach applied in the study. The discussion on research methods, which includes the sampling methods, participants, data collection methods, data analysis techniques and ethical considerations of the study will then follow.

This chapter also highlights the methodology that was used in exploring the support of language development of children from birth to four years old. Table 4.1 provides the research design to be applied in this study.

RESEARCH APPROACH
Qualitative
RESEARCH PARADIGM
Constructivism
RESEARCH TYPE
Case study

RESEARCH METHODS – TOOLS FOR DATA COLLECTION	
Observations	
Field notes	
Casual conversations	
Semi-structured interviews	
Document and visual materials sourcing	
Participants	
Selection of participants	Purposeful sampling
Preschool A Preschool B Preschool C	2 practitioners 2 practitioners 2 practitioners
DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION	
Qualitative thematic analysis	
TRUSTWORTHINESS	
Dependability, credibility, transferability and confirmability	
ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS	
Informed consent, confidentiality and anonymity, and privacy and empowerment	

Table 4.1: The research methodology

4.2 Empirical research questions

According to White (2017), a researcher who spends time thinking about research questions at the beginning of a study will save a significant amount of time when it comes to reviewing the literature. The purpose of qualitative research questions is to narrow down the purpose of the study to several questions that will be addressed (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The main research question that underpins this study, as mentioned in chapter 1, is: What are the experiences of ECCE practitioners' support of language development in the birth-to-four age group?

In seeking for the answer to this question, particularly in terms of empirical data collection during observations and interviews, sub-questions were asked to guide the participants. The following sub-questions sought to describe the experiences that

practitioners have of the support of language development in early childhood classrooms.

- How do practitioners understand language development and support in ECD centres?
- How do practitioners promote and support language development in ECD centres?
- What challenges do practitioners experience in language development and support?
- How do practitioners overcome the challenges they experience in language development and support?
- What does policy say about language development and support in the birth-to-four age group?

Research questions	**Participants**	**Data collection tool**	**Contribution of the question to the study**
What are the experiences of ECCE practitioners' support of language development in the birth-to-four age group?	Practitioners	Interview protocol	This question was instrumental in getting information on how the participants perceive language development.
How do practitioners understand language development and support in ECD centres?	Practitioners	Interview protocol	This question gave insight into what the practitioners mean when they say they are supporting the development of language in their classrooms.
How do practitioners promote and support language development in ECD centres?	Practitioners	Observation schedule	This question gave me insight into the practitioners' classroom practices of language development.
What challenges do practitioners experience in language development and support?	Practitioners	Interview protocol	Participants got the opportunity to share some of the challenges they encounter in developing the languages of the children, keeping in mind that multiple languages were spoken by the children.

How do practitioners overcome the challenges they experience in language development and support?	Practitioners	Interview protocol	This question assisted me in finding out the strategies used by the participants to mitigate the challenges they encounter in their quest to support language development of the children in their care.
What does policy say about language development and support in the birth-to-four age group?	Practitioners	Documents and visual data	This question helped me determine what the participants knew about policies or guidelines regarding the language of teaching and learning in the preschools.

Table 4.2: Empirical research questions

4.3 The research design

The study employed a qualitative approach to collecting data. Underpinning the study is the constructivist paradigm, which guided the data collection and analysis of the findings. A discussion of the research paradigm will be followed by a discussion of the research approach and type, the research methods, which consist of observations, field notes, casual conversations, interviews and document and visual data sourcing. Data analysis, trustworthiness and ethical considerations make up the final discussion.

According to Creswell & Poth (2018), the essence of qualitative research is to study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. Qualitative research requires the researcher to empathise with the people being studied. Observations on site, meant to familiarise the researcher with the topic, and to document current practices, further ensured that the spirit of qualitative research was embraced, given the manner in which these complimented this particular project.

4.4 The research paradigm

In educational research, the word paradigm is used to describe a researcher's worldview (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). This worldview constitutes the abstract beliefs and

principles that shape how a researcher sees the world, a general philosophical orientation about the world and the nature of research that a researcher brings to a study (Creswell, 2013; Kivunja *et al,* 2017).

This study applied the social constructivist paradigm in a quest to find out the practitioners' perceptions of support of language development in their classrooms, by "relying as much as possible on the participants' views of the situation being studied" (Creswell 2014:38). In the constructivist paradigm, every effort is made to try to understand the viewpoint of the subject being observed, rather than the viewpoint of the observer.

4.5 The research approach

The study conducted was of a qualitative nature. Qualitative studies are used as a means to explore and understand meanings that individuals or groups attribute to a social or human problem. The social constructivist approach maintains that, to obtain knowledge and information from participants, one must rely on the participants' views of the situation being studied (Creswell, 2008). Therefore, data collection tools known to be suitable for this purpose such as interviews, observations, field notes, casual conversations and document and visual materials were used to ensure that findings collected represented the experiences of participants.

According to Macmillan and Schumacher (2010), qualitative studies are important, amongst other things, for the improvement of educational practices. Furthermore, a qualitative researcher collects data in face-to-face situations by interacting with selected persons in their settings. Macmillan and Schumacher contend that qualitative research also contributes to policy formulation, implementation and modification. Other purposes of qualitative studies include action, advocacy or empowerment, which are often the ultimate goal of critical studies. Some of the objectives of this study are to establish how practitioners understand language development in ECD centres and how they promote and support language in their centres. This will ultimately contribute to the empowerment of the children, through learning in a language that they know and are confident in.

Qualitative studies explore the meaning their experiences have for participants Creswell (2013). The process of research involves emerging questions and procedures, data typically collected in the participants' settings, data analysis inductively building from particulars to general themes and the researcher making interpretations of the meaning of the data.

The main purpose of this study was to explore ECD practitioners' support of language development of the birth-to-four age group in peri-urban areas. This was done using a qualitative approach and gathering data through the scientific method of observation, which differs from the quantitative method in that it is non-numerical. Qualitative research is very important in educational research because it addresses the "how" and "why" of research questions and enables deeper understanding of experiences, phenomena, and context. It also allows the researcher to ask questions that cannot be easily put into numbers to understand human experience. Getting at the everyday realities of a social phenomenon and studying important questions in practice help answer big questions (Cleland, 2017; Macmillan & Schumacher, 2010). According to Creswell (2008), research questions and hypotheses serve to narrow down the purpose statement and they also become major signposts for the reader.

Agee (2009: 435) advocates for the development of an overarching question, as it allows for the researcher to "capture the basic goals of the study in one major question". Agee continues to say that the overarching question also serves as the basis for sub-questions. The overarching or main research question for this study, as outlined in chapter 1 is: "What are the experiences of early childhood care and education practitioners' support of language development of children from birth to four years old?

4.6 The research type

A descriptive case study was selected for this research in order to acquire a deeper understanding of what early childhood care and education practitioners perceive as support of language development of children from birth to four years old in their classroom practices. The essence of a case study, as explained by Yin (2014), "is that it tries to illuminate a decision or set of decisions: why they were taken, how were they

implemented and with what results". He continues to state that the purpose of a case study is to capture an in-depth description of the phenomenon and individuals under study. For this research, a descriptive case study was most appropriate, as it allowed me the freedom to closely examine, through observations, interviews, casual conversations and field notes, how the ECCE practitioners perceive and experience their support of language development of the children within their context, which is an impoverished peri-urban setting.

4.6.1 Locating the theoretical framework within the case study

The theoretical framework, which I termed socio-cultural dialogic language development (SCDLD) theory and is discussed comprehensively in chapter 3, was instrumental in my pursuit of answers to the research questions. Language is a cultural and social construct. During my observation period, I used the observation schedule (see appendix B) to see how practitioners were supporting the language development of the children through scaffolding, which is a Vygotskian principle of language teaching and learning. As stated in chapter 2, section 3.2.1 "caregivers help young children learn how to link old information or familiar situations with new knowledge through verbal and nonverbal communication and modelling behaviours" (Van der Stuyf, 2002: 3) and Vygotsky's ZPD encapsulates the dialogue that ensues between the knowledgeable other and the child, for example during a conversation between a parent and a child, or a shared reading activity in the classroom.

The questions that were asked during the interviews and casual conversations also dug deeper into the language children bring into preschools and how much of it is used by the practitioners to leverage and enhance language development. For instance, one question asked is about the role played by the parents in the language development of children and whether they receive any support from the parents in terms of language inputs such asIKS and FoK. Bearing in mind that both the practitioners and children came from different language backgrounds, I wanted to find out whose IKS and FoK were used and which language was going to be enhanced.

Further observations were those of verbal interactions between practitioners and children, as well as amongst the children and their peers. The rationale behind these

observations was to see whether there was any language support given to the children during dialogic teaching and learning, considering that they spoke different languages and the fact that most teaching in preschool classrooms takes place orally. Another interview question sought to find out what strategies the practitioners applied to ensure that all the children in their care are benefitting in terms of language development, so that all the children were empowered enough to express themselves and become part of the conversations and language activities. As stated in chapter 3, section 3.5, "in the absence of an explicit focus on language, children from certain backgrounds continue to be privileged and others to be disadvantaged in learning, assessment and promotion, perpetuating the inequalities that exist today" (Schleppegrell 2009: 16). The implication is that those children with no language skills and linguistic capital are automatically excluded and silenced.

4.7 The research methods

The research methods consist of the sampling method, participants, research site, data collection methods and data analysis strategies. The data collection tools employed for this qualitative study to capture the lived experiences of the participants are discussed comprehensively in this section.

4.7.1 Population sampling

4.7.1.1 Site selection

According to Macmillan and Schumacher (2010), choosing a site is a negotiation process aimed at obtaining freedom of access at a relevant location that is suitable for the research problems and feasible for the researcher's resources of time, mobility and skills. Based on this, three sites were identified, and initial informal contact made with a number of community-based preschools in Mamelodi and in an informal settlement outside Mamelodi township. By virtue of the sites being in a township and an informal settlement, it goes without saying that they were not only peri-urban but impoverished as well, compared to neighbourhood suburbs. The sites cater for children from Mamelodi and its rural surroundings that resulted in the informal

settlement. Most of the children are funded by government social grants as most of the parents are unemployed.

The justification for choosing the sites is that they cater for children coming from homes where multiple indigenous South African and African languages are spoken. This study explored what the language of teaching and learning was at the centres, as well as how and why the centres chose that language. An investigation of how the practitioners navigate their support of the development of the language of choice, which is not necessarily every pre-schooler's home language, was done.

A letter of permission was given to the contact person at each site (see appendix D). The letter was accompanied by a written statement that specifies reasons for the study, the length of the study, information about the researcher, organizational affiliation, and general uses of the data as well as an assurance of the protection of the rights of human subjects. The purpose of this letter is to give the assurance that the researcher has been vetted by the ethics committee of the University, ensuring that participants are not exposed to harmful and unethical situations during the course of the research.

4.7.1.2 Participants

According to Sargeant (2012), subject selection in qualitative research is purposeful, that is, participants selected are those who can best inform the research questions and enhance understanding of the phenomenon under study (Creswell, 2013). In line with the qualitative nature and case study research type of this study, purposeful sampling was used in order to identify participants who are specifically selected with the understanding that they do not represent a wider population (Maree & Pietersen, 2016). For this study, participants were purposefully selected from three preschools and, therefore, the data will not be a representation of a wider population.

Participants in a study should be appraised of the motivation of the researcher for their selection, granted anonymity (if they desire it), and told by the researcher about the purpose of the study. This disclosure helps build rapport (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The

practitioners were furnished with a letter of consent that clearly stated the purpose of the study and how their privacy and anonymity would be ensured.

For the sake of credible results, a maximum of six practitioners from three sites, with the first site having about 30 children, the second about 50 children and the third site about 70 children in the birth-to-four age group were selected. It should be noted that these numbers were lower across the sites that normally have about a hundred children each because of Covid-19 and the subsequent lockdowns. See table 4.3 of participants below. The reason for this sample is to ensure that a wide range of responses and, therefore, experiences could be collected to establish patterns in the responses of the participants.

	PARTICIPANT	AGE AND GENDER	QUALIFICATIONS	NUMBER OF YEARS IN PRESCHOOL	AGE GROUP BEING STUDIED	HOME LANGUAGE
Case 1, preschool A	Participant 1	39 Female	Level 4 Certificate in Learning in the Early Years.	3	4 to 5 years	isiSwati
	Participant 2	23 Female	Second year BEd student at UNISA	1	2 to 4 years	isiSwati
Case 2, preschool B	**Participant 3**	26 Female	Registered with a TVET college for a diploma in ECCE	5	4 to 5 years	isiNdebele
	Participant 4	23 Female	Matric Certificate	3	2 to 3 years	isiZulu
Case 3, preschool C	**Participant 5**	37 Female	Matric plus NCF online certificate	3	3 to 4 years	isiNdebele
	Participant 6	43 Female	Level 4 certificate	19	6 months to 4 years - floater	Setswana

Table 4.3: Participants' biographical data

4.8 Tools for data collection

In order to focus on the participants'' perspective, opinions and experiences with regard to language development practices, multiple tools for data collection were used over the course of the study, including observations, interviews, field notes, casual conversations and document and visual materials.

4.8.1 Observations

Observing in a setting is a special skill that requires addressing issues such as the "potential deception" of the people being interviewed, impression management, and the potential marginality of the researcher in a strange setting (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2015; Creswell & Poth, 2018:168).To gain first-hand experience of the current practices as far as the support of language development is concerned in Mamelodi township ECCE centres, I spent a period of three months in the field. I went in as a non-participant observer and maintained the position throughout the study. I also held casual conversations with the practitioners and documented comprehensive field notes during such conversations. Subsequently, observation of the practitioners' delivery of lessons in the classroom during structured activities and outside play and interactions was undertaken.

Observations are important as a data collection method because they provide researchers with ways to watch the physical setting, participants, activities, interactions, conversations and the researcher's own behaviour (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In this study, I designed and used an observational protocol tool (see appendix D) to observe the practitioners in action with the children, as a way to pick up on information that might be left unsaid during interviews. This helped to strengthen the data collected. The observation tool assisted me in checking for verbal interactions during structured and unstructured activities in the preschools. Furthermore, I wanted to hear what language or languages the interactions would be conducted in, so that I could gauge these against the responses to the interview questions and see if there was correlation. As stated in section 4.6, I wanted to observe whether any scaffolding was happening, and what language or languages the lesson presentations were in, and whether that corresponded with the responses to the interview questions.

4.8.2 Field notes

Field notes were jotted down during observations. I made space for the notes on the observation protocol (see appendix D), so I was able to write them down on the spot, as I observed actions and interactions. The field notes were helpful when I later compared observations, interviews and document and visual data.

4.8.3 Semi-structured interviews

According to Brinkmann and Kale (2015:4), interviews are where “knowledge is constructed in the interaction between the interviewer and interviewee”. Interviews are generally organised around a set of predetermined open-ended questions, with other questions emerging from the dialogue between the researcher and participants. The questions are often the sub-questions in the research study, put in such a way that the person being interviewed can understand them (Crabtree, 2006; Creswell & Poth, 2018). In this study, informal conversation interviews, and one-on-one interviews were conducted with the practitioners and I made use of an interview schedule (see appendix E). During the one-on-one part of the interviews, prepared questions on the practitioners’ experiences of support of language development of the children were asked. Some of the questions asked were on the types of support the practitioners were getting from the families in terms of IKS and FoK, and how that was assisting them in language continuity and development. Moreover, the questions sought to find out what strategies were used by the practitioners to support and develop the multiple languages that are spoken in the children’s homes, in other words, what they were doing to accommodate every child.

All interviews were recorded, and the recordings transcribed verbatim. The reason for recording the interviews was that whatever I might have missed while taking down notes would be on record and could be played back as many times as I wished, so as to understand the meaning thereof. According to Yin (2014), recording interviews is a matter of personal preference, and should be withdrawn if an interviewee shows discomfort or withdraws permission. Therefore, even with the voice-recorder, notes will still be taken, both to record nonverbal communication and in case permission for the recording is withdrawn.

4.8.4 Casual conversations

In addition to the interviews, casual conversations were also recorded. These conversations were a supplement to questions that were asked during the interviews.

They served the purpose of asking clarity-seeking questions that came about when I observed something that I did not initially anticipate.

4.8.5 Document analysis

For case studies, documents are important for corroboration and augmentation of information from other sources. Documents can help in verifying correct spellings, names of organisations, policies and information sourced from other sources such as interviews (Yin, 2014). For this study, official documents from the relevant sites – language policies, daily programmes, learning programmes and lesson preparations, reflection sheets and assessment records were sourced.

4.8.6 Audio and visual materials

According to Creswell (2013) audio and visual data is unobtrusive and gives the participants a chance to directly share their reality. Pictures of classroom resources like storybooks and wall charts were taken. Audio recordings and videos of the daily programme activities were added to the data. This was done with the permission of the parents, as well as the centres (see appendices B and F).

4.9 Data presentation and analysis procedures

Data analysis involves organizing the data, conducting a "preliminary read-through of the database", coding and organizing themes, representing the data and forming an interpretation of them (Creswell & Poth, 2018: 181). For this study, the data was analysed through the content analysis method, since the data was collected by means of different methods, that is, observations, interviews, casual conversations, field notes and document and visual materials. According to Mayer (2015) the central idea of content analysis is data reduction. As a researcher, I had to compress the data coming from the different collection methods when it became excessive.

The data was analysed using the approach of Macmillan and Schumacher (2010), which posits that data analysis is rigorous and not separated from the data collection process, and several analyses are done during data collection. An interim analysis,

which serves the purposes of making data collection decisions and identifying recurring topics, was done. A coding system was developed from the data, whereby the data was divided into parts and the parts were studied to get a sense of the whole. I generated codes from the data and then compared the codes for duplication.

Creswell & Poth (2018) define coding as the process of organizing data collected into segments of text, labelling it into categories with terms before bringing meaning to the information. According to Graue (2015), categorizing and coding data are ways to organize and prepare the data and make it usable for the analysis. For this study, I used the traditional approach of allowing the codes to emerge during the data analysis.

In order to understand the findings, I used Creswell's five-step data analysis spiral, as well as data analysis for case study research (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Following is an outline of the steps.

Organize and prepare

Firstly, I started with data managing. For any qualitative study, Archer (2018) posits that the data is mainly textual, graphic, audio or other non-numerical data and for this study, the data to be analysed was arranged into type groups such as observations, interviews, document analysis, field notes and photographs. After that, I transcribed the audio material from the interviews and videos into text data. I followed Creswell's (2008) method of arranging data according to similar responses, which were then grouped into initial codes.

Reading through data

I then read through the data to make sense of its overall meaning. In order to glean the general tone of the data, I took note of the information gathered from observations, interviews, documents, audio and visual data as well as field notes taken during the observation phase of data collection (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Describing and classifying codes into themes

According to Creswell & Poth (2018), description involves a detailed rendering of information about people, places or events in a setting. I conducted an analysis to design detailed descriptions for each case using the information from the observations,

interviews, field notes, documents and audio and visual material for which I had generated codes. I created and named themes according to the sorted and categorized responses of the participants detailing their description and understanding of their support of language development.

Coding is the process of organizing material into chunks or segments of text before giving meaning to the information (Creswell, 2013). Coding provides a means of purposefully managing, locating, identifying, sifting, sorting, and querying data (Archer, 2018). I did this by organizing the data, clustering similar information together into categories and labelling the categories. I read through the data and reorganized it for each of the participants. Different themes and the relationships between them were identified. This made it easier for me to analyse and interpret the data.

Developing and assessing interpretations

Interpretation entails making meaning of the data. I did this by reflecting on my personal interpretations of the findings and information gleaned from literature. I tried to answer the question: “What were the lessons learned?” (Creswell & Poth, 2018:195).

Representing

Another step in the data analysis process is the representation of the findings. This was done by using a narrative passage to convey the findings of the analysis (Creswell, 2013). I presented the findings through an in-depth description of the cases. I developed detailed discussions of themes and sub-themes generated during the coding stage, which I put into table form, see diagram 4.1.

According to Creswell & Poth (2018), when analysing data forthcoming from a multiple case study, the researcher first offers a detailed account of each case and themes within the case known as within-case analysis. After having done the above, I then did a thematic analysis across all the cases, which is called cross-case analysis.

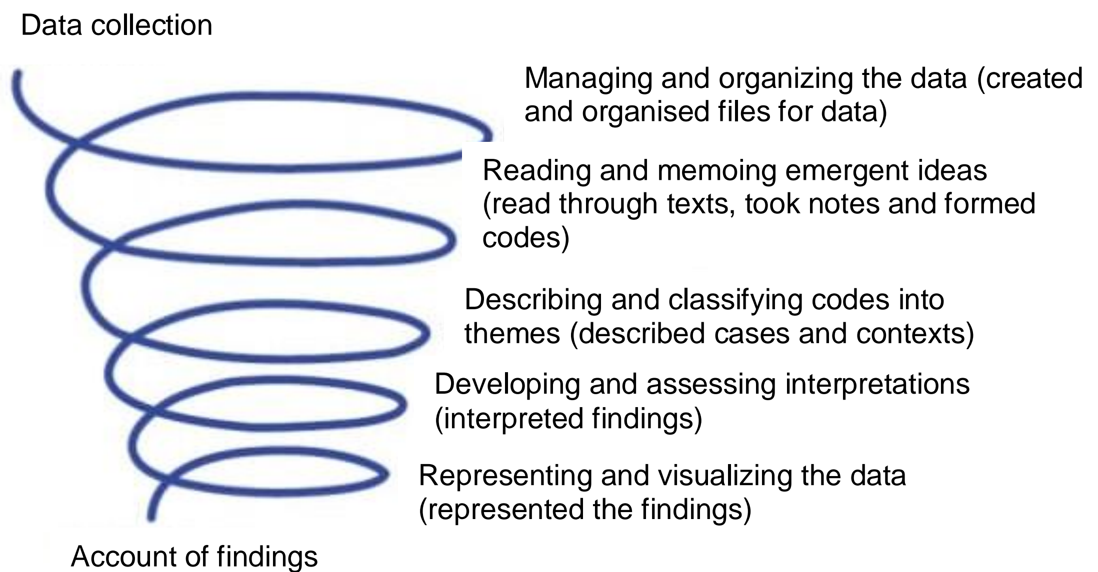


Diagram 4.1: Data analysis spiral (adapted from Creswell & Poth, 2018)

4.10 Role of the researcher

According to Wood (2012), in qualitative research, the researcher stands central to the data collected. Hannaway (2016) states that, in qualitative research, a human – the researcher – is the instrument of data collection and that researcher subjectivity is something that cannot be dismissed in the data collection and analysis where the researcher is the "research instrument".

In order to fulfil the role of the qualitative researcher in this study, I had to be a mindful participant, who had to evaluate my own past experiences, perceptions, biases and role regarding the research process. As a former preschool teacher and current teacher educator, I had to recognize that I bring with me "particular histories, beliefs, assumptions and values" about language learning (Martin, 2015:104). I therefore had to adopt the positionality perspective of an outsider in collaboration with insiders (the practitioners in the preschools). I assumed the stance of "They know. We don't know" as opposed to "We know. They don't know" (Nkambule, 2017). I explained that I was there to learn from them, as they were the experts in the education of the children under their care. This was done so that the practitioners would not be reactive in their responses, by telling me what they thought I wanted to hear.

Furthermore, Martin (2016) posits that ECD centres are not neutral zones, but critical institutional spaces, where young children are initiated into the beginnings of literacy training and the beginnings of their subjection to the disciplinary power of adults who care for and educate them. Naturally, I had to take precautions not to be intrusive, I negotiated with the practitioners the best times of day to visit, preferably when I would not be a distraction to either them or the children. The participants were, however, very accommodating, allowing me to come whenever was convenient for me. This meant I had the freedom to come during planned activities where I could observe the practitioners and children in action, so to speak.

4.11 Addressing trustworthiness

In a qualitative study, the researcher is the data gathering instrument. As a researcher, I considered *dependability, credibility, transferability and confirmability* as trustworthiness criteria to ensure the rigour of qualitative findings (Schwandt, Lincoln, & Guba, 2007). I used the triangulation method, which is a cross-validation among data sources, to enhance validity. Nieuwenhuis (2010), posits that, when research addresses validity and reliability, the implication is that the study is credible and the data is reliable.

4.11.1 Dependability

Anney (2014), defines dependability as "the stability of findings over time, as it involves participants evaluating the findings and the interpretation and recommendations of the study to make sure that they are all supported by the data received from the informants of the study". This study ensured dependability by using the code-recode strategy, as suggested by Ary, Jacobs, Razavieh & Sorensen (2010). This strategy involves the coding of the same data twice, while allowing a rest period between the coding and then comparing the results of the two codings, to see whether the results are the same or different.

4.11.2 Credibility

Credibility is the equivalent of internal validity in quantitative research and is concerned with the aspect of truth-value Korstjens & Moser (2018). It also establishes whether the research findings represent plausible information drawn from the participants' original data and is a correct interpretation of the participants' original views (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In this study, credibility was ensured by prolonging engagement on the research site. The extended time in the field improved the trust of the respondents and provided a greater understanding of participants' culture and context. It also increased rapport, which in turn resulted in informants volunteering different and often more sensitive information than they did at the beginning of the research project (Anney, 2015).

4.11.3 Transferability

Transferability refers to the degree to which the results of qualitative research can be transferred to other contexts or settings with other respondents. It provides readers with evidence that the research study's findings could be applicable to other contexts, situations, times, and populations (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). For this study, thick descriptive data, which allowed for comparison of this context, that is, practitioners' experiences of support of language development in peri-urban preschools, to other possible contexts was provided to ensure transferability (Anney, 2015).

4.11.4 Confirmability

Confirmability refers to the degree to which the results or the findings of the research study could be confirmed by other researchers. Confirmability is concerned with establishing that data and interpretations of the findings are not figments of the inquirer's imagination, but clearly derived from the data (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). In this study, confirmability was ensured by using the data triangulation method to obtain corroborating evidence. This was achieved through the use of different sources as the research instruments applicable to this study, namely, interviews, observations, casual conversations, field notes and document and visual materials (Onwuegbuzie & Frels, 2014).

Strategy	Criteria	Applicability
Dependability	Code-recode strategy	I coded the same data twice, while allowing a rest period between the codings and then comparing the results of the two codings, to see whether the results were the same or different.
Credibility	Prolonged engagement	I spent an extended time in the field, to ensure that I built rapport with the participants. That, in turn, made them comfortable and caused them to trust me.
Transferability	Thick descriptive data	I provided a complete description of the methodology and verbatim accounts of the data.
Confirmability	Audit	The supervisors reviewed the comprehensive descriptions of the data collected.

Table 4.4: Strategies to enhance trustworthiness

4.12 Ethical considerations

Research ethics is concerned with what is permissible and acceptable when one is conducting research. Research ethics can be interpreted in two ways: it may be applicable to research involving humans, animals and the environment or it may concern the honesty and integrity of the researcher (Creswell, 2013).

Qualitative research is more likely to be personally intrusive in nature, because it focuses primarily on human beings and ethical issues need to be anticipated and planned for (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Participants were informed that their participation was completely voluntary, and they may withdraw at any point of the research. Participants were also assured of protection from any potential harm. That being considered, the following ethical considerations were employed: informed consent as a dialogue, confidentiality and anonymity, and privacy and empowerment.

An ethical clearance letter (see appendix A), was obtained from the University and given to the contact persons at the sites. A brief written statement that specified reasons for the study, the length of time of the study, information about the researcher, organizational affiliation, general uses of the data as well as an assurance of the protection of the rights of human subjects was also given to participants. In line with the ethics guidelines of the University, permission to participate in the study was solicited from participants.

According to Olivier (2020), most universities and research organisations have committees and procedures to assist researchers with ethical considerations. For this study, the process that was followed began with an application for police clearance, which is a requirement when research is to be done at a site that involves children, such as a preschool in this instance (See appendix G). Principals, practitioners and parents were also issued with consent letters (see appendices B, C and D).

4.12.1 Informed consent

Informed consent is a voluntary agreement to participate in research. It is not merely a form that is signed but, rather, a process in which the subject has an understanding

of the research and its risks. The goal of the informed consent process is to provide sufficient information so that a participant can make an informed decision about whether or not to enrol in a study or to continue participation. To gain support from participants, a qualitative researcher conveys to participants that they are participating in a study, explains the purpose of the study, and does not engage in deception about the nature of the study (Creswell, 2014).

For this study, I ensured that participants were provided with information about the purpose of the study, how the data was going to be used, and what participation would be required of them, the subjects likely to be covered and how much time was required. Participants were also afforded the opportunity to ask clarity seeking questions before the study commenced, as well as during the collection of data (Ritchie & Lewis, 2011; Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Before data collection commenced, after a personal visit to the sites, a letter of invitation was sent to the principals of the preschools to request informed consent to conduct the study at the sites (see appendix B). The primary participants, that is, the practitioners, were also furnished with a consent form to sign (see appendix C).

4.12.2 Anonymity and confidentiality

Anonymity is the principle of keeping secret the identity of individuals involved in the research and confidentiality refers to the safe-keeping of data collected from subjects. (Le Roux, 2015). Participants were assured that their identity would not be revealed and that the data they provide would be kept confidential, for their protection. This was done by using pseudonyms for both the preschools and practitioners.

4.12.3 Privacy and empowerment

According to Maclean & Poole (2010), the right to privacy of the participants should be respected in the research design, in the use of the data collected, and in the proposed dissemination of the results of the research. For this study, the participants were assured of privacy by being informed that their identities would not be disclosed in the dissemination of data and that pseudonyms would be used instead of their names.

4.13 Conclusion

The aim of this chapter was to give a detailed account of the research methodology I applied to investigate the topic under study. This chapter also indicated the approach that was employed in answering the research questions of this study. An explanation of the research design, research paradigm and research approach applied in this study was provided. The discussion on research methods, which included the sampling methods, participants, data collection methods, data analysis techniques and ethical considerations of this study was provided. The following chapter will be on the analysis and presentation of the data collected.

CHAPTER FIVE

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

“Thought is not merely expressed in words, it comes into existence through them.”

Len Vygotsky

5.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, a description of the research methodology that was used to conduct the fieldwork for this study was provided. In this chapter, an analysis and presentation of the data collected through interviews, observations, field notes, casual conversations, documents and visual data is provided. This chapter concludes with the interpretation of the analysed data generated through the main research question and sub-questions outlined below:

Main question:

What are the experiences of practitioners’ support of language development in the birth-to-four age group?

Sub-questions:

- How do practitioners understand language development and support in ECCE centres?
- How do practitioners promote and support language in ECCE centres?
- What challenges do practitioners experience in language development and support?
- How do practitioners overcome the challenges they experience in language development and support?
- What does policy say about language development and support in the birth-to-four age group?

I used the data source triangulation method, by reporting on data collected through interviews and confirming this with data from observations, field notes, casual conversations as well as document review and visual data analysis. The data source triangulation method was used so that I could "develop a comprehensive understanding of phenomena and to gain multiple perspectives and validate the data" (Carter, Bryant-Lukosius, DiCenso, Blythe & Neville, 2014: 5).

The aim of this chapter was to present and discuss the generated data according to each case and participant. This was achieved by discussing each case and participant, and giving a picture of each, through a discussion of their background. In order to protect the anonymity and confidentiality of the participants, their names were not disclosed, instead they were referred to as participant 1A to 6C, with the letters indicating the preschool they come from. See table 5.1 below, explaining the codes used.

PARTICIPANT	**CODE**
Participant 1A	P1A
Participant 2A	P2A
Participant 3B	P3B
Participant 4B	P4B
Participant 5C	P5C
Participant 6C	P6C

Table 5.1: Participant codes

Qualitative data analysis was used to analyse the data. I categorized and coded the data into themes, by way of a thematic analysis process. Archer (2018) defines thematic analysis as the process of identifying themes in the data which capture meaning that is relevant to the research question, and perhaps also to making links between such themes. Thematic analysis helped me in identifying patterns in the data.

For me to be able to provide information and reference the data in the discussions to follow, I chose a variety of codes for the participants as well as for the data type. Table 5.2 below shows codes for the different types of data.

Data type	Code
Observation schedule	OS
Semi-structured interview	SSI
Field notes	FN
Casual conversations	CC
Document and visual data	DVD

Table 5.2: Data type coding

I begin the process of analysis by discussing each case and participant's background, giving a brief picture of each case and the profile of the participants. This is done so that I, as the researcher, could conscientize myself regarding the practitioners' context, so that I am more reflexive and aware, and that I avoid my "knowledge" of support of language development influencing my understanding of what informs the participants' classroom practices (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

In accordance to Nieuwenhuis (2010), the data collected was organized and identified by fictitious names so it could be contextualized. It should also be noted that, just as the participants are given codes to protect their privacy and anonymity, no real names of the children who are quoted as part of the field notes obtained through casual conversations (CC) with the practitioners were used.

Following is a discussion of each case and participant's background.

Preschool A (case 1): Background information

Case 1 consists of an ECE centre situated in a section of Mamelodi township consisting of informal settlements (preschool A). From the observation of the premises of the preschool, it is evident that the centre caters for the lower socio-economic population group. The centre caters for children from isiZulu, SePedi, Tshivenda,

seTswana, isiSwati, and Shona (a Zimbabwean language) language backgrounds. The case 1 participants were two practitioners (P1A and P2A). The two practitioner participants are both from isiSwati backgrounds. The name of the centre, which is in an indigenous language, translates to *Taking care of something.* The medium of communication in the classroom is said to be English. A description of each participant is provided below.

- Participant 1A is a 39-year-old female practitioner with 3 years of experience in ECE. Her home language is isiSwati. Her qualification is a level 4 certificate in Learning in the Early Years. She is responsible for the 4- to 5-year-old group.
- Participant 2A is a 23-year-old female who is also a BEd student in the Foundation Phase and has just over 1 year of experience as a teacher at the centre. She speaks isiSwati at home. She is responsible for the 3- to 4-year-old group but has also taken responsibility for the birth-to-2 age group, since the centre lost many children because of the Covid-19 lockdown, and they had to let some of the practitioners go and combine classes. The picture below is that of the building of preschool A (case 1) building. As stated above, the site is situated in the lower socio-economic part of Mamelodi, the informal settlement. Context is important in this study, as will be demonstrated later in a discussion on resources.

Photograph 5.1: Preschool A (case 1)

Preschool B (case 2): Background information

Case 2 consists of an ECE centre which is situated in what I would refer to as the original Mamelodi township, the name of which translates into *Our hope* in English (preschool B). From observing the physical environment of the preschool, and from informal conversations with the practitioners, I deduced that the centre's population was from a working-class background (see photograph 5.2). The photograph is shown with a view to the later discussion on the context, as it relates to resources at the centre. This centre has children who speak isiNdebele, isiZulu, Tshivenda, Xitsonga, SePedi and Sotho (a combination of SePedi, Setswana and Southern Sotho). The participants from case 2 (preschool) participants were two practitioners (P3B and P4B).The two practitioner participants are from an isiNdebele and isiZulu background respectively. The centre decided on English as a language of learning and teaching.

A description of each participant is provided below.

- Participant 3B is a 26-year-old female practitioner with 5 years of experience in teaching. She holds a grade 12 certificate as a qualification and is currently enrolled at a TVET college, studying towards a diploma in Early Childhood Care and Education. She is responsible for the 4- to 5-year-old group. Her home language is isiNdebele. She uses isiZulu to communicate.
- Participant 4B is a 23-year-old female practitioner with 3 years of experience in teaching at a preschool. She has a grade 12 certificate. She is responsible for the 2- to 3-year-olds. She speaks isiZulu at home.

Photograph 5.2: Preschool B (case 2)

Preschool C (case 3): Background information

Case 3 consists of a preschool situated in the more affluent part of Mamelodi township, where newer houses have been built, instead of the standard four-roomed houses associated with township housing (preschool C). This is in a neighbourhood where families take out mortgages to pay for the big houses they build. Because of its location, case 3 is the best resourced of all the preschools, at least according to township standards (see photograph 5.3). This centre caters for isiZulu, SePedi, Setswana, South Sotho and isiNdebele. An interesting finding at preschool C (case 3), is that they speak a combination of SePedi, Setswana and South Sotho, which is popularly known as Pretoria Sotho or in the township lingo, S'Pitori. S'Pitori is a word coined by Mamelodi natives, drawing it from the word Pitori, which is what most black South Africans call Pretoria. This language makes for very interesting conversations. The name of the centre translates into *A place of joy* in English. The language of learning and teaching is English.

Again, there were two participants from preschool C (case 3), namely practitioners 5C and 6C. A description of each participant is provided below.

- Participant 5C is a 37-year-old female practitioner with 3 years of experience in teaching in a preschool. She holds a Grade 12 certificate, with another certificate for an NCF online course. She is responsible for the 3- to 4-year-old group. Her home language is isiNdebele. She speaks English and SePedi to the children.
- Participant 6C is a 43-year-old female with 19 years of preschool teaching experience. She has a Level 4 qualification. She is responsible for all the birth-to-5 children since her position is that of a floater teacher, that is, with the numbers having dropped because of Covid-19 and the lockdown, she only helps the few practitioners retained by the centre. Her home language is Setswana. She speaks English to the children.

Photograph 5.3: Preschool C (case 3)

5.2 Data analysis

The data collected from interviews was triangulated with the data from observations, field notes, casual conversations, documents and visual data. After a vigorous analysis of the data collected had been done, the data was coded by assigning phrases to the various segments of text. By placing similar codes together, themes and sub-themes started to emerge (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In the end, five themes, with three sub-themes each, except for theme 5, emerged. Table 5.3 below displays these themes and sub-themes. A discussion of the themes and sub-themes follows.

THEMES	SUB-THEMES
1. Practitioners' perspectives on the importance of support for children's language development.	1.1 Practitioners' understanding of language and home language 1.2 Practitioners' home languages 1.3 Children's multiple home languages
2. Mixed home languages for communication	2.1 The middle ground of transactional language

	usage determined by geographic location 2.2 Children whose home languages are not commonly spoken are disempowered 2.3 Communication breakdown: challenges for practitioners, children and parents.
3. English as a language of teaching and learning	3.1 The rationale for using English 3.2 Challenges with English as a medium of instruction 3.3 Contradictions between theory and classroom practices
4. Parental support in the development of language	4.1 Parents' language of communication with their children 4.2 Parental expectations of the centres regarding the development of language 4.3 Practitioners' challenges in supporting the development of multiple home languages
5. Practitioners' cognition of language policies in ECE settings	

Table 5.3: Themes and sub-themes

5.2.1 Theme 1: Practitioners' perspectives on the importance of support for children's language development

During the interviews, practitioners were asked whether they thought it was important to develop children's language and how they were supporting language development in the children in their care. The participants responded by saying that they thought language development was important and that they were supporting the children by speaking to them (the pre-schoolers) in their home languages. Further probing on how the development of language was supported by the practitioners yielded more responses, such as P1A saying:

"I accommodate every child with the language they understand."

P5C expressed the same sentiments when she stated:

"*When we communicate with the kids, we try to explain with the language that they understand".*

P1A gave the following justification for why she feels so strongly about supporting the children's home languages:

"We don't want the kids to be frustrated when they start with formal schooling because they are going to different primary schools and primary schools use the different home languages. That is why we also allow children to communicate with their home language".

Responding to a follow-up question, which was Which language do you think must be developed and prioritized? P3B was of the opinion that English should be the one language that is developed, so that they can accommodate every child. P4B added the following:

"Children speak different languages, so I think it's better if we use English."

When asked how the practitioners maintain home languages amidst the use of English as a language of communication, participants across the three sites felt that, by being able to communicate with the children in their different home languages, they were

able to maintain them. The participants continued to say that, even though they opted for English, they fall back on the home languages when they see that the children do not understand what they are saying in English. P1A asserted that:

"Outside the classroom, we engage the children in their home languages."

Observing and listening to the children during lunch at preschool A (case 1) (see photographs 5.4 and 5.5), I noted that the children were chatting amongst each other in isiZulu, SePedi and some English. It was obvious that translanguaging was taking place.

P4B mentioned that the children themselves will revert to a home language when they do not have the English vocabulary for certain concepts.

P5C stated that, at her preschool, they communicate with the children in English and that they (the pre-schoolers) all understand and speak it, but when they feel the pre-schoolers are not understanding, they resort to languages spoken by the children to make sure that they understand.

From the observations and listening to the interactions between the practitioners, practitioners and children, as well as children and their peers, it was evident that, together with English, there were multiple home languages spoken at the centres. This resulted in the emergence of the following sub-themes: practitioners' understanding of language and home language; practitioners' home languages, and the children's multiple home languages. A discussion of the sub-themes follows next.

Photographs 5.4 and 5.5: Lunch time at preschool A (case 1): children speaking in SePedi, isiZulu and English while enjoying lunch

5.2.1.1 Practitioners' understanding of language and home language

During the interviews, participants were asked what their understanding of language and home language development was. Across the three sites, practitioners seemed to respond to their understanding of what a home language was but shied away from sharing their understanding of language as such. The practitioners responded by saying that they understand a home language to be the first language that the child is exposed to from birth and the language that a child speaks at home.

P5C confirmed that understanding when she mentioned that "*language is the first thing the children understand from home, it is the language they know from home"*.

P6C stated that:

"Language is the first thing they (the children) understand from home through their families."

Three out of the six practitioners stated that they maintain the children's home languages by giving "homework" in English so that the parents can teach the children the same concepts in their home language.

P1A stated:

“I give homework like days of the week or colours, and ask the parents to teach their kids in their mother tongue.”

P5C also stated:

“You see, it’s almost summer and we are doing seasons and making Christmas decorations. We do it in English, and the parents enforce in the home language at home.”

From what I could gather from the participants, it seemed as if they were not really concerned with maintaining the children’s home languages, but were rather entrusting the parents with that responsibility.

5.2.1.2 Practitioners’ home languages

All six participants across the sites spoke different home languages, which were different from most of the languages commonly spoken by the children, and none of the practitioners had English as a home language. In case 1 for instance, both practitioners are isiSwati speakers, while the most commonly spoken languages of the children are isiZulu and SePedi, with some of the children speaking Tshivenda, Setswana, isiSwati and even Shona. In case 2, the practitioners speak isiNdebele and isiZulu, while, apart from children speakingthese languages, they also have speakers of Xitsonga, SePedi and South Sotho. The most commonly spoken language at this site is S’Pitori, which is a combination of Setswana, SePedi, South Sotho and Afrikaans. In case 3, the two practitioners speak Setswana and isiNdebele respectively, while the commonly spoken home languages are isiZulu and SePedi, with some of the children speaking South Sotho, isiNdebele and Setswana.

When asked about the challenges brought on by the differences in their home languages, P3B from preschool B (case 2) stated that *“for the most part, we are able to understand and respond to the children in their different home languages, but we have a problem with the not so common languages like Xitsonga. We once had a*

communication breakdown with parents of a Tsonga boy. He went home with a swollen ear and the following day the parents came because they thought another kid bit or pinched his ear, only to find that he was trying to tell us that a bee stung him, but we didn't know what a bee was in Xitsonga"(CC).

From the above sub-theme, it is clear that practitioners are not in a position to communicate with every child in his/her home language. This, therefore means that marginalized languages remain under-resourced as they are not fully catered for.

5.2.1.3 Children's multiple home languages

As stated above, children across the three sites spoke multiple home languages. Through observations and casual conversations with the children, I overheard most of the conversations between the children and their peers, as well as with the practitioners in a variety of languages. The most commonly spoken of these languages were isiZulu, SePedi and some English at all three sites. The children used fewer English words than the practitioners. Interestingly, at preschool A (case 1), the children who spoke Setswana and isiSwati as home languages, would either speak isiZulu and SePedi with their peers, or not take part in the conversations. The children whose home languages were Tshivenda and Shona did not take part in any of the interactions. Similarly, at preschool B (case 2) all but one of the children were communicating in isiZulu and SePedi, and the one Tsonga boy did not take part in the conversations. When I initiated a conversation with one of the other Tsonga children in isiZulu, she responded to me in SePedi. This was explained to me by P4B who pointed out:

*"Her name is *Karabo, which is a Sotho name, her home language is Xitsonga but she speaks fluent SePedi. You see, some of our kids are from dual home language backgrounds, you find that maybe *Karabo's mom is Tsonga and her dad is Pedi, that is why she is fluent in both. I speak to her in isiZulu because she understands it too"* (CC).

Children at these centres are in a position to develop proficiency in more than one language as they hear the languages at preschool. It would seem that multilingualism

and translanguaging are not just possibilities, but a necessity, as it affords the children an opportunity to see things through more than one linguistic lens.

5.2.1.4 Summary

Mashiya (2010:21) states that, “for a child to communicate and become a fully functional being, the primary language of children should be well developed”. To this end, the findings across the sites indicated that practitioners are doing their best in supporting the development of the children’s languages. However, the practitioners have to contend with not just the development of English, which is their choice for communication, but also the multiple home languages that the children come to the preschools with. This implies that the practitioners might not be succeeding in their endeavour because they are unable to fully support the development of one single language. Instead of seeing this as an obstacle, practitioners will do well to see the opportunity of developing more than one language, that is, see this as a gap to be filled through multilingualism.

5.2.2 Theme 2: Mixed home languages for communication

During the observation period at the three sites, I overheard both practitioners and children communicating in the different home languages, with isiZulu and SePedi dominating the conversations. There were a few English words in the exchange, for example, the children refer to the practitioners and the researcher as *teachers.* At preschool C (case 3), P6C spoke to the children only in English, even though the children responded in either isiZulu, SePedi or S’Pitori. At both preschool A and B (case 1 and 2), the practitioners were chatting to each other and the researcher in both isiZulu and SePedi. At preschool B (case 2), the children were singing along and dancing to a popular song called Jerusalema, playing on the CD player (see photograph 5.6). The song is in isiZulu. From my observation and experiences at the sites, three sub-themes emerged from this main theme, namely, the middle ground of transactional language usage determined by geographic location; children whose home languages are not commonly spoken are disempowered, and communication breakdown: challenges for practitioners, children and parents. A discussion of the three sub-themes follows.

Photograph 5.6: Children at preschool B (case 2) singing along and dancing to the song Jerusalema

5.2.2.1 The middle ground of transactional language usage determined by geographic location

As pointed out in the discussion of the main theme above, I observed that the dominant languages of communication were isiZulu, SePedi and a bit of English at all three sites, with S'Pitori added at preschool C (case 3). While continuing with my observations at preschool B (case 2), I casually asked P3B why it was that, with so many other home languages spoken by the children, they chose to communicate in isiZulu and SePedi. Her response was that *"it just so happens that our most talkative children are from isiZulu and SePedi background*". P4B chimed in to point out that the centre is also just a few meters away from the local primary school, which offers a dual medium of SePedi and isiZulu as languages of teaching and learning.

Of the six participants, only P4B is from an isiZulu background, the other participants are from isiSwati (P1A, P2A), isiNdebele (P3B, P5C) and Setswana (P6) backgrounds respectively. It should be noted that four out of the six participants used isiZulu and SePedi to communicate with each other and with the children, and P6C used English to communicate with the pre-schoolers and only resorted to SePedi when she did not get responses from the children. Furthermore, it should be noted that isiZulu and SePedi seem to have automatically become the transactional language of communication.

5.2.2.2 Children whose home languages are not commonly spoken are disempowered

Across the three sites, there were children who were not part of the interactions. The reason for that, I found out from the interviews, was because they spoke home languages that were not commonly spoken, and the practitioners were not conversant in those languages. P1A at preschool A (case 1) spoke to the issue of marginalisation when she assumed that *"even the kid who speaks Shona, we speak to him in SePedi. He understands and speaks it".*

Other participants confirmed this by saying sometimes they do not understand, nor speak, the difficult languages spoken by some children, but they try to learn some words in those languages. P6C admitted that *"sometimes I have a hard time understanding what some of the kids are saying. That boy over there, it's taken me most of the year to understand him, his home language is South Sotho".*

5.2.2.3 Communication breakdown, challenges for practitioners, children and parents

The reality of multiple home languages hold challenges for all the stakeholders, that is, the practitioners, children and parents. For example, P3B articulated the issue as follows:

"Some languages are very difficult, especially the ones that are hardly spoken, like Xitsonga and Tshivenda. So, one day, that boy over there, he speaks Tshivenda at home. There was this other time, he spoke to me in Tshivenda. His ear was swollen, and I thought maybe it was an allergic reaction to something he had eaten. When he got home, he told his parents something about the swollen ear and the next day his mom brought him here to the crèche. She pointed to his ear and said something about insuna, we checked all of our kids' names, thinking maybe there was one that sounded close to this ntsuna. We asked the mom to ask him what happened, and she reported that oh, he says he was bit by ntsuna and ntsuna is a mosquito in Tshivenda. Imagine!"

P2A at preschool A (case 1) also complained that she found it challenging when parents who come to drop off their children expect her and her colleagues to

understand their requests when those requests are made in a home language not familiar to them, instead of English.

P4 at preschool B (case 2) said *“we have realized that kids suffer to socialize with other kids, it’s hard for them to create a relationship”.*

5.2.2.4 Summary

South Africa has a history of overt racial and ethnic segregation that was based on perceived language differences (Nkadimeng & Makalela, 2015). It is therefore close to impossible to have a language discussion without addressing this part of our history. The findings are that the impact of this history is still being experienced by some children who not only have to contend with being taught in English, which is a third or fourth language for them, but also struggle with home languages that are not commonly spoken and therefore relegated to the background while commonly spoken languages are promoted.

5.2.3 Theme 3: English as a language of teaching and learning

Considering that early childhood education centres are under no obligation to implement government language policies, it came as no surprise that, when asked during the interview what the language of learning and teaching (LoLT) was at the different sites, English stood out, but the different participants added that other home languages are used as well. P1A at preschool A (case 1) said *“It is English, but we also use a mix of the other languages spoken by the children, to make sure that they (the pre-schoolers) understand”.* P2A at the same site said it was a mix of many languages. After lunch and before nap time, children at preschool A (case 1) were observed doing some exercises with P1A, doing the actions to the Hokey Pokey song (see photograph 5.7). This, as I found out from P1A, is one of the instances where they are developing the language of teaching and communication, in this case English.

Photograph 5.7: Children at preschool A (case 1) exercising to the Hokey Pokey song

At preschool B (case 2), P3B was adamant that they use English for teaching, whereas her colleague, P4B made the following point:

"We teach children in medium English and we also allow them to talk their home language."

At preschool B (case 2), the practitioners and children also happened to be practicing for a grade R graduation ceremony that was coming up. The songs and rhymes to which they were singing along and dancing, were all in English.

At preschool C (case 3), both P5C and P6C said that the basic language is English. It should be noted that at preschool C (case 3), P6C offered her lessons in English and the children responded to questions and instructions in English, SePedi and S'Pitori. During story time (see photograph 5.8), P5C read an English story called *The Veggie Patch* and explained the English concepts in isiZulu and SePedi. She could be overheard saying:

*"In the vegetable garden there were insects like bees, ladybugs, flies and lizards. What's a bee in SePedi? Ke nnosi and a fly is ntshi! There were also veggies like spinach, carrots and pumpkin, *Busi, what's a pumpkin in your language (isiNdebele)?"*

To this the little girl responded with *“ithanga”.* The main theme of language of teaching and learning led to the emergence of the three sub-themes that will be discussed next. They are, the rationale for using English for teaching and learning; challenges with English as a medium of instruction, and the contradictions between theory and classroom practices.

Photograph 5.8: P5C reading an English story, while emphasizing concepts in isiZulu and SePedi

5.2.3.1 The rationale for using English

One of the interview questions was: “Why did the preschool decide on English as the language of teaching and learning?” A variety of responses were elicited from the participants. P1A had the following to say:

“It was not even a decision. We had no choice but to use English. If we are to teach each and every child in their home language, then we will have to hire too many practitioners for all the languages spoken by the children”.

P3B said they did help the children to be able to socialize with one another and her colleague, P4B, reasoned that *“we have noticed that it’s hard for some children to communicate. Therefore, we decided to use one language”.*

P5C said English was used because it is universal, and that most of what is written is in English. P6C had the following explanation:

"So, we have kids who speak isiZulu, SePedi, Setswana, Sesotho and isiNdebele at home and here at the centre, they speak a combination of the Sotho languages, which we have come to term S'Pitori. I would not even know how to write it down, though. That is why we decided to go with English".

Even though the choice of English as the language of learning is being rationalised, it would seem that this solution might not be the best one, considering that English is not the first language of either the practitioners or children.

5.2.3.2 Challenges with English as a medium of instruction

English, being none of the practitioners' nor children's, home language, came with its own sets of challenges when it came to classroom instruction. Sitting in and observing the delivery of lessons at the three sites, I noted that the practitioners were not conversant in English and were therefore not only unable to support the development of language, but were teaching the children incorrect concepts in a language that was not familiar to either of the parties.

Across the three sites, even though the practitioners were delivering the lessons in English, there was much code-switching and reverting back to either isiZulu or SePedi. At preschool C (case 3), for example, P6C would be asking the children questions in English, and judging by their silence and blank facial expressions, she would ask the same questions in SePedi and then she would get responses in either SePedi or isiZulu. At preschool A and B (case 1 and 2), the practitioners were teaching the children the English names of concepts, such as colours or days of the week, but the delivery was in isiZulu and SePedi.

5.2.3.3 Contradictions between theory and classroom practices

All of the three sites decided that English was to be the language of instruction. Across the three sites, the visual materials such as posters, the daily programme, charts and pictures on the classroom walls, as well as books were all in English (see photographs 5.9-5.15). However, at preschool A (case 1), during a presentation on the theme My Body, the practitioner was using English to point to the body parts and using a combination of isiZulu and SePedi to explain them to the children. The children in turn were using a combination of all the languages and the practitioner was allowing them to do so. At preschool B (case 2), similarly, lessons were presented in English, with much code-switching. For example, P3B could be overheard teaching the children about hygiene in the following mix of languages:

P3B:*"Re berekisa di wet wipes for eng?"* (What do we use wet wipes for?), *"For go phomola matsogo"* (For wiping hands).

At preschool C (case 3), the lessons were presented strictly in English only by P6C, while P5C resorted to SePedi when the children did not answer her questions, asked in English.

Photographs 5.9 to 5.15: English posters across the three sites

5.2.3.4 Summary

Results from a study conducted by Bergbauer (2015) into the causes of poor learning outcomes in South Africa proved that these were, to a great extent, a result of poor language proficiency and utility. The study also showed that the majority of learners were being taught in a second or sometimes a third language, and they were struggling with basic comprehension. The practitioners' rationalization of the choice of English, which is none of the stakeholders' home language, would seem off the mark, seeing that Awopetu (2016), discovered that mother tongue as a medium of instruction in early childhood classrooms is very effective in improving pupils' learning abilities. Across all three sites, it would seem that there was a contradiction between theory and practice, in that the sites chose English as the medium of instruction, but much translanguaging between the multiple home languages was taking place.

5.2.4 Theme 4: Parental support for the development of language

This theme arose out of the question on the types of support the practitioners received or expected from the parents with regards to the support of development of language. The responses were varied, with a common thread that indicated a certain attitude of nonchalance from the parents. P1A did, however, give a contradictory answer when she stated:

"Parents generally do not care. They are comfortable with their kids being taught in English. Some parents ask if we only teach in English".

P2A indicated that she does get some kind of support from parents, with regards to the reinforcement of concepts taught at the centre. She stated that:

"I give homework and ask the parents to help their children. I give them homework of English words and ask the parents to reinforce at home, like colours and days of the week".

I found the response from P5C and P6C from preschool C (case 3) fascinating. It should be noted that the choice of language of teaching and learning at preschool C (case 3) is strictly English. P6C posited that:

"Parents really don't mind us teaching and speaking English to the kids. When the kids get home, they continue in the home language. Like this girl over there, she started with us 5 months ago, and when she started, she spoke isiNdebele only, but now she speaks SePedi and some English," and confirmed the above when she responded with: *"We sometimes give them homeworks so the parents can teach them in their own language".*

The data above brought about the emergence of three sub-themes, which are: parents' language of communication with their children; parental expectations of the centres regarding the development of language, and practitioners' challenges in supporting the development of multiple home languages. A discussion of the three sub-themes follows.

5.2.4.1 Parents' language of communication with their children

This sub-theme came about when the question of what language the parents were using to communicate with their children was asked. The participants indicated that parents generally used their home languages when speaking to their children. P1A

responded by saying that parents use their home languages and P2A confirmed this by stating that:

"Even that Shona boy, when his mother drops him off in the mornings, I overhear them talking in Shona, but I do not understand what they say."

P4B mentioned that most parents use their home language to communicate with their children, but there are some who use English. P3B voiced a concern in that regard when she stated that:

"Most parents communicate in African languages with their children, so it's very hard for me sometimes to use English because kids don't understand whatever I am trying to teach them."

The responses above show that practitioners face another obstacle when they cannot bridge the language gap between themselves and the parents as they cannot exchange information about the children freely because of the language barrier.

5.2.4.2 Parental expectations of the centres regarding the development of language

When parents choose a preschool to send their children to, it is usually because the preschool meets their requirements or some of their expectations. With regards to what the parents' desires were for their children in terms of language development, most practitioners across the three sites were of the opinion that parents were really not that bothered about the development of language, and that they were leaving the decision up to the practitioners. P1A did, however, mention some parental expectations in her response:

"The parents asked us not to teach their kids in any of the other home languages spoken by the other children, just English. They say they want their kids to retain their own home languages that they speak to them at home."

P6C indicated that there was some unspoken agreement between the practitioners and parents with regards to language development when she stated:

"We tell the parents what we taught in English on a particular day, so that they can reinforce, in their home language at home".

However, I never witnessed any homework being given to the children or their parents.

5.2.4.3 Practitioners' challenges in supporting the development of multiple languages

Practitioners across the three sites found it challenging to support the development of language for the following reasons: the language of communication is English at all sites, but English is not the practitioners' nor the children's first language; the practitioners' home languages are different to those of the pre-schoolers, and there are many home languages spoken by the pre-schoolers.

P2A said that they encourage the children to speak to each other in English, but they (the pre-schoolers) forget and revert back to speaking SePedi or the other languages. She went on to say, *"we try and practice talking with the child in that language".*

P4B stated that:

"Some languages are difficult, but we try hard to learn a few words by using the internet and also communicating with people who speak different languages, for example, from church, community and so on".

P5C articulated her challenges by saying:

"Sometimes we do not know the language of the child and we end up using three languages, isiZulu, SePedi and English here and there".

P6C stated that they try very hard to understand the languages spoken by the children. She went on to explain:

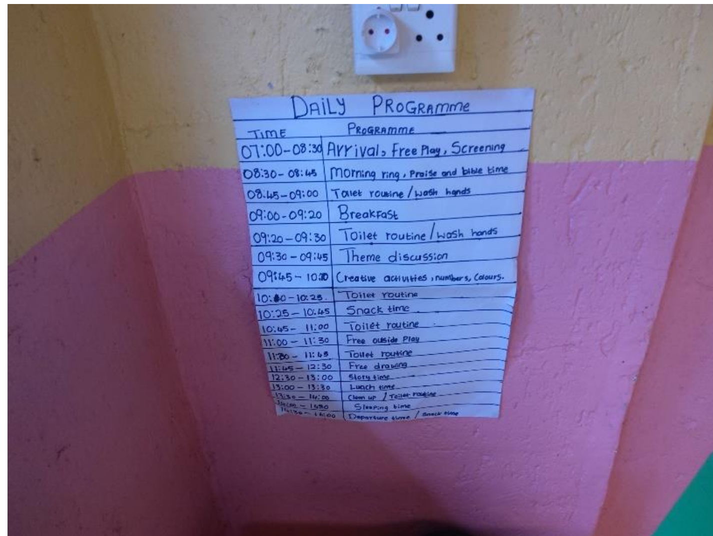
“Sometimes I have a hard time understanding what some of the kids are saying. That boy over there, it’s taken me most of the year to understand him, his home language is Sotho”.

5.2.4.4 Summary

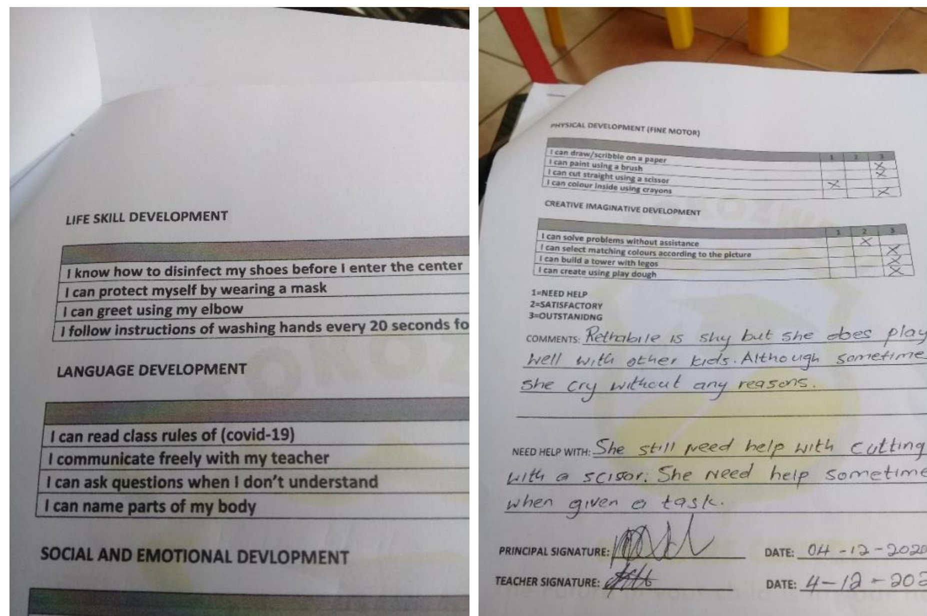
Msila & Gumbo (2017) assert that both fathers and mothers play a crucial role in language development when children are very young and acquiring cognitive, language and social skills that support later development. They go on to state that parent language input is crucial, and they should engage young children in dialogue, promote talkativeness and provide specific language stimulation and feedback. From what could be gathered from the practitioners, the parents across the sites seem to be doing their part in supporting the development of language, some have gone to the extent of requesting the practitioners to teach their children in English only, and therefore preserve their children’s home languages by not exposing them to the home languages of the other children at the centres.

5.2.5 Theme 5: Practitioners’ cognition of language policies in ECE settings

During the interviews, the participants were asked whether their centres had any policies in accordance with which they worked. Preschool A (case 1) did not have any policies, and at preschool B (case 2), the practitioners said they were using some parts of the CAPS document, which they had borrowed from the primary school across the road. I was, however, not shown the document, as they used the CAPS document only to the extent of the daily programme, which had been put up on the wall of the classrooms (see photograph 5.16). At preschool C (case 3), the practitioners had learnt about the National Curriculum Framework from an online course P6C has done. Preschool C (case 3) used the NCF guidelines in as far as following the guidelines when generating progress reports after assessing the children (see photographs 5.18 and 5.19). Preschool C (case 3) also has the daily programme up on the wall (see photograph 5.17).



Photographs 5.16 and 5.17: Daily programme displayed at preschool B and C (case 2 and 3) respectively (adapted from CAPS document)



LIFE SKILL DEVELOPMENT

I know how to disinfect my shoes before I enter the center
I can protect myself by wearing a mask
I can greet using my elbow
I follow instructions of washing hands every 20 seconds fo

LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT

I can read class rules of (covid-19)
I communicate freely with my teacher
I can ask questions when I don't understand
I can name parts of my body

SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL DEVLOPMENT

PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT (FINE MOTOR)

	1	2	3
I can draw/scribble on a paper			X
I can paint using a brush			X
I can cut straight using a scissor	X		
I can colour inside using crayons			X

CREATIVE IMAGINATIVE DEVELOPMENT

	1	2	3
I can solve problems without assistance		X	
I can select matching colours according to the picture			X
I can build a tower with legos			X
I can create using play dough			X

1=NEED HELP
2=SATISFACTORY
3=OUTSTANIDNG

COMMENTS: Rethabile is shy but she does play well with other kids. Although sometimes she cry without any reasons.

NEED HELP WITH: She still need help with cutting with a scisor. She need help sometimes when given a task.

PRINCIPAL SIGNATURE: [signature] DATE: 04-12-2020

TEACHER SIGNATURE: [signature] DATE: 4-12-2020

Photographs 5.18 and 5.19: Contents of the progress report at preschool C (case 3)

5.2.5.1 Summary

According to the National Early Learning and Development Standards policy, practitioners need to support children in their mother tongue, because, when children have a firm grounding in the mother tongue, it becomes easier for them to learn new languages and concepts (DBE, 2009). The National Curriculum Framework states that all children need to hear and learn to speak in their mother tongue. If they have a solid foundation in their mother tongue, they will find it easier to learn another language as they will have already found out how language is constructed and how to communicate with others. This will help them if they are cared for in a place where more than one language is spoken (DBE, 2015). The findings from the sites indicate that practitioners have no comprehensive knowledge of any ECE policies, certainly not the policies pertaining to language. Even though the practitioners at preschools B and C (case 2 and 3) mentioned that they use parts of CAPS and NCF respectively, no such proof was shown to me.

5.3 Conclusion

This study shows that, in as much as practitioners are doing their best to support the development of the children's languages, they still have to contend with the children's multiple home languages. They are not successful in their endeavours because they opt to use English, which is not a language familiar to them or the children. The practitioners find themselves having to fall back on using home languages with the children, but that is also another hurdle because there are multiple home languages and the practitioners are not well versed in all of them. The issue of translanguaging is as real today as it was many years ago, and the practitioners in this study found themselves struggling with it. On the matter of policy, specifically language policy, even though the government has spelled out language related issues in language policies, the practitioners do not seem to know much about them, nor do they feel bound to implement them in their classrooms.

This chapter presented the analysis of the data from interviews, observations, documents and visual materials, casual conversations and field notes. Furthermore, main themes and sub-themes were compared against the literature review to arrive at the findings. The next chapter is the conclusion of the study. It contains a summary and discussion of the findings and the implications thereof and reflects on possible areas of future study.

CHAPTER SIX

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS, IMPLICATIONS, SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH AND REFLECTIONS

“If you talk to a man in a language he understands, that goes to his head. If you talk to him in his language, that goes to his heart”

Nelson Mandela

6.1 Introduction

The purpose of this study was to investigate what the experiences of ECCE practitioners are of the support of language development in peri-urban ECCE centres. This chapter provides an overview of the study with reference to the literature review, theoretical framework, research questions and study findings. A summary of the findings, as well as a discussion of the limitations of the study, the implications thereof and suggestions for future research will be presented, followed by the conclusion.

6.2 Summary of findings

This section highlights the main findings of this study as reported in chapter 5. The major findings of the study are presented with the literature reviewed and theoretical frameworks as backdrop. Below is table 6.1, which contains a summary of the findings, with reference to the literature reviewed and presented according to the themes drawn from the analysed data.

THEME	**FINDINGS**	**LITERATURE**
Practitioners' perspectives on the importance of support of children's language development.	Findings across the sites indicated that practitioners are trying their best to support the development of the children's languages. However, the practitioners have to contend with not just the development of English, which is their choice for communication, but also the multiple home languages that the children come to the preschools with. *"We don't want the kids to be frustrated when they start with formal schooling because they are going to different primary schools and primary schools use the different home languages. That is why we also allow children to communicate with their home language"* (P1A, section 5.2.1.	Hélot & Rubio (2013) state that young children attending preschools are at a crucial stage of language acquisition and teachers have a significant role to play in the development of the linguistic competence of children in early childhood education. Makalela (2015) argues that South African students who are from linguistically hybrid townships where at least four identifiable languages are spoken, are prone to being educationally disadvantaged because they cannot be compartmentalized by schools who think monolingually. Furthermore, these students are seen to be "defying traditional labels such as 'mother tongue' as they are able to use languages flexibly across a wide range of language clusters" (Makalela, 2015:203).
Mixed home languages for communication.	The findings are that many of the children and practitioners are from a background where two or more home languages are spoken. Across all sites, all the verbal interactions between the different age groups and adults took place in mainly three different languages, that is, isiZulu, SePedi and a bit of English. *"Her name is *Karabo, which is a Sotho name, her home language is Xitsonga but she speaks fluent SePedi. You see, some of our kids are from dual home language backgrounds, you find that maybe*	Gumbo (2017) asserted that sometimes two languages are used in a home and, as a result, people become bilingual from birth, which is known as native bilingualism. Daries (2017) posits that, in instances where children attend English classes and come from multilingual backgrounds, research has shown that teachers will accommodate children's home language by switching between two or more languages, that is, by translanguaging.

	**Karabo's mom is Tsonga and her dad is Pedi, that is why she is fluent in both. I speak to her in isiZulu because she understands it too"* (P4B, section 5.2.1.3).	
English as a language of teaching and learning	Findings across the sites are that practitioners opted for English as a way to mitigate language obstacles and accommodate every child. Furthermore, there were too many home languages for them to cater for individually. *"It was not even a decision. We had no choice but to use English. If we are to teach each and every child in their home language, then we will have to hire too many practitioners for all the languages spoken by the children"* (P1A, section 5.2.3.1).	Results from a study conducted by Bergbauer (2015) into the causes of poor learning outcomes in South Africa proved that these were, to a great extent, a result of poor language proficiency and utility. Awopetu (2016) argues that mother tongue as a medium of instruction in early childhood classrooms is very effective in improving pupils' learning abilities.
Parental support for the development of language	Parents were taking responsibility for their children's language development, and leaving the responsibility for English to the practitioners, while making it clear that they did not want their children to learning in other children's home languages but to preserve their own. *"The parents asked us not to teach their kids in any of the other home languages spoken by the other children, just English. They say they want their kids to retain their own home languages that they*	Msila & Gumbo (2017) assert that both fathers and mothers play a crucial role in language development when children are very young and acquiring cognitive, language and social skills that support later development. They go on to state that parent language input is crucial, and that parents should engage young children in dialogue, promote talkativeness and provide specific language stimulation and feedback. Yamauchi Ponte, Ratliffe & Traynor (2017) state that FoK is based on informal, every day, diverse knowledge and experiences found amongst families, teachers, children and community members.

	speak to them at home" (P1A, in section 5.2.4.2).	
Practitioners' cognition of language policies in ECE Settings	The findings from the sites indicate that practitioners have very little knowledge of any ECE policies, certainly not the policies pertaining to language. The practitioners at preschool B stated that they were using parts of CAPS (see photograph 5.16). Practitioners at preschool C stated that they used CAPS to set up the daily programme (see photograph 5.17). They also said they use some parts of NCF for their progress reports (see photographs 5.18 and 5.19).	According to the National Early Learning and Development Standards, practitioners need to support children in their mother tongue, because when children have a firm grounding in the mother tongue, it becomes easier for them to learn new languages and concepts (DBE, 2009). The National Curriculum Framework states that all children need to hear and learn to speak in their mother tongue. If they have a solid foundation in their mother tongue, they will find it easier to learn another language as they will have already found out how language is structured and how to communicate with others. This will help them if they are cared for in a place where more than one language is spoken (DBE, 2015).

Table 6.1: Findings, interpretations and literature

6.3 Discussion of findings

6.3.1 Practitioners' perspectives on the importance of support of children's language development

When practitioners were asked during interviews whether they thought the development of language was important in the early years, four out of the six said they believed it was very important to develop children's language. As indicated in section 5.2.1 in the previous chapter, P1A asserted:

"We don't want the kids to be frustrated when they start with formal schooling because they are going to different primary schools and primary schools use the different home languages. That is why we also allow children to communicate with their home language".

Hoff (2013) states that, by the time children reach the age of five, they have essentially mastered the sound system and grammar of their language and acquired a vocabulary of thousands of words. This seems to be the sentiments shared by Obiweluozo & Omotosho (2014), who posit that language is among the skills that are best acquired in the first seven years of life. Practitioners should make use of this window during which a child can easily learn a language. In this study, the practitioners believed it was important to support the development of language in the children. This is in accordance with the literature that was reviewed, for instance Hélot & Rubio (2013), who state that young children attending preschools are at a crucial stage of language acquisition and teachers have a significant role to play in the development of the linguistic competence of children in early childhood education.

On the issue of English being the chosen language of communication, the practitioners felt that English is the one language that should be developed and prioritized. In the previous chapter, section 5.2.3.1, P3B reasoned that:

"It was not even a decision. We had no choice but to use English. If we are to teach each and every child in their home language, then we will have to hire too many practitioners for all the languages spoken by the children".

The participants added that, even though they opted for English, they fell back on the home languages when they saw that the children did not understand what they were saying in English. As P3B stated, *"We teach children in medium English and we also allow them to talk their home language".*

This is consistent with Daries (2017), who posits that, in instances where children attend English classes and come from multilingual backgrounds, research has shown that teachers will accommodate children's home language by switching between two or more languages. This results in translanguaging. Nordquist (2019) says that, by the age of five, most English-speaking children can actively use around 3 000 words, and more are added fast, often quite long and complex ones. It is acknowledged that the children at the participating sites were not English-speakers, yet Hoff (2013) argues that the course of language development is very similar across children and even

across languages, which suggests that there is a universal biological basis to this human capacity.

6.3.2 Mixed home languages for communication

Across all sites, all the verbal interactions between the different age groups and adults were taking place in mainly three different languages, that is, isiZulu, SePedi and a bit of English. The findings that many of the children and practitioners have two home languages is consistent with what Gumbo (2017) asserted, namely that sometimes two languages are used in a home and, as a result, people become bilingual from birth, which is known as native bilingualism. According to Rahimpour (2011), a child usually acquires most of the grammatical forms of a native language by the age of five. He continues to state that, at the age of four to five, children typically use sentences with four or more words, and they will be able to tell an adult about things that happened to them at preschool with occasional errors. This is inconsistent with the findings in this study in that many of the children, especially those whose home languages are hardly spoken, do not acquire vocabulary or are not understood even if they express themselves.

All the centres decided that English was to be the language of learning and teaching, while the different home languages of the children and practitioners are used for communication. There seems to be an unspoken agreement that developing the children’s home languages is a responsibility left to the parents. This finding is not in line with the literature reviewed. According to Vygotsky, for example, the language development of children is advanced through social interaction with other people, particularly those who are more skilled (Vygotsky, 1978). This, therefore, means that the practitioners also have a role to play to take language teaching forward and help the children learn language in a formal way.

Scaffolding, which is a process through which a teacher adds support for students in order for them to learn and master tasks, did not happen at any of the three sites. For example, it was found that out of the multiple languages of the children, only isiZulu, SePedi and some English are spoken, and that most of the practitioners have a home language that is different from the commonly spoken languages. As a result, the

practitioners were unable to play their roles as the MKOs or skilful tutors, through social interactions with whom important learning by the child occurs (Vygotsky, 1978; Charlesworth, 2013). In this study, there was no evidence to indicate that the interventions from practitioners were substantial enough to have made a big impact. For one, the practitioners' own competence in the chosen language of teaching, English, was not very strong. Their strategies and methods of supporting language development were not consistent across all the children, with the result that those coming from minority languages were not fully supported.

Another observation made across the three sites was that the children whose home languages were not common were keeping to themselves and not engaging with their peers or with the practitioners. A case in point is the Shona-speaking boy, who presumably did not understand what was said given that none of the practitioners spoke or even understood Shona. According to Obiweluozo & Omotosho (2014), certain aspects of learning, such as language learning, can only be acquired effectively during the first seven years of life. They advise practitioners to make use of young children's remarkable ability to learn language.

Another compelling fact was that the most talkative children were SePedi speakers, which somehow influenced the rest of the group to speak SePedi, as most of them could understand and speak the language. This leads to lingua franca dominance, that is, SePedi appeared to be the language adopted as a common language between the speakers of different home languages. Behaviourists argue that language is learned by association, and therefore consider it an associative process (Skinner, 1957; Msila, 2011; Keating, 2012). I opine that, instead of letting some languages dominate verbal interactions in their classrooms, the practitioners would be wise to use the opportunity to apply translanguaging strategies while the children are still at the prime stage for language learning. This they can do by encouraging all the children to speak in their own languages. In that way, there will be an opportunity to learn each other's languages in the process.

Awopetu (2016) discovered that mother tongue as a medium of instruction in early childhood classrooms is very effective in improving pupils' learning abilities. This, therefore, means that the learning abilities of the children in this study are being

stunted by the practitioners when, in fact, literature is clear that language can be acquired or learnt effectively during the first seven years of life (Obiweluozo & Omotosho, 2014). Practitioners were, however, also limited in their ability to intervene because they did not speak all the languages of children in their care.

6.3.3 English as a language of teaching and learning

Participants across the sites stated that they used English as the language of instruction in their classrooms. As discussed in section 5.2.3 of the previous chapter, from observation, there was much code switching between English and isiZulu and SePedi. Of the six participants, only one stuck to teaching in English only, even when it was clear that some of the children did not fully understand some of the instructions she gave or questions she asked. This leads to a contradiction between theory and practice, as practitioners say they use English for teaching, when, in reality, they are translanguaging and code switching, inside and outside of the classroom context. Children are not afforded a chance to learn one language maximally, as they are exposed to many languages which are not treated equally.

As discussed in section 2.12.2 in chapter 2, according to Alexander (2009), a home language that children know best when they first enter school should be used as the language of learning and teaching, as that will be a formula for their success. Awopetu (2016) corroborates this statement by confirming that there is a direct relationship between the language of instruction used by the teacher and the pupils' learning abilities, as stated in section 5.2.1.4 of the previous chapter.

Furthermore, the findings showed that the practitioners themselves were not well versed in their chosen language of teaching and learning, which is English. This further perpetuates the already dire situation that the children find themselves in, as the practitioners are teaching incorrect concepts in a language that neither they, nor the children, are conversant in. Alexander (2009) contends that, in early childhood, effective teaching begins with and builds on what children already know and can do. The children are already familiar with their home languages, which can be seen as funds of knowledge (FoK) as discussed in section 3.3 of chapter 3.

6.3.4 Parental support in the development of language

There is a popular belief that practitioners are being pressured by parents to speak to and teach their children in English. However, in section 5.2.4.2 of the previous chapter, the findings showed that parents were communicating with the children in their home languages. Furthermore, there were no great expectations from the parents that the practitioners should teach the children in English. The only request made by some parents was that their children not be taught in a home language different to their (the pre-schoolers') own. One important guideline from the NCF is that children should be spoken to and taught in their home language. If they have a solid foundation in their mother tongue, they will find it easier to learn another language as they will have already found out how language is constructed and how to communicate with others. This will help them if they are cared for in a place where more than one language is spoken (DBE, 2015). The findings were that, across the sites, multiple languages were spoken.

6.4 Locating the findings within the theoretical framework

The theoretical framework which I termed socio-cultural dialogic language development (SCDLD) theory and within which this study was conducted, emanates from a combination of four theories. The first is Vygotsky's social constructivist theory, which focuses on the child's interactions with people (Charlesworth, 2016). Secondly, SCDLD draws on the funds of knowledge (FoK) theory, which is based on Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory and maintains that social interactions are the basis of all psychological phenomena and that the cultural contexts surrounding individuals determine what is learned and developed. The third theory on which SCDLD is based, is the Bakhtinian theory of dialogism, which refers to a philosophy of language and a social theory that recognises the multiplicity of perspectives and voices. Lastly, SCDLD built on Bourdieu's cultural capital theory (language and symbolic power), which considers language to be not merely a method of communication, but also a mechanism of power, thus, language is as much an instrument of power and action as of communication, as discussed in sections 3.2 to 3.5 of chapter 3.

The theoretical framework, as outlined in section 3.1 of chapter 3, served as a guide that supported and following which I built my study and achieved its aims and objectives, as outlined in section 1.5 of chapter 1. As mentioned above, the theoretical framework of this study was a result of triangulated theories and it was beneficial to this study in that it encouraged me to look at the research into practitioners' experiences and perceptions of supporting language development of children from more than one standpoint. During the discussion of each theory, I discovered that the social nature of learning was common among all four theories.

Vygotsky's social constructivist theory focuses on the child's interactions with people (Charlesworth, 2016). Vygotsky's theory implies that learning relies strongly on a skilful adult or peer through scaffolding. In section 5.2.3.3 of the previous chapter, findings across the sites indicated that practitioners are struggling to support the development of children's languages. Furthermore, the practitioners have to grapple with not just the development of English as the preschools' language of choice for communication, but also the multiple home languages that they fall back on when English fails them.

The funds of knowledge (FoK) theory, which is based on Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural perspective of human development, maintains that social interactions are the basis of all psychological phenomena and that the cultural contexts surrounding individuals determine what is learned and developed. From what could be gathered from the practitioners, the findings in section 5.2.4 of the previous chapter were that the parents across the sites seemed to be doing their part in supporting the development of their children's language, some even going to the extent of requesting the practitioners to teach their children in English only, and therefore preserve their children's home languages by not exposing them to the home languages of the other children at the centres.

Further findings were that some children not only had to contend with being taught in English, which is a third of fourth language for them, but also had to communicate in the commonly spoken home languages of their peers, at the expense of their own languages that are not commonly spoken and therefore relegated to the back seat. In this instance, the practitioners were not successful in tapping into and building onto those children's FoK.

The Bakhtinian theory of dialogism refers to a philosophy of language and a social theory that recognises the multiplicity of perspectives and voices. Bakhtin believed that that dialogic teaching holds the greatest cognitive potential for learners– in this study, the children – and demands the most of teachers – in this study the practitioners (Lyle, 2013). The practitioners' rationale for opting to use English as a language of communication while they themselves are not very competent in the language, which results in them reverting back to different home languages, is in agreement with section 5.2.2.4 of the previous chapter, which is that, due to a lack of knowledge of all languages represented at the preschools, the practitioners could not be said to have succeeded in the development of each language, thus children coming from minority languages were not adequately attended to.

Bourdieu's cultural capital theory (language and symbolic power) perceives language as a powerful tool, which individuals can use to influence the outcomes of their lives in a positive way. Across the three sites, there were children who were not part of the interactions. The reason for that, I found out from the interviews, was that they spoke home languages that were not commonly spoken, and the practitioners were not conversant in those languages, therefore these children's home languages were not catered for, with the resultant disempowerment (see section 5.2.2.2 of the previous chapter).

As already mentioned above, it is worth noting that the social nature of learning is common among all four theories. Diagram 3.6 in chapter 3 illustrates how the four theories are interlinked by the common thread of social interactions that take place through communication in a language or languages between practitioners and children, both of whom are central to the research question of the study. The proposed socio-cultural dialogic language development (SCDLD)theory could adequately answer the research question, which is: What are the practitioners' experiences of support of language development in early childhood education?

For me to understand the practitioners' classroom practices, a combination of Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory and FoK theory were helpful. For instance, in this study, I had to examine the concept of scaffolding of the children's languages through

the social interactions between them and the MKOs– in this case, the practitioners. The social relationship between the practitioners and the parents also provided some insights into the practitioners' reliance on the parents to continue with the development of their children's home languages at home, which is ultimately in their communities. In terms of cultural capital, Bourdieu maintains that language is a powerful tool that individuals can use to influence the outcomes of their lives. In this study, the children coming to preschool had multiple home languages. The practitioners could use that opportunity to enhance the development of those languages through Bakhtin's dialogic teaching and, as a result, succeed in their attempts to support language development.

6.5 Research conclusions

The previous section discussed the summary of the findings against the backdrop of the literature reviewed and theoretical framework. In this section, I explore the research questions and provide answers based on the findings.

The study pursued the following main research question: *What are ECCE practitioners' experiences of the support of language development in the birth-to-four age group?*

The sub-questions were:

- How do practitioners understand language development and support in ECD centres?
- How do practitioners promote and support language in ECD centres?
- What challenges do practitioners experience in language development and support?
- What does policy say about language development and support in the birth-to-four age group?

In exploring the research questions, the five main themes showed how practitioners were trying their best to navigate the bumpy road of supporting the language development of the children in their care, when multiple home languages were spoken by both the practitioners and children and the language of choice was English. In

answering the questions, I begin with the sub-questions and conclude with the main research question.

6.5.1 Commentary on the first sub-question

How do practitioners understand language development and support in ECD centres?

Under theme 1, the findings indicated that practitioners understand and perceive language development as being able to speak to the children in their own home languages, while the chosen language of communication is English. For example, in section 5.2.1.3, one practitioner's response was:

"You see, it's almost summer and we are doing seasons and making Christmas decorations. We do it in English, and the parents enforce in the home languages at home."

Another practitioner stated:

*"Her name is *Karabo, which is a Sotho name, her home language is Xitsonga but she speaks fluent SePedi. You see, some of our kids are from dual home language backgrounds, you find that maybe *Karabo's mom is Tsonga and her dad is Pedi, that is why she is fluent in both. I speak to her in isiZulu because she understands it too"*

The implication is that the practitioners might not have been succeeding in the area of language development because their strategies for language development were compromised and they were also selective in respect of which languages to mainstream. Instead of seeing this as an obstacle, practitioners will do well to see the opportunity of developing more than one language, that is, see this as a gap to be filled through multilingualism and translanguaging.

6.5.2 Commentary on the second sub-question

How do practitioners promote and support language development in ECD centres?

Under theme 1, participants across the three sites felt that by being able to communicate with the children in their different home languages, they were able to support, as well as maintain the children's languages. The participants continued to say that, even though they opted for English, they fall back on the home languages when they see that the children do not understand what they are saying in English. Under theme 3, section 5.2.3, however, the findings are that there seems to be a contradiction between theory and practice. The sites chose English as a medium of communication, but there was little evidence of supporting the development of English. Instead, much translanguaging between multiple home languages was taking place and there was no evidence of scaffolding in those languages either. As one practitioner asserted:

"It is English, but we also use a mix of the other languages spoken by the children, to make sure that they [the children] understand."

Another practitioner argued:

"So, we have kids who speak isiZulu, SePedi, Setswana, Sesotho and isiNdebele at home and here at the centre, they speak a combination of the Sotho languages, which we have come to term S'Pitori. I would not even know how to write it down though. That is why we decided to go with English".

At preschool A, the practitioners felt like they had no choice in the matter of which language or languages to use when she posited:

"It was not even a decision. We had no choice but to use English. If we are to teach each and every child in their home language, then we will have to hire too many practitioners for all the languages spoken by the children".

The contradiction between theory and practice across the sites is that the practitioners opted to use English as a medium of instruction and yet there was much translanguaging between multiple home languages taking place. I am of the opinion that practitioners would do well to embrace translanguaging as translanguaging builds multilingualism and I believe it helps to remove boundaries between languages.

6.5.3 Commentary on the third sub-question

What challenges do practitioners experience in language development and support?

Under theme 2, the findings in section 5.2.4.1 of the previous chapter suggest that all stakeholders, that is, the children, practitioners and parents, experience challenges of one kind or another. One participant voiced her concern as follows:

"Most parents communicate in African languages with their children, so it's very hard for me sometimes to use English because kids don't understand whatever I am trying to teach them."

The practitioners do not speak all the home languages of the children. Furthermore, as indicated in section 5.2.4.3 of the previous chapter, it was found that the children whose home languages are considered "difficult" or inaccessible because they are not commonly spoken, are disempowered, as they are either excluded from interactions because of the language barrier, or are obligated to communicate in languages that the practitioners choose at a particular moment. P3A confirmed this when she stated:

***"**Sometimes we do not know the language of the child and we end up using three languages, isiZulu, SePedi and English here and there".*

P3B argued *"Some languages are difficult, but we try hard to learn a few words by using the internet and also communicating with people who speak different languages, for example, from church, community and so on"**.***

From what could be gathered from the practitioners, the parents across the sites were doing their part in supporting the development of the children's home languages, some having gone to the extent of requesting the practitioners to teach their children in English only, and therefore preserve their children's home languages by not exposing them to the home languages of the other children at the centres. This, again, I consider to be a missed opportunity on the part of the both the parents and the practitioners as they could be taking advantage of the opportunity to expose the children to as many

languages as they can. Furthermore, this would seem like history repeating itself when one considers that South Africa has a history of overt racial and ethnic segregation that was based on perceived language differences (Nkadimeng & Makalela, 2015) and that English was historically considered superior to indigenous languages (Tshotsho, 2013).

6.5.4 Commentary on the fourth sub-question

What does policy say about language development and support in the birth-to-four age group?

In section 5.2.5 of the previous chapter, findings under theme 5 indicated that, even though there were language policies that promoted home language or mother tongue instruction such as the NCF and NELDS for the ECE sector, the preschools were under no obligation to implement them. In fact, one out of the three sites knew about the NCF but did not feel bound by it.

This is a result of the preschools being private entities that do not resort under the Department of Social Services. Furthermore, it should be noted that, under theme 4, in section 5.2.4 of the previous chapter, which considers parental expectations and support, the indications are that, on the parental front, there does not seem to be any push towards English as the language of communication. However, the parents would rather have their children taught in English if that is the only way to ensure that their children are not taught in any of the other children's home languages, thereby preserving their own, as discussed in section 5.2.4.2.

P1B stated that:

"Parents generally do not care. They are comfortable with their kids being taught in English. Some parents ask if we only teach in English".

P1A confirmed this by saying:

"The parents asked us not to teach their kids in any of the other home languages spoken by the other children, just English. They say they want their kids to retain their own home languages that they speak to them at home".

The fact that ECCE centres are privately owned and run and therefore not bound by any policies, means that, as they go along, practitioners make up their own rules for language development. This also means that the "rules" are fluid, meaning, what works today might not necessarily work the next day and can be changed as the practitioners go along.

6.5.5 Commentary on the main research question

What are the experiences of ECCE practitioners' support of language development in the birth-to-four age group?

The answer to the main research question can be summarized in the following points:

In their day-to-day practices, practitioners are doing their best in supporting the development of the children's languages, however, their success rate is very low because:

- Practitioners opt to use English as the official language of communication, and English is not a familiar language to them, nor to the children (section 5.2.3.2 in the previous chapter).
- Practitioners still have to contend with multiple home languages of the children in their care and therefore they are not successful in their endeavours to support the development of the children's languages (section 5.2.3.1 in the previous chapter).
- The practitioners find themselves having to fall back on using home languages with the children, but that is also another hurdle because there are multiple home languages and the practitioners are not well versed in all of them (section 5.2.2.3 in the previous chapter).
- Practitioners are applying the translanguaging strategy in their classrooms (section 5.2.2 in the previous chapter).

This implies that practitioners have opted to use English as a language of communication because it accommodates every child under their care, and yet they still fall back on some of the other languages that are spoken by the children. This means that the children whose languages are not commonly spoken are automatically excluded and not accommodated. Translanguaging between all the languages spoken by the children might offer some solutions, if the practitioners see this as an opportunity and not an obstacle.

6.6 Implications of the study

It is through the language or languages that children speak that they form their sense of identity, community and belonging. Children not taught in their home language might lose their sense of self-identity. Children acquire most of the language structures in the first seven years of life and if practitioners do not capitalize on this window of opportunity it might have lasting negative effects later in life.

Lack of focussed development of children's home language may have devastating results for them. For instance, if a child lacks certain concepts in their own language, they will face challenges when switching to another language because learning how language structures and conventions work in their own language can serve as a springboard for learning another language. The child is likely to start formal schooling without any established language in place, and this will have a negative, long-lasting impact on their schooling career, as seen currently in South African schools.

This study comes at a time of significant strides being made in changing systems in the ECCE space in South Africa. Specifically, there is a focus on the provision of quality early childhood education by the best qualified practitioners. According to Biersteker, Dawes, Hendricks & Tredoux (2016), between 1994 and 2013, a number of policies and plans have been piloted towards the expansion of ECCE services (see 2.14 in chapter 2). Presently, South Africa's concern is both professionalisation of and professionalism in the ECD field, as many teachers in the ECD sector hold the minimum teaching qualifications, namely at level 4 and 5 on the NQF (Biersteker *et al*, 2016; RSA DHET, 2011).

The first Policy on Minimum Requirements for Programmes leading to Qualifications in Higher Education in ECCE (birth-to-four) for teachers is opening pathways to further qualifications (RSA DHET, 2016). The policy pathways start with diplomas in ECD and continue with higher degrees which can be done at universities and colleges across SA. This will go a long way towards producing quality early childhood education practitioners, whose focus will be on "improved provision of educational activities, scaffolding of learning, and attention to language stimulation of young children" (Biersteker *et al,* 2016)

ECCE in South Africa is an under-researched field and this study fills a gap in research on peri-urban practitioners' competencies in supporting the development of language of children under their care. According to Martin (2016), teachers and practitioners in disadvantaged contexts are normally targeted for professional development interventions from the perspective of them being in deficit and the interventions are usually from the western context. However, the practitioners in this study do not even form part of such interventions, by virtue of their remote locations, as well as a lack of affiliation or support from the main stakeholders such as the Department of Social Development (DSD).

6.7 Future research

According to the National Integrated Early Childhood Development Policy (NIECDP) (2015), it is the responsibility of the Department of Basic Education (DBE) to coordinate, mobilise funding and implement programmes to build the capacity of early childhood development practitioners. What this means is that the DBE will have to play a major role in delivering early childhood development practitioner training. Furthermore, this will pave the way for relevant policies and guidelines to be followed by the ECCE sector.

The ECCE sector's shift from the DSD to the DBE is a step in the right direction, and the Department's aspiration that "practitioners need to be trained and well-versed in skills like story-telling, use of rhymes and singing of songs to be able to support cognitive and first language development of children" (DBE,2017), may finally be realised.

6.8 Limitations of the study

The study was conducted in three ECD centres in the peri-urban area known as Mamelodi, in South Africa. A sample of six participants, namely, two practitioners from each site, was selected. This was obviously a limited target population which did not represent all preschools in Mamelodi township, the Gauteng province or the country.

Based on the small sample size, it is difficult to generalise the findings and the inferences drawn from the study beyond the three preschools in which the study was conducted. It is left to the reader to decide the relevance of the findings of this study to their particular setting. In addition, the study focused on the views of preschool practitioners and did not include the views of external sources. Nonetheless, the researcher did everything possible to ensure that the study findings were credible. A second limitation was due to the Covid-19 pandemic outbreak, and the subsequent lockdowns that followed. All three sites were not at their full capacity for staff or children, because parents kept their children at home and the principals had to let some of their staff members go. The researcher had to reimburse some of the staff members for transport and lunch, so that they could come to work for parts of the interviews.

6.9 Future studies

Future research can be conducted on the following:

- The professional recognition of the field of ECCE;
- Translanguaging strategies and how language specialist teachers can implement them in their classrooms, and
- Language policy implementation in the ECCE sector.

6.10 Conclusion

Literature suggests that language plays an important role in learning and communication. It also suggests that young children attending ECD centres are at a crucial stage of language acquisition and teachers have a significant role to play in the development of the linguistic competence of children in early childhood education. This study gave new insight into practitioners' perceptions and experiences of the support of language development in early learning and the various obstacles that result from the children's multilingual backgrounds. With the correct language development practices, practitioners are best positioned to support the learning of language at the very early stages of the child's development. Early childhood education policies state that practitioners need to support children in their mother tongue, because, when children have a firm grounding in the mother tongue, it becomes easier for them to learn new languages and concepts (DBE, 2009). Proponents of early childhood learning argue that government should match policies with action in order to address some of the challenges children face in language development at the early childhood level (Lafon, 2009).

7. Reflections on my study journey

Being a former preschool teacher myself, I first went out into the field with my own preconceived ideas of what a preschool teacher, or practitioner, should look like. I tried very hard to be mindful of my subjectivity and biases, but I doubt whether I was successful all the time. The first of my preconceived ideas that was dispelled was the notion that, just because I had been given permission by the principals of the preschools and that the practitioners had agreed to be the subjects of my study, I would have an automatic rapport with the practitioners.

I found this out the hard way when I realized, right at the beginning, that even though I had permission to do research at their preschools, one of the principals viewed me in a suspicious way, as if I was there as a departmental official who came to spy on them. In a conversation where I explained the purpose of my study, the principal from preschool C mentioned how she was always suspicious of strangers coming into her preschool because she had been burned before, that is, a certain individual had come

and told her they were doing research, when in actual fact they had come to steal her ideas of running a preschool. She stated that:

"I wouldn't even have had a problem if they told me the real reason they were here, I mean, I am all about sharing my knowledge."

When it came to the practitioners, I got a sense that they saw me as the one who "knows" and was there to judge them because they "didn't know". This is where the power dynamics were at play, in that the practitioners already assigned power to me because I came from a university, a place all but one of them had been admitted to. I had to explain to them that, on the contrary, they were the experts from whom I had come to learn about my study. In a way, that seemed to put them at ease because after that, they were more open and forthcoming in our casual conversations. Furthermore, because of Covid-19 and the subsequent lockdowns, the preschools were operating with a skeleton staff, parents who were let go by their employers kept their children at home and the principals had to let go of some of the practitioners. When I asked the principals if they could recall some practitioners for the duration of my stay in the field, I discovered that some practitioners were unhappy with having been dismissed and, as discussed under the limitations of the study (see 6.8), I also had to pay transport and lunch fees for those who were willing to come back.

I also got a sense that the practitioners were somewhat uncomfortable during observations and I assumed they felt judged in their practices. I might have sounded judgemental when I asked questions regarding the choice of English as a language of learning and teaching, when the preschools comprised of one hundred percent black African children. I had just assumed that, by virtue of the sites being in peri-urban areas, it would be a given that they would have a home language, or at least a South African indigenous language as an official language of learning and teaching. I took for granted the fact that some of the children might be from neighbouring countries and speak none of the local languages, and that the practitioners and children might have differing home languages. This notion was obviously negated by the discovery that the practitioners felt that English was a necessity, a middle ground language.

During this journey, I also came to realize that I had come from a place of privilege into the field and that I had to change my attitude if I were to produce valid results from my study. Having a background as a preschool teacher, I realized that the spaces where I worked were different from the participants' context. I had always worked at more privileged, and therefore more resourced preschools where everything to help with my teaching was at my disposal. The subjects of my study, however, were not so privileged, they had to work with almost nothing, and had to make the most of the little they had, from the fact that they were not professionally trained for their positions, to the fact that they had limited resources to work with.

Currently being in teacher education also came with its own challenges. I had to be mindful of the fact that these were practitioners working in the field and not my student teachers, for whom I already have a vision of how I hope they turn out to be, as fellow colleagues in the profession. Most of all, my research has opened my eyes to the realities that prevail at grassroots level that I should always keep that in mind as a I do my part in curriculum development, so that I can be part of the movement that produces early childhood education professionals who make a difference in the lives of our early learners.

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Appendix A – Ethical clearance certificate

UNISA COLLEGE OF EDUCATION ETHICS REVIEW COMMITTEE

Date: 2019/11/13

Ref: **2019/11/13/42689813/31/AM**
Name: Mrs SJ Mahan
Student No.: 42689813

Dear Mrs SJ Mahan

Decision: Ethics Approval from 2019/11/13 to 2024/11/13

Researcher(s): Name: Mrs SJ Mahan
E-mail address: emahansj@unisa.ac.za
Telephone: 082 636 2140

Supervisor(s): Name: Prof Nkidi Phatudi
E-mail address: Phatun1@unisa.ac.za
Telephone: 012 429 4582

Name: Dr MR Modise
E-Mail address: modismr@unisa.ac.za
Telephone: 012 429 2269

Title of research:

PRACTIONERS' SUPPORT OF HOME LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT IN EARLY CHILDHOOD: A CASE OF BIRTH TO FOUR-YEAR OLDS.

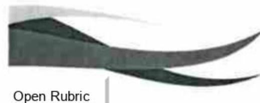
Qualification: PhD Early Childhood Education

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 2019/11/13 to 2024/11/13.

*The **low risk** application was reviewed by the Ethics Review Committee on 2019/11/13 in compliance with the UNISA Policy on Research Ethics and the Standard Operating Procedure on Research Ethics Risk Assessment.*

The proposed research may now commence with the provisions that:

1. The researcher(s) will ensure that the research project adheres to the values and principles expressed in the UNISA Policy on Research Ethics.
2. Any adverse circumstance arising in the undertaking of the research project that is relevant to the ethicality of the study should be communicated in writing to the UNISA College of Education Ethics Review Committee.



Open Rubric

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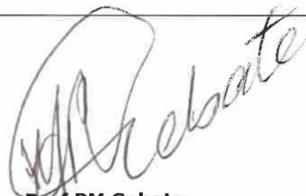
3. The researcher(s) will conduct the study according to the methods and procedures set out in the approved application.
4. Any changes that can affect the study-related risks for the research participants, particularly in terms of assurances made with regards to the protection of participants' privacy and the confidentiality of the data, should be reported to the Committee in writing.
5. The researcher will ensure that the research project adheres to any applicable national legislation, professional codes of conduct, institutional guidelines and scientific standards relevant to the specific field of study. Adherence to the following South African legislation is important, if applicable: Protection of Personal Information Act, no 4 of 2013; Children's act no 38 of 2005 and the National Health Act, no 61 of 2003.
6. Only de-identified research data may be used for secondary research purposes in future on condition that the research objectives are similar to those of the original research. Secondary use of identifiable human research data requires additional ethics clearance.
7. No field work activities may continue after the expiry date **2024/11/13**. Submission of a completed research ethics progress report will constitute an application for renewal of Ethics Research Committee approval.

Note:

The reference number **2019/11/13/42689813/31/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
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Appendix B – Letter of consent: principals

Request for permission to conduct research at a preschool

Title of your research: PRACTIONERS' SUPPORT OF HOME LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT IN EARLY CHILDHOOD IN RURAL MPUMALANGA PROVINCE.

Date: 2020

Dear Principal,

I, Sibongile Mahan am doing research under supervision of Prof NC Phatudi, a Chair of Department in the Department of Early Childhood Education towards a D ED at the University of South Africa. We have funding from Project for Early Childhood Policy Analysis for analyzing policies in early childhood education. We are inviting you to participate in a study entitled Practitioners' Support of Home Language Development in Early Childhood.

The aim of the study is to establish practitioners' perceptions of home language development and support. Your preschool has been selected because of location as well as the fact that a home language, isiNdebele is used as a medium of instruction. The study will entail observations, interviews, as well documents sourcing from the preschools. The benefits of this study are that the practitioners will be capacitated in as far as language policies of the centers are concerned. The potential risks **posed by the COVID19 pandemic will be mitigated by following the National instituted protective measures such as wearing of masks, hand hygiene and physical distancing**. There will be no reimbursement or any incentives for participation in the research. Feedback procedure will entail the researcher visiting the site to inform the participants of the findings. Participants will also be provided with the researcher's contact details.

Yours sincerely,

____

Mrs. S Mahan

ECD RESEARCH - CONSENT LETTER FROM THE ECD PRINCIPAL (RETURN SLIP)

I,………………………………………………………………… (ECD principal), hereby give permission to the researcher to conduct the study in the ECD school. I have read (and it was explained to me), and I understand the nature, procedure, potential benefits and anticipated inconvenience of participation in this study. I have had sufficient opportunity to ask questions and hereby give permission for the researcher to conduct the study. I am aware that the practitioners will participate voluntarily after signing the consent form and that school documents will be used in the study requiring my permission. The researcher has assured me that the school's name will be kept confidential unless specified otherwise.

The researcher has also indicated that the findings of this study will be processed into a research report, journal and chapter publications and/or conference proceedings.

I therefore agree/do not agree that the researcher proceed with the research.

Participant 's Name (print)	Participant 's Signature	Date:
…………………………….	…………………………	…………………………..
Prof NC Phatudi	Signature	Date:
…………………………….	…………………………	…………………………..
Dr MR Modise	Signature	Date:
…………………………….	…………………………	…………………………..
Researcher's Name	Signature	Date:
…………………………….	…………………………	…………………………..

Appendix C – Letter of consent: practitioner

Preller Street, Muckleneuk, Pretoria 0002.

Date: 2020

Title: PRACTIONERS' SUPPORT OF HOME LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT IN EARLY CHILDHOOD IN RURAL MPUMALANGA PROVINCE.

DEAR PROSPECTIVE PARTICIPANT

My name is Sibongile Mahan and I am doing research under the supervision of Phatudi NC, in the Department of Early Childhood Education towards a D ED at the University of South Africa. We have funding from Project for Early Childhood Policy Analysis for analysing policies in early childhood education. We are inviting you to participate in a study entitled Practitioners' Support of Home Language Development in Early Childhood.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THE STUDY?

This study is expected to collect important information that could benefit Early Childhood Education practitioners by capacitating them in as far as language policies of the centers are concerned.

WHY AM I BEING INVITED TO PARTICIPATE?

You are invited because you are best placed in the preschool classroom for which the study is being conducted, that is, three to four-year-olds. I obtained your contact details from Ms Jacolien Coetzee, the supervisor to the Tshwane municipality-run preschools.

WHAT IS THE NATURE OF MY PARTICIPATION IN THIS STUDY?

The study involves observations, semi-structured interviews, as well documents (daily program) sourcing from the preschools. The types of questions you will be asked will have to do with the language you use when interacting with the preschoolers. Observations will happen during both structured and unstructured classroom activities. Interview sessions will happen during naptime for full day preschoolers or afterschool for those that go home. The interviews will be an hour long. **All protective measures instituted by the government because of the COVID19 pandemic will be adhered to during observations and interviews.**

CAN I WITHDRAW FROM THIS STUDY EVEN AFTER HAVING AGREED TO PARTICIPATE?

Participating in this study is voluntary and you are under no obligation to consent to participation. If you do decide to take part, you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a written consent form. You are free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason.

WHAT ARE THE POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?

The benefits of this study are that the practitioners will be capacitated in providing home language development and support to preschoolers in their classrooms. This will be done through the provision of standards and guidelines on home language policies in early childhood education.

ARE THERE ANY NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES FOR ME IF I PARTICIPATE IN THE RESEARCH PROJECT?

Due to the corona virus pandemic, practitioners will be expected to adhere to protective measures such as wearing of masks, sanitizing and keeping to the social distancing protocol. Practitioners may also be inconvenienced by being asked to avail themselves after hours. The study is classified as low risk since it involves ECD practitioners and the data they provide is not sensitive in nature, as it is the day- to-day classroom practices.

WILL THE INFORMATION THAT I CONVEY TO THE RESEARCHER AND MY IDENTITY BE KEPT CONFIDENTIAL?

You have the right to insist that your name will not be recorded anywhere and that no one, apart from the researcher and identified members of the research team, will know about your involvement in this research. Your name will not be recorded anywhere, and no one will be able to connect you to the answers you give. Your answers will be given a code number, or a pseudonym and you will be referred to in this way in the data, any publications, or other research reporting methods such as conference proceedings.

Your answers may be reviewed by people responsible for making sure that research is done properly, including the transcriber, external coder, and members of the Research Ethics Review Committee. Otherwise, records that identify you will be available only to people working on the study, unless you give permission for other people to see the records.

Your anonymous data maybe used for other purposes such as a research report. A report of the study may be submitted for publication, but individual participants will not be identifiable in that report.

HOW WILL THE RESEARCHER(S) PROTECT THE SECURITY OF DATA?

Hard copies of your answers will be stored by the researcher for a period of five years in a locked cupboard/filing cabinet at the university for future research or academic purposes; electronic information will be stored on a password protected computer. Future use of the stored data will be subject to further Research Ethics Review and approval if applicable. The information will be destroyed If there is ever a necessity, that is, hard copies will be shredded, and electronic copies will be permanently deleted from the hard drive of the computer, through the use of a relevant software program.

WILL I RECEIVE PAYMENT OR ANY INCENTIVES FOR PARTICIPATING IN THIS STUDY?

There is no payment or incentive for participation in the study.

HAS THE STUDY RECEIVED ETHICS APPROVAL?

This study has received written approval from the Research Ethics Review Committee of the CEDU Committee, Unisa. A copy of the approval letter can be obtained from the researcher if you so wish.

HOW WILL I BE INFORMED OF THE FINDINGS/RESULTS OF THE RESEARCH?

If you would like to be informed of the final research findings, please contact Sibongile Mahan on 012 429 2272 or emahansj@unisa.ac.za.

Should you require any further information or want to contact the researcher about any aspect of this study, please contact Prof NC Phatudi on 012 429 4582 or phatun1@unisa.ac.za.

Should you have concerns about the way in which the research has been conducted, you may contact Dr M Modise on 012 429 2269

Thank you for taking time to read this information sheet and for participating in this study.

Thank you,

____

Sibongile Mahan

CONSENT/ASSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY (Return slip)

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 sufficient opportunity to ask questions and am prepared to participate in the study.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without penalty (if applicable).

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 observations and semi-structured interview.

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

Participant 's Name	Signature	Date
……………………………….	……………………………	…………………………..

Researcher's Name	Signature	Date
……………………………….	……………………………	…………………………..

Appendix D –Letter of consent: parents

Preller Street, Muckleneuk, Pretoria 0002.

Dear Parent,

Your child is invited to be a part in a study entitled PRACTIONERS' SUPPORT OF HOME LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT IN EARLY CHILDHOOD: A CASE OF BIRTH TO FOUR-YEAR OLDS.

I am undertaking this study as part of my doctoral research at the University of South Africa. The purpose of the study is to collect important information that could benefit Early Childhood Education practitioners by capacitating them in as far as language policies of the centers are concerned and the possible benefits of the study are that the practitioners will be capacitated in providing home language development and support to preschoolers in their classrooms. This will be done through the provision of standards and guidelines on home language policies in early childhood education. I am asking permission to include your child in this study because one way in which I am going to collect data is through observing practitioners as they interact with your child during lesson presentation and during play. I expect to have all the other children in your child's class to be part of the study. **I, as the researcher, will adhere to all protective measures, as instituted by the government because of the COVID19 pandemic. I will ensure that I wear a mask and keep to social distancing rules during observations, so that I do not put your child at risk of infection.**

If you allow your child to participate, I shall request him/her to be present in school **if they are healthy and not showing any signs of infection**, **and also to follow the protective rules as set out by the school**. Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and can be identified with your child will remain confidential

and will only be disclosed with your permission. His/her responses will not be linked to his/her name or your name or the school's name in any written or verbal report based on this study. Such a report will be used for research purposes only. There are no foreseeable risks to your child by participating in the study.

Your child will receive no direct benefit from participating in the study; however, the possible benefits to education are the changes in preschools' language policy. Neither your child nor you will receive any type of payment for participating in this study.

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

The study will take place during regular classroom activities with the prior approval of the school and your child's teacher. However, if you do not want your child to participate, an alternative activity, in the form of fantasy play or book corner will be available.

In addition to your permission, your child must agree to participate in the study and you and your child will also be asked to sign the assent form which accompanies this letter. If your child does not wish to participate in the study, he or she will not be included and there will be no penalty. The information gathered from the study and your child's participation in the study will be stored securely on a password locked computer in my locked office for five years after the study. Thereafter, records will be erased.

The benefits of this study are that preschoolers will be taught in their Home Language and research has proven that learners who are taught in their Home Language are more successful in their studies. There are no potential risks to the study. There will be no reimbursement or any incentives for participation in the research.

If you have questions about this study please ask me or my study supervisor, Prof NC Phatudi, Department of Early Childhood Education, College of Education, University of South Africa. My contact number is 082 636 2140 and my e-mail is emahansj@unisa.acza. The e-mail of my supervisor is Phatun1@unisa.ac.za. Permission for the study has already been given by the principal and the Ethics Committee of the College of Education, UNISA.

You are making a decision about allowing your child to participate in this study. Your signature below indicates that you have read the information provided above and have decided to allow him or her to participate in the study. You may keep a copy of this letter.

Sincerely,

SJ Mahan

Name of Child

____

Parent 's Name	Signature	Date
_____________________	_____________________	_____________________
Researcher's Name	Signature	Date
_____________________	_____________________	_____________________

Appendix E – Observation protocol

A: QUESTIONS GUIDING THE OBSERVATION	B: RATIONALE BEHIND WHAT WAS OBSERVED	C: WHAT WAS OBSERVED?
1. Are verbal interactions during the daily programme activities in a home language?	The South African National Curriculum Framework for children from Birth to Four states that all children need to hear and learn to speak in their mother tongue. It is important for practitioners to use every opportunity to communicate with the pre-schoolers in a home language because the skill transferred will ensure that the birth to four children participate successfully in subsequent grades. Research has proven that language and achievement are loosely linked.	
2. Is the practitioner supporting the development of home language through scaffolding?	Practitioners are supposed to be able to recognize teachable moments that arise, even during free play and hone-in on the development of home language.	
3. Are the activities offered print rich in home language?	Relevant resources need to be displayed and used on the Theme table and the resources need to be labelled as required by NCF, for incidental "reading"	
4. Is the presentation of lessons in the target Home Language?	Although many practitioners do not have specific standards and guidelines on home language instruction, it is imperative that they get into the habit of being intentional about developing the pre-schoolers' home language.	
5. Are the pre-schoolers and their peers communicating in the Home Language during routine activities in the daily programme?		
6. Are the children communicating in the target Home Language during their "down time", that is, when they are interacting without the practitioner's interference?		
A: QUESTIONS GUIDING THE OBSERVATION	B: RATIONALE BEHIND WHAT WAS OBSERVED	C: WHAT WAS OBSERVED?

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6. Are the children communicating in the target Home Language during their "down time", that is, when they are interacting without the practitioner's interference?		

Appendix F – Interview schedule

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT PRACTITIONERS

Thank you for taking time to do the interview with me. You have been selected to be interviewed as one of the Early Childhood Development Practitioners in your community. This interview is designed to determine your understanding of home language development and your views on supporting the that development in your classroom. Please assist us in answering the questions. There are no right or wrong answers. This interview is confidential. You **will not** be individually identified in any information or reports produced from this data. Participation is **voluntary** and you are free to **withdraw** at any point. You are also free to choose **not to answer** questions that you are not comfortable with. We appreciate you taking the time, because we believe that your feedback on all of these issues is very important. The interview should take about 30 minutes. Are you available to respond to some questions at this time?

SECTION A: PERSONAL INFORMATION

1. Your age

____

1. Your nationality

____

2. Your home language

____

3. Your highest level of schooling

____

4. Your highest level of academic or professional qualification

____

5. Your highest level of qualification in ECD

____

6. Training institution where you got your ECD professional qualification/s

____

7. Year in which the ECD qualification/s was/were awarded

8. Years of experience as an ECD Practitioner

9. Location of your ECD Centre (Province, Nearest City /Town Township/Rural Village/Informal Settlement)

10. Age group of children you work with

SECTION B: DAY TO DAY CLASSROOM PRACTICES

1. What is your understanding of Home Language development and support in early childhood education?

2. What is the language of teaching and learning in your preschool?

3. How did the school decide on this particular home language?

4. Are all the pre-schoolers from the same Home Language group?

5. If you answered no to the question above,

A. How does the school make provision for the other languages spoken by pre-schoolers?

B. How are you, as a practitioner catering for the other languages spoken by the pre-schoolers?

7. In your opinion, does teaching pre-schoolers in their Home Language help them learn better? Please provide reasons for your answer.

8. How do you promote and support home language in your ECD centre?

9. What support are you as a practitioner getting from parents and caregivers in the development of home language?

10. What challenges do you encounter in home language development and support?

11. How do you overcome the challenges you encounter in home language development and support?

12. In terms of in-service training, what type of support do you think would help you in your development and support of Home Language for the pre-schoolers?

SECTION C: ECD LANGUAGE POLICY AWARENESS AND UNDERSTANDING

1. Are you aware of the existence of South Africa's National Integrated ECD Policy published in 2015?

____
____
____

2. If you answered yes to the question above, have you attended any workshops on the National Integrated ECD Policy published in 2015?

____
____
____

3. Have you read the sections on language in the National Integrated ECD Policy published in 2015?

____
____
____

4. Are you aware of the existence of South Africa's National Curriculum Framework (NCF) for children from birth to four years?

____
____
____

5. If you answered yes to the question above, have you attended any workshops on the South Africa's National Curriculum Framework (NCF) for children from birth to four years?

____
____
____

6. Have you read the sections on language in the South Africa's National Curriculum Framework (NCF) for children from birth to four years

____
____
____

7. When and how did you hear about the policy/ policies?

   a. National Integrated ECD Policy

____
____

b. South Africa’s National Curriculum Framework (NCF)

Appendix G – Police clearance certificate

Open Rubric

SAPS 365

ENQ NO: 2019352687

South African Police Service

Clearance Certificate

THIS IS TO CERTIFY THAT NO CONVICTIONS HAVE BEEN RECORDED FOR ANY CRIME IN THE REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA AGAINST:

TRANSACTION NO	: 36106699
DATE OF BIRTH	: 1973-02-10
PLACE OF BIRTH	: SOUTH AFRICA
TITLE	: MS
SURNAME/S	: MAHAN ,
MAIDEN NAME/S	:
NAME/S	: SIBONGILE ,JOHANNAH ,

....
F/The National Commissioner of the South African Police Service

W/O A.J Goosen

Note

Personal details supplied by the applicant

Information on criminal history (where applicable) traced by means of fingerprints

SAPS Criminal Record Centre, Private Bag x308, Pretoria, 0001
E-mail address:
Tel. No.: +27 12 393 3928
Fax no.: +27 12 393 3909

Appendix H – Editor's certificate

CERTIFICATE OF LANGUAGE EDITING (ENGLISH)

To whom it may concern

This is to certify that the draft doctoral thesis with the title **PRACTITIONERS' EXPERIENCES IN SUPPORTING LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT OF PERI-URBAN PRESCHOOL CHILDREN**, to be submitted by **S.J. Mahan**, has been edited for language.

The editing included correction of grammatical, spelling, punctuation and formatting errors.

Neither the research content nor the author's intentions were altered in any way during the editing process.

Provided the editorial changes are accepted, this serves to guarantee the quality of English language in this thesis.

For further verification, please do not hesitate to contact me directly via email at desiree.tesnersmith@gmail.com or telephonically at 082 309 9641.

Dr. Desirée Tesner-Smith
Professional editor
B.Hons. (Journalism) (US)
M.A. (Creative Writing) (UP)

4 November 2021
Date