In-service students' perceptions of the Diploma in Grade R teaching programme at a South African university

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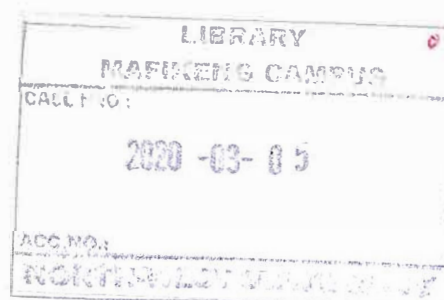
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Dissertation submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree *Master of Education in Education Management and Leadership Development* at the North-West University

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DECLARATION

I, DORCAS MATSHEDISO LEKGETHO declare that this dissertation

IN-SERVICE STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE DIPLOMA IN GRADE R

TEACHING PROGRAMME AT A SOUTH AFRICAN UNIVERSITY is my own work and

all sections of the research that used quotes or described arguments and concepts developed

by other authors have been referenced, including all secondary literature used, to show that

this material has been adopted to support my dissertation.

This dissertation has not been previously submitted by me for a degree at any other

university.

_____   **20/11/2018**

    Dorcas Matshediso Lekgetho   Date

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

DBE	Department of Basic education
DoSD	Department of Social Department Development
ECCE	Early Childhood Care and Education
ECD	Early Childhood Development
ETDP SETA	Education Training & Development Practice, Sector for Education Training Authority
GET	General Education and Training
LTSM	Learning and Teaching Support Materials
ITEC	Institution of Training and Education for Capacity Building
NIECDP	National Integrated Early Childhood Development Practices
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
NWU MC	North-West University, Mafikeng Campus
NCOP	National Council of Provinces
RTAL	Teaching and Learning in Grade R Module
RLSD	Disabilities and Learning Barriers Module
RMAT	Fundamentals of Mathematics Teaching and Learning Module
RWEL	Life Skills: Personal Wellbeing Module
RTCL	Technology and Computer Literacy for Educators Module
SAQA	South African Qualifications Authority
RHWP	Handwriting Proficiency Module

DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

Assessment: Process of gathering information on learner performance for the purpose of making instructional decisions

Barriers to learning: Conditions or factors interfering with learning or development

Behaviour: What individuals do or how they act

Constructivism: Method of instruction with learners at the centre of the learning process in which learners have to build their own understanding

Centre-Based Grade R Classes: What we normally call Community-Based ECD Centres. These are Grade R classes that are found in the communities and are managed by ECD centre management committees

Child development: Biological, psychological and emotional changes that occur in human beings between birth and the end of adolescence

Content: Subject matter or the topic of learning

Daily Programme: Grade R time table. It is divided in three main categories – Teacher guided activities, Learner initiated activities and Routines

Diploma in Grade R teaching: Introductory qualification for Grade R practitioners who wish to register as qualified professional student-teachers to teach in Grade R (SA Qualifications Authority ID 91954)

Disability: A condition where an expected human ability is impaired or absent and can be described or measured; generally it refers to a medically diagnosed condition

Educational practice: Teaching activity carried out in an educational teaching and learning space

Foundation Phase: The years of schooling starting from Grade R to Grade 3

Grade R: The Reception year programme preceding Grade 1. The first year of the foundation phase

Home Language: The language spoken by learners at home

Grade R in-service student-teachers: Student-teachers that are trained part-time while they are volunteering their services in the Grade R

Non-Centre Based Grade R classes: Home-Based Care Centres

Play-based learning: Informal, planned, fun and hands-on learning opportunities created by the teacher

Practitioners: Care givers and student-teachers that teach Grade R classes in schools and ECD centres and are not qualified as student-teachers

School-Based Grade R classes: Grade R classes at primary schools

Student-teachers: The Grade R practitioners that have registered on the Diploma in the Grade R Teaching

Teaching and Learning Space: A space that can be inside or outside where teaching and learning takes place

White Paper 5 (WP5): Education White Paper 5 on Early Childhood Development

ABSTRACT

Keywords: ECD, Grade R, mentors, perception, theory-practice gap, student-teachers

The lack of qualified Grade R student-teachers remains a challenge in the Early Childhood Development sector in South Africa. The introduction of School Based Grade R classes necessitated the need for appropriately trained Grade R student-teachers. The purpose of the Diploma in Grade R teaching, abbreviated Diploma in Grade R teaching is to teach Grade R. The Diploma in Grade R Teaching will also provide a vast number of under- and unqualified Grade R practitioners with the opportunity to gain access to a higher education qualification. Therefore, this qualification will not only provide in-service student-teachers with an opportunity to develop their academic careers, but will also enhance their personal and social well-being. This study explored the perceptions of student-teachers about the *Diploma in Grade R teaching.* A single, interpretative, descriptive case study, with a quantitative component, was utilised. Data were gathered with a questionnaire and focus group interviews. The results indicated that the programme content and delivery enhanced the professional development of the student-teachers. In addition, the participants were empowered to bridge the theory-practice divide.

In-service students' perceptions of the Diploma in Grade R teaching programme at a South

African university

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CHAPTER 1

1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Teacher training is regarded as a key factor in teacher quality (Cochran-Smith, et. al., 2009; Deacon, 2015). Therefore, attention is currently focused on teacher preparation. More so in South Africa, where emphasis is placed on quality education in the Foundation Phase (FP) to ensure the improvement of outcomes in higher grades (Department of Basic Education, 2012). Grade R (reception year) is the first grade of the FP and entails teaching and learning of children 5-6 years of age (Department of Education, 2001). In Germany, the education of children prior to primary school is referred to as kindergarten (children's garden), matching the concept of nurturing young children in a way that would prepare them for the school years ahead.

With the development of the White Paper 5 (2001), the importance of Early Childhood Development was emphasised (2001). The then Department of Education (DoE) made a commitment to include the reception year programmes as part of the Foundation Phase schooling at the public schools. This reception year, called Grade R, forms the first year of the Foundation Phase (WP5, 2001). This reception year, called Grade R, forms the first year of the Foundation Phase. It is the year that children are received into the "big school". (WP5, 2001). The policy went further to say that 85% of the Grade R classes would be in schools by 2010 even though the Provincial Education Departments (PEDs) were against the idea. They argued that schools were not ready for Grade R and that a more formal approach of teaching and learning is used at the schools which could hamper with teaching and implementation of the Grade R programme (Biersteker, 2012). In the WP5 (2001), government did not make any commitment regarding employment of Grade R practitioners

which the sector had anticipated would be addressed. Training was mentioned in the WP5 (2001) but this excluded employment contracts, as government was not ready to increase its financial commitment to teacher or practitioner salaries. Practitioners are often highly skilled individuals who are knowledgeable about child development, while student-teachers have gone through specific training to teach children under the national curriculum. They have acquired knowledge of strategies and techniques to deliver the national curriculum. Decision to roll out Grade R within the schooling system was made by the then DoE in consultation with Treasury (Biersteker, 2012). Additionally, there was no clear statement available anywhere as to who is employable as a Grade R educator, what their minimum qualification levels should be, or which institutions or agencies should be training and certifying them (Atmore, 2012). Given this development towards Grade R teacher training, the need for well-trained Grade R student-teachers remains critical.

1.1.1 The need for well qualified Grade R student-teachers

The impact of teacher training on the quality of teaching and learning in classrooms is well documented (Atmore, 2012). The same applies to Grade R, therefore standards were set for the qualifications of student-teachers in Grade R. Currently, the minimum qualifications for Grade R student-teachers in the formal schooling system in South Africa is either a Diploma in Grade R teaching or a Bachelor of Education degree in the Foundation Phase (Department of Higher Education and Training, 2015). The purpose of the Diploma in Grade R teaching, is to develop student-teachers who could teach Grade R learners (WP5, 2001).The qualification requires in-depth specialisation of knowledge, as well as practical skills and experience in a Grade R classroom teaching context, (Department of Higher Education and Training [DHET], 2015). Diploma in Grade R teaching qualification expects

students to gain experience in applying such knowledge and skills in the context of working with Grade R learners in a school.

Though qualifications have an impact on quality of education, linking theory and practice remains a challenge in teacher training (Korthagen, 2014; Rusznyak & Walton, 2011). Relating to this observation, Korthagen (2014) mentions that in some countries, a major part of in-service teacher education has now become the responsibility of the schools, thus creating a situation in which, to a large degree, teacher education happens on the job. In South Africa, some of the ECD teacher training initiatives are implemented through learnership programmes. This means that student-teachers enrolled for the Diploma in Grade R teaching would come to training sessions for a week, (depending on the prescription of the training programme) and go back to their work places for three weeks to implement what they have learnt during training. Widespread criticism of educational theory courses by students in training, beginning student-teachers, and school principals has been noted (Skilbeck & Connel, 2004). According to the DHET (2015) practical learning involves learning from and in practice.

1.2 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

After 1996 the then Department of Education (DoE) decided to spend less of the budget on student-teachers to enable more spending on infrastructure in public Grade R facilities managed by School Governing Bodies (SGBs) (Biersteker, 2012). Due to a lack of qualified Grade R student-teachers, few schools could offer departmental posts thus most public posts were SGB funded. The lack of qualified Grade R student-teachers was again mentioned in the Auditor General's report on Early Childhood Development: too many underqualified practitioners (Makwetu, 2014). The report emphasised that even though the Grade R practitioners had many years of practical experience and a deep love of children, far too many of them are unqualified to teach Grade R classes. This prompted the Department of

Basic Education (DBE) to conduct its own survey in 2014. According to the survey report, (Department of Education, 2014) nationally 12 336 Grade R practitioners were in need of a diploma qualification for the efficient delivery of the Grade R curriculum. The DBE was aware of the fact that not all Grade R student-teachers would have enough credits to access the BEd (Foundation Phase). Therefore, the Diploma in Grade R teaching was promoted as the preferred alternative to the BEd Foundation Phase for Grade R student-teachers and is offered by Higher Education institutions and some NGOs, e.g. South African National Tutor Services (SANTS.

By initiating the Diploma in Dip (Grade R teaching) as a professional qualification, the Department of Basic Education acknowledged the importance of having trained Grade R student-teachers for the effective implementation of the Grade R curriculum.

1.2.1 The need for quality Early Childhood Development (ECD)

A study was undertaken in Asia at the Isra University (Abdul-Haq, 2014). The aim of the study was to investigate the degree of the general basic educational skills that ECD student-teachers in Jordan have from the standpoint of the student-teachers themselves. The study also aimed at identifying the student-teachers' major subjects and whether the subjects had any impact on the ECD programmes. The study attempted to answer the following question: What are the educational skills needed for kindergarten student-teachers according to their student-teachers' own perception of the programme? In both Jordan and South Africa, student-teachers are expected to possess various teaching performance skills: curriculum planning, implementation and assessment (cf. 1.2.1). Grade R student-teachers should possess creative abilities, be capable of providing an organized educational environment that encourages learning, and allows the child freedom of movement, choice, experimentation and learning through discovery (DoE, 2008).

Like in South Africa, the Korean society demanded government to promote quality early childhood education (Kim & Kang, 2012). This led to the Korean government giving more attention to quality training of early childhood education student-teachers. It is evident that having qualified ECD student-teachers is not applicable to South Africa only, but other countries as well, e.g. Korea

ECD is a priority area within the South African context and is supported by legislation and national policies e.g. WP5 (2001), National Integrated Early Childhood Development policy (2015) and Interim Policy for Early Childhood Development (1996). ECD is defined by WP5 (2001) as a comprehensive approach to policies and programmes for children from birth to nine years of age with the active participation of their parents and caregivers. Its purpose is to protect the child's rights to develop his or her full cognitive, emotional, social and physical potential (WP5, 2001). Teaching and learning in Grade R share this purpose of the optimal development of each individual child (WP5, 2001). The challenge faced by the sector was that most Grade R learners were taught by unqualified or underqualified student-teachers (Biersteker, 2012).

1.2.2 Grade R teacher preparation in South Africa

Since the Interim Policy for Early Childhood Development (1996), training and education opportunities for Grade R student-teachers in South Africa were made available through short skills programmes, full ECD qualifications, and Bachelor of Education in Foundation Phase. Besides, some Higher Education Institutions offer Diploma in Dip (Grade R teaching) (Atmore, 2012). Furthermore, Biersteker and Picken (2013) emphasised in their report to Education Training and Development Practises, Sector for Education Training Authority (ETDP SETA), that qualified Grade R student-teachers are important functionaries in the education fraternity and that there is a need to provide more trained Grade R student-

teachers. This is in further support of the requirements for teacher qualifications that any education for Grade R student-teachers must have sufficient practical activities and alternative strategies of teaching young children in order for their training to be complete, Revised Minimum Requirements for Teacher Education Qualifications (DHET, 2015).

When Grade R classes at primary schools in South Africa were introduced, one of the obstacles was the fact that the country did not have enough student-teachers who were qualified to teach this grade. Janse van Rensburg (2015) claims that one of the reasons Grade R learners were not ready for formal schooling was this obvious lack of professionally qualified student-teachers. The report of the DBE to SCOPA (2014) reflected the concern that the country does not have enough qualified Grade R practitioners. The report further indicated that many schools could not accommodate Grade R classes due to lack of student-teachers and space.

1.2.3 The Diploma in Grade R teaching

The University X started offering Diploma in Grade R teaching in 2015. This diploma is designed to develop the Grade R teacher's academic career and to enhance the personal and social well-being of the Grade R child (NWU, 2018). The minimum entry requirement for the Diploma in Grade R teaching is a Senior Certificate or a Level 4 National Certificate (Vocational) with a diploma entry endorsement or equivalent. Another pre-requisite is that student-teachers should be working at, or volunteering their services in the Grade R classes at the Primary Schools, NWU (2018) backed by the memorandum from the Department of Basic Education (DBE, 2017). This specialised qualification provides students with an opportunity to articulate into the B.Ed. Foundation Phase degree offered by higher education institutions.

The provincial DoEs assist provinces to ensure unqualified Gr R student-teachers who do not qualify to enrol for the Diploma in Grade R teaching, to complete NQF Level 4, whilst a further 4 000 were receiving support to complete either a B.Ed. or a Diploma in Grade R teaching to complete NQF Level 4. The intention is to give opportunity to these student-teachers to access the Diploma in Grade R teaching. In 2015, University X registered 97 Grade R practitioners for the *Diploma in Grade R teaching*, of which 79 of these students were involved in this case study. These student-teachers were neither employed by the SGBs nor the PEDs, but they were volunteering their services at school-based Grade R classes.

According to the DHET (2015), the purpose of the Diploma in Grade R teaching is to develop student-teachers who could teach Grade R. The qualification requires in-depth knowledge, as well as practical skills and experience in a Grade R classroom teaching context. Abdul-Haq (2014) supports this notion by saying that the general objective of teacher preparation programmes, are that student-teachers are expected to possess various teaching performance skills, such as planning, curriculum implementation and assessment. The programme content plays a role in the professional development of the Grade R student-teachers, Abdul-Haq (2014). In education, the term professional development may be used in reference to a wide variety of specialised training, formal education, or advanced professional learning intended to help student-teachers to improve their professional knowledge, competence, skill, and effectiveness (Caena, 2013).

Another important skill that the student-teachers should master through the programme is the early identification of barriers to learning to ensure that learners that experience barriers to learning are provided with the necessary support at different levels and in different Grade R settings, as was the intention of the White Paper 6 (WP6, 2001).

The Council on Higher Education (CHE, 2011) advocates that programmes promoting graduates' successful integration into the world of work require innovative curricular,

teaching, and assessment practices. Van Koller (2010) requires that all initial teacher

education programmes should include work integrated learning which will assist student-

teachers not only to learn in practice, but also from practice. The question here is: "Do

student-teachers perceive the Diploma in Grade R teaching supportive to their professional

development as Grade R student-teachers?"

1.2.4 Grade R practitioners enrolled for the Diploma in Grade R teaching: Who are they?

These are 79 student-teachers enrolled for the Diploma in Grade R teaching at the

University X. Some of these student-teachers started working with young children voluntarily

at their respective schools. Others run their own ECD sites and had to leave these sites to go

and volunteer their services at the School Based Grade R classes registered with DoE as

required by DBE. All 79 student-teachers on this programme have some experience on

working with young children gained from the ECD traditional sites in the communities

(responses from the questionnaire). Atmore (2012) describe a traditional ECD site as a site

that involves the common practice of providing ECD care and education for a class of

children, ranging from 0 to 6 years of age. However, ECD provision can take place at public

primary schools (in the form of Grade R classes), at community-based facilities (in the form

of pre-Grade R and/or Grade R classes) or centre-based facilities. Centre-based facility is a

site build and dedicated for the purpose of caring and teaching young children from 0 to 6

years of age. .

The fact that the University and the student-teachers were situated in poor, rural area,

posed specific challenges, pointed out by Letseka (2013). These include lack of resources and

systemic inefficiency which result in dysfunctional schools. These schools are sometimes

without basic infrastructure, such as decent classrooms and libraries, or basic services

including clean running water and electricity. Given these circumstances, it is important to state from the onset that the participants were a unique group, with unique needs. Student-teachers were chosen for his specific case-study to determine their perceptions

The student-teacher's ages ranged from 25 to 56. Most of them had Level 4 or Level 5 ECD qualifications, but very few of them had matric (Grade 12). The ECD Level 4 qualification provided them with the necessary skills to facilitate the holistic development of young children (including those children with special needs) (DHET, 2015), and to offer quality ECD services in a variety of community ECD settings. Level 5 provided them with the necessary skills to manage the Grade R programme (DHET, 2015). The Diploma in Grade R teaching qualification would place them on REQV 13 (NWU, 2018).

These student-teachers applied for the *Diploma in Grade R teaching* to the University X and were offered a bursary by an external funder. An agreement between the University and the funder included some conditions. One of them was that these students should be supported to ensure success. Support measures included contact sessions for two Saturdays through-out the academic year as well as the opportunity to come for contact sessions during school holidays.

1.3 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK UNDERPINNING THE RESEARCH

Berry, Geursen and Lunenberg (2015) state that a theoretical framework should be used to maintain focus during research. This study is underpinned by Vygotsky's theory of Social constructivism (Vygotsky, 1978) which claims that knowledge is actively constructed by individuals, groups as well as society and that knowledge is not simply transferred. The theoretical framework arises from the processes of social interaction. The study conforms to Social constructivism because participating student-teachers had to work with one another, with lecturers and with mentors for effective learning. They were given projects and assignments to complete in groups.

In addition, there was social interaction between the researcher and the participants. According to Maree (2017), the researcher should observe and pay very close attention by creating a connection and social relationship with the participants. It was important for the researcher to meet and talk to the participants often at the schools in their Grade R classes. This made it possible for the researcher to observe and listen to what the participants said and did when they were in their Grade R classes and to understand their historical backgrounds. Draper (2013) says, according to Social constructivism nothing is learnt from scratch; instead, it is related to existing knowledge with new information being integrated into and expanding the existing network of understanding. This is true with the student-teachers on this programme since many of them had been working at the ECD sites before joining the Grade R classes at schools. They came with their own experiences and integrated that with the new information that they learnt from the programme. According to Abdul-Haq (2014), student-teachers make many decisions in the classroom in accordance with their competence and experiences. Thus, a lack of competence on their part may lead to them making unsound decisions that could adversely affect the level and objectives of education. In this instance, prior knowledge played a big role because the student-teachers could compare and relate to their past experiences.

Assessments included reflection on prior knowledge and teaching strategies. These reflections enabled the student-teachers to integrate newly learnt knowledge as they came to new understanding of teaching in Grade R. This confirms Draper's (2013) statement in saying that a Social Constructivist learner's view of the world will always be subjective, as each individual will interpret experience via a different pre-existing framework of understanding and will develop their own unique view of the world.

1.4 PROBLEM STATEMENT

The introduction of school based Grade R classes necessitated the appropriate training of Grade R student-teachers. To respond to the need of qualified Grade R student-teachers, the *Diploma in Grade R teaching* was developed with the purpose of developing student-teachers who can demonstrate focused knowledge and skills appropriate for teaching in Grade R. The qualification requires in-depth specialisation of knowledge, as well as practical skills and experience in a Grade R classroom teaching context (cf. 1.2.2). Given the need for well qualified Grade R teachers, coupled with the opportunity to enrol for the Diploma in Grade R teaching at a rural campus as well as having a bursary placed the students in better position. The 97 student-teachers (aged between 25 and 56) who were enrolled for this specific bursary project were not employed, but were volunteering their services at the school-based Grade R classes. Thus, exploring this group of in-service student-teachers' perceptions of the *Diploma in Grade R teaching* programme, in this context, would support Higher Education as well as the Department of Education with essential information on the way the delivery mode of the Diploma in Grade R teaching with additional face-to-face support could foster professional development of unqualified volunteer Grade R student-teachers and help them link theory to practice.

1.4.1 Research questions

The main research question was:

What are the Grade R in-service student-teachers' perceptions regarding the *Diploma in Grade R teaching*?

The sub-questions were:

- What are the perceptions of the student-teachers of the way the programme content supported their professional development as Grade R student-teachers?

- What are the perceptions of student-teachers of the way the delivery of the programme supported their professional development as Grade R student-teachers?

- What are the perceptions of student-teachers of the way the programme supported the linking of theory and practice?

- What are the perceptions of student-teachers of the way the teaching environment supported the implementation of programme content in practice?

1.4.2 Research objectives

The study attempted to achieve the following objectives:

- To determine the student-teachers' perceptions of the way the programme content supported their professional development as Grade R student-teachers.

- To determine the student-teachers' perceptions of the way the delivery of the programme supported their professional development as the Grade R student-teachers.

- To determine the student-teachers' perceptions of the way the programme supported the linking of theory and practice.

- To determine the student-teachers' perception of the way the teaching environment supported the implementation of programme content in practice.

1.5 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

1.5.1 Research paradigm

A research paradigm is a set of beliefs that guides the research process (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Researchers use various paradigms that are attuned to their study. The theory that underpins this study is Vygotsky's theory of Social constructivism (Vygotsky, 1978) (cf. 1.3), thus, the research paradigm adopted for this study is the Social Constructivist worldview, combined with interpretivism. According to Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007), an interpretive paradigm is characterized by the concern for the individual and an attempt to understand the subjective world of human experience. In interpretivism, efforts are made to understand from within (Cohen et al., 2007). The reason for choosing an interpretivist approach was to allow the researcher to interact closely with participants in order to gain more insight on the perceptions of this specific group of student-teachers enrolled in the *Diploma in Grade R teaching* as part of a bursary group, regarding aspects that relate to their professional development as well as the covering of the theory and practice gap.

1.5.2 Research design

Okeke and Van Wyk (2015) describe a research design as a detailed plan of how one conducts a research project. A case study is a strategy for doing research which involves an empirical investigation of a particular contemporary phenomenon within its real life context using multiple sources of evidence (Coe, Waring, Hedges, & Arthur, 2017). Yin (2017) recommends a single case study with both qualitative and quantitative components integrated to allow rich, strong evidence about the problem in question. To provide a more complete understanding of the research problem, a qualitative case study, with a quantitative component (questionnaires) was used. Yin (2017) further suggests that the same research

questions are used in both the qualitative and quantitative components and that concurrent analyses should be conducted. According to Guba, (as cited in Maree, 2017), case studies are classified into three types: factual/descriptive, interpretative and evaluative. In addition, Yin (2017) distinguishes between explanatory and descriptive case studies.

In this study, the researcher used the interpretative, descriptive case study to help understand the Grade R in-service student-teachers' perceptions regarding the *Diploma in Grade R teaching*. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), the researcher should provide an in-depth understanding of a case, develop procedures for data collection and specify the analysis approach.

1.5.3 Methodology

The researcher explored in-service Grade R student-teachers' perceptions of the *Diploma in Grade R teaching*. Therefore in this study, an interpretative qualitative case study (cf. 3.4) with questionnaires as quantitative component was used as a strategy. The 79 participants completed the questionnaire and then only those who indicated that they are willing to be interviewed, participated in interviews. According to Rallis and Rossman (2012), a case study approach enables the researcher to gather detailed data with a range of sources and to obtain multiple perspectives within the case. In this study, the quantitative data consisted of questionnaires and was used to get data from the larger group, while the qualitative data (four focus group interviews), were used to get in-depth data about student-teachers' perceptions of what contributed to their professional development and enabled them to cover theory-practice gap. These data sets have been used to construct a descriptive analysis and derive possible interpretations and implications of the data.

1.5.3.1 Site selection

The research was conducted at a rural, South African university, called University X for the purpose of this study. The site was conveniently chosen for its proximity to the researcher since this ensured access to the type of data needed for the study. According to Maree (2017), the research site must be convenient and suitable to answer the research question. The research site was suitable, because it provided access to the in-service student-teachers enrolled on the *Diploma in Grade R teaching*, as participants. The interviews and questionnaires were completed at the research site.

1.5.3.2 Participant selection

All participants (cf. 3.4.2) had to be enrolled on the Diploma in Grade R teaching at this specific site, called University X, since the study intended to understand their perceptions about the programme in question. A colleague, with experience in research, acted as a research assistant (a researcher requested by the main researcher for the purpose of assisting in this study). The research assistant supported the main researcher to recruit participants. The participants recruited were able to give information enhancing the understanding of the research problem because they were directly involved in the programme and could give the most relevant information. There were two groups, group 1 was the larger group and they answered the questionnaires, while group 2 was a smaller group (who indicated that they were willing to be interviewed) and was involved in the focus group interviews.

The following steps were followed to recruit participants.

STEP 1: An advertisement about the study was placed on the electronic platform used for teaching and learning activities at University X.

STEP 2: Participants, who were interested in the study, responded via e-mail to the research assistant.

STEP 3: The research assistant replied to the e-mails, providing the date, time and venue that the participants would meet with her.

STEP 4: The research assistant explained the study to the student-teachers and handed out the informed consent forms (cf. Appendix F). An appointment (date, time and venue) was set with the participants to collect the completed informed consent forms.

STEP 5: After a week, the research assistant met with student-teachers and collected the signed informed consent forms. 79 student-teachers agreed to participate in the study and they formed Group 1.

STEP 6: From Group 1 (79 student-teachers), 20 volunteered to participate in the focus groups.

Thus, from the study population of 97 students enrolled, 79 participated in the questionnaires (group 1), while 20 of these students agreed to participate in the focus group interviews (group 2). Group 1 (79 student-teachers) completed the questionnaires. The questionnaires also included a question where the participants indicated who would be interested to participate in a focus group interview. Those who were interested provided their cell phone numbers where they could be contacted.

1.5.3.3 Data collection strategies

Questionnaires

The information gathered from the literature study was used to develop and design a structured questionnaire (cf. 3.4.3.1) with items to gather information regarding student-teachers' perceptions about the Diploma in Grade R teaching (section B). Section A of the questionnaire provided biographical information about the student-teachers (cf. Appendix A).

Section B, the quantitative component, comprised of both open ended and closed questions. Group 1 (79 student-teachers) completed the questionnaires. The questionnaire also included a question where the participants indicated who would be interested to participate in a focus group interview. Those who were interested provided their cell phone numbers where they could be contacted.

Focus group interviews

The focus group interviews (cf. 3.4.3.2) were conducted to collect qualitative data and to provide the student-teachers with the opportunity to portray their perceptions of the Diploma in Grade R teaching. They responded through the focus group interview on how the programme was supporting their professional development as Grade R student-teachers as well as their ability to cover the theory-practice gap.

Group 2 (20 student-teachers) were divided into four groups of five members and focus group interviews were conducted (cf. Appendix B) with each group. Appointments were made with the group members through SMS and reminders were sent a day before the interviews. The focus group interviews gave an opportunity to student-teachers to express themselves freely and provided the researcher to prompt for deeper meaning. These sessions took between 20 and 30 minutes. Recordings were done using a tape recorder and a cell phone for backup purposes. Table 1.1 provides a framework that guided data collection to answer the research questions.

Table 1.1: Guiding Framework for data collection

MAIN RESEARCH QUESTION:	
What are the Grade R in-service student-teachers' perceptions regarding the *Diploma in Grade R teaching?*	
SUB-QUESTIONS	DATA COLLECTION
What are the perceptions of the student-teachers about the way the programme content supported their professional development as Grade R student-teachers?	Questionnaires (Questions 1.1 – 1.5) Focus group interviews (Question 1.1 – 1.3)
What are the perceptions of student-teachers of the way the delivery of the programme supported their professional development as Grade R student-teachers?	Questionnaires (Questions 1.6 – 1.7) Focus group interviews (Question 1.4 – 1.6)
What are the perceptions of student-teachers of the way the programme supported the linking of theory to practice?	Questionnaires (Questions 2.1 – 2.2) Focus group interviews (Question 2.1)
What are the perceptions of student-teachers of the way the teaching environment supported the implementation of programme content in practice?	Questionnaires (Questions 2.3 – 2.5) Focus group interviews (Question 2.2 – 2.5)

1.5.3.4 Data analysis

Data analysis (cf. 3.4.4) assists the researcher to make sense of the data. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) indicates that qualitative data analysis is primarily inductive and comparative. In this study, the data was interpreted at the hand of concurrent triangulation (Creswell, 2009). In a concurrent triangulation approach, the researcher collects both quantitative and qualitative data concurrently and then compared the two databases to determine if there was convergence. Creswell (2009) recommends that the concurrent triangulation method should be used to compensate for the weaknesses inherent within one method with the strengths of the other.

Qualitative data

The qualitative data collected with the open ended questions of the questionnaires, as well as the data collected with the focus group interviews, were analysed simultaneously (Yin, 2017), using inductive content analysis (Nieuwenhuis, 2014). The researcher followed a systematic process to analyse data by recording data, transcribing data and coding data into themes and categories. Once the data had been coded and after extensive collaboration with the supervisors, colleagues and participants, the researcher organised the data according to the themes and categories. This process of sharing the information was for verification and validation. Once tentative conclusions were made, the information was stored in a password protected computer.

The quantitative component

Questionnaires (cf. Appendix A) were analysed to provide detail about the participant's context and biographical information. This was done in order to also establish the student-teachers' perceptions of the *Diploma in Grade R teaching*, how the programme content and the delivery of the programme supported their professional development as Grade R student-teachers (cf. Table 1.1). After collection of questionnaires from students,

responses were entered into a file created for that purpose and labelled. A table format was

used to record data. Simple, descriptive analysis was used to report frequencies and averages,

of the data obtained from the questionnaires.

1.5.3.5 The researcher's role

According to Creswell and Poth (2018), the researcher should provide an in-depth

understanding of a case. In addition to this, the researcher should determine if the research

problem is best examined using a case study approach; identify the reason and case for the

study; develop procedures for data collection; specify the analysis approach and report on the

interpreted meaning of the case and lessons learned (cf. 3.4.5).

In this interpretative case study, the researcher is an ECD specialist, who has

extensive experience in both teaching Grade R learners and training Grade R student-

teachers. She intended to understand the participants' perceptions of how the Diploma in

Grade R teaching supported their professional development as Grade R student-teachers as

well as their ability to implement theory in practice. In line with Draper (2013) who noted

that a social constructivist learner's view would be subjective, the researcher understood that

her experience and background could influence the interpretation of the data. In addition,

interpretative inquiry requires from researchers to interpret what they see, hear and

understand. These interpretations cannot be separated from their own backgrounds, history

and prior knowledge. Thus, the researcher acknowledges the fact that her experience and

background influenced the interpretation of the data. To ensure validity the researcher

checked her interpretation with colleagues, as well as the participants of the study.

1.5.4 Ethical considerations and trustworthiness

All research is concerned with producing valid and reliable information in an ethical manner (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Okeke and Van Wyk (2015) examined the major ethical values and principles that researchers are supposed to keep in mind as they conduct research involving human participants. In accordance with these standard accepted principles of ethical research procedures, all relevant authorities were contacted and the research took place with the informed consent of all participants (cf. Appendix F). All participants took part in the research voluntarily and they could withdraw at any time. In addition, the individual's right to privacy was respected as stressed in the consent forms. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained at all times.

Cohen, et al. (2007) state that the sources of data should be triangulated to ensure credibility. Therefore, to ensure the credibility of this qualitative research, triangulation was utilised. Data derived from the questionnaires and focus group interviews were used together and checked with knowledgeable members in the field to provide credibility, objectivity and validity to the interpretation of the data.

1.6 CONTRIBUTION OF THE STUDY

It is important to mention again that the Department of Basic Education has realised the need to have qualified Grade R teachers in every Grade R classroom. Registration and offering of the Diploma in Grade R teaching means that the national need will be met and the knowledge base of the teachers in the Early Childhood Development sector will be deepened. Hoadley and Jansen (2009) states that integration or competence curriculum is often supported by people interested in opening up education to all groups in society and in using education to emancipate groups that have been oppressed. This study aimed to find out answers to the questions raised (c.f. 1.2.2) and to make suggestions for improvement.

Thus, exploring this group of in-service students-student-teachers' perceptions of the Diploma in Grade R teaching programme, in this rural context, could support Higher Education as well as the Department of Education with essential information.

1.7 CHAPTER OUTLINE

Chapter 1: Introduction and background

This chapter provides an overview of the research, including an introduction, brief literature review, problem statement, research question, aim of the research, definition of concepts, research design and methodology.

Chapter 2: Literature Study

This chapter offers an overview of the relevant literature on this subject to explain the importance of the implementation of theory in practice. Theoretical support of the research was also considered.

Chapter 3: Design and Methodology

This chapter focuses on the design and methodology that underpinned this study, including the population, site selection, data collection procedures, analysis and interpretation.

Chapter 4: Analysis of Data and Empirical Findings

This chapter deals with analyses and presentation of findings.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Recommendations and Conclusions.

This chapter discusses and interprets the findings and compares the findings with the existing literature. Conclusions are drawn and recommendations made.

CHAPTER 2

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Continuous Professional Development (CPD) is an international practice and a pre-requisite for quality in any occupation, including education (Robinson, 2017). This professional development, serves little purpose if it cannot be applied in the workplace (Allen & Wright, 2014; Gordon, Meyer & Rose, 2016). This chapter focuses on the theoretical and empirical literature that underpinned the study. The chapter starts by explaining the theoretical framework of the study, namely social constructivism. Thereafter, literature relevant to CPD, teacher training, covering the theory and practice gap as well as the importance of mentoring is placed in the context of the study. The chapter concludes with an overview of the Diploma in Grade R teaching.

2.2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Education theory entails the fact that teaching approaches and strategies must have a theoretical basis upon which teaching can take place which indicates the purpose, interpretation and application of education (Draper, 2013). This study is underpinned by the Social Constructivist theory (Vygotsky, 1978). According to Draper (2013) the Social Constructivist theory has been in existence for approximately forty years. He says that although it is thought of as a theory, it is more of a philosophical explanation of the nature of learning. In a Social Constructivist's view, knowledge is actively constructed by individuals or groups and not simply transferred.

2.2.1 Defining Social Constructivist theory

Social constructivism is a sociological theory of knowledge according to which human development is socially situated and knowledge is constructed through interaction with others (Draper, 2013; Rawson, 2000; Brooks & Brooks, 1992). The Social Constructivist theory owes its origins to the contributions of Vygotsky through his Social Development Theory (Draper, 2013). The major theme of Vygotsky's work is that social interaction plays a fundamental role in the development of cognition. The participants in this study, the in-service student-teachers, came from different backgrounds with different experiences and knowledge. It was important that they interact with one another and learn from one another. Through interacting, student-teachers gained specific knowledge about different contexts and cultures. In addition, there was interaction between the presenters of the programme and the student-teachers who came to the programme with extensive theoretical knowledge and practical experience about teaching in Grade R, but again from their unique circumstances. This had to be taken into account and formed the basis for new learning during training because the expertise that the adult student-teachers brought to the training was taken into account (Brooks & Brooks, 1992).

Vygotsky (1978) states that every function in the person's cultural development appears twice: first on the social level and later on the individual level, principally between people (inter psychological) and then inside individual people (intra psychological). Draper (2013), notes that social constructivism emphasises that all cognitive functions, including learning, are dependent on interactions with others, e.g. student-teachers and peers. Therefore learning critically depends on the qualities of a collaborative process within a group or community.

The United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO, 2017) says that constructivism implies that people construct how they understand and know

the world through their experiences and reflections on those experiences. UNESCO (2017) continues that when we encounter something new, we have to reconcile it with our previous ideas and experiences. This encounter may lead to change about what we believe or clearance of the new information as irrelevant. These decisions point to the fact that we are active creators and constructors of our own knowledge. We create our own knowledge by asking questions, exploring and assessing knowledge.

In this study, the student-teachers had an opportunity to ask questions, to engage in projects (within small groups) and to assess the knowledge that they had before enrolling for the Diploma in Grade R teaching. They were also able to compare and decide to keep what they thought was good practice as well as discard what they contemplated and understood as bad practice. This practice is confirmed by Brooks and Brooks (1992) who suggest that people assimilate information by connecting new knowledge to the knowledge they already have and by accommodating knowledge which involves adjustment of their view of the world in order to accommodate new knowledge presented to them. In addition, the social constructivist's view of learning points towards a number of different teaching and learning strategies, such as the content of the training programme supports student-teachers to use different techniques in their construction of new knowledge and students actively construct knowledge aided by their instructors or their society (Brooks & Brooks, 1992; Draper, 2013).

Fosnot (2013) describes constructivism as referring to the family of theories that share the assertion that human knowledge and experience entails the (pro) active participation of the individual. Fosnot (2013) says that constructivism has been described as consisting of two types of hypotheses: that knowledge is actively constructed by the cognising subject, and not passively received from the environment. Also that coming to know is an adaptive process that organises one's experiential world, it does not discover an independent, pre-existing world outside the mind of the knower.

The implication of this view of learning in this study was twofold. Firstly, to direct the student-teachers who had to realise that Grade R learners should be actively involved in a constructivist classroom. Secondly, in their own training, the Grade R student-teachers actively constructed their knowledge through discussion, experimentation, observation and building their own representation of understanding, assisted by the lecturers (Rawson, 2000). Another aspect of Vygotsky's theory is the idea of "Zone of Proximal Development" (ZPD).

2.2.2 Zone of Proximal Development

Vygotsky (1978) distinguished between two developmental levels: the actual and the potential. He believed that the actual level of development is the level that the learner has reached and at which the learner can solve problems independently, while the potential level or the ZPD is the level which the learner could reach with adequate support or in collaboration with others. According to Amineh and Asl (2015) as well as Lantolf, Thorne and Poehner (2015), the ZPD is the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving with support or in collaboration with more capable peers. Full development within the ZPD depends upon social interaction. The range of skills that could be developed with support or peer collaborations exceeds what students could achieve on their own (Amineh & Asl, 2015; Lantolf, et al., 2015). Every student-teacher on this programme came with the actual level of development and through training could reach potential levels. In this study, the student-teachers were supported through the Diploma in Grade R teaching programme by the lecturer, as well as by engaging in group activities when the student-teachers collaborated to solve problems by engaging in group activities.

Therefore, this theory is applicable to this study as the participants had to understand a constructivist teaching environment with regards to their own training and as to how it is applicable to the Grade R classroom.

2.2.3 Social Constructivist lecture planning

The Social Constructivist lecture planning is based on the premise that student-teachers come to the university with some knowledge and experience which may be right or wrong and which must be reinforced or corrected (Bybee, 2013). One of the instructional models that are used in a Social constructivism teaching and learning space was developed by Bybee (2013) and is best known as the "Five E's". This instructional model acknowledges five stages of engagement: these are, engage, explore, explain, elaborate and evaluate. **Engagement** provides the opportunity for the lecturers to discover what student-teachers know or what they think they know. This is followed by **exploration where** a common, yet broad range of experiences, allows student-teachers to compare their thoughts with their observation of the experiences. During the third stage, **explanation,** student-teachers are provided with opportunities to connect their previous experiences with the main ideas within the unit of study. This stage contributes to making conceptual sense of the newly learned knowledge and is followed by **elaboration.** When student-teachers elaborate, they apply or extend the concepts in new situations and relate their previous experiences to the new ones. **Evaluation** of student-teachers' conceptual understanding and ability to use skills begins at the engagement stage and continues throughout (Bybee, 2013).

Brooks and Brooks (1992) argue that the constructivist training environment should acknowledge the diversity of skills and knowledge that student-teachers bring to the teaching environment. They maintain that training should create opportunities for student-teachers to create and apply their existing skills and knowledge and to develop new skills and knowledge

that are important in their future careers. In a constructivist training environment, student-teachers are encouraged to constantly assess how the training helps them gain more robust understanding of the learning processes. By questioning themselves and their strategies, student-teachers in the constructivist training environment ideally become expert learners and in turn, expert teachers. The principles mentioned above provided the lecturers in the Diploma in Grade R teaching an opportunity to modify and adapt various lecture strategies to benefit the student-teachers enrolled in the programme.

2.2.4 The application of social constructivism in this study

Amineh and Asl (2015) indicate that social constructivism is closely linked to constructivism in that it contributes to the development of cognition in individuals. Social constructivism contributes by suggesting strategies that can be used to enhance teaching. Van de Walle, Karp, Bay-Williams, Wray and Brown (2007) suggest strategies for the improvement of teaching. These include, building of new knowledge, recognition of prior knowledge and the use of cultural tools. Therefore, student-teachers must be provided with opportunities to talk during contact sessions, but also in their Grade R classes, create opportunities for learners to talk. Classrooms, as indicated by van de Walle et al. (2007), need to provide structures and support to help learners to make sense of the new content in the light of their existing knowledge. In this study, the student-teachers had opportunities for reflective thoughts to integrate their existing knowledge with what they have learned, thus, the reflection supported the student-teachers to make sense of what has been learned. This practice, according to Van de Walle et al. (2007), supports the student-teachers to improve teaching.

Not only does Social constructivism encourage the use of multiple approaches in teaching to allow learners to build connections between what they know and what they are

learning (Van de Walle et al., 2007), but it also engages learners in a productive struggle with the knowledge they are exploring, which leads them to experience disequilibrium in developing new ideas. Thus, learner participation is encouraged and they are able to use multiple approaches in solving problems.

Scaffolding (Vygotsky, 1978) explains the way in which these new knowledge structures are built. Van de Walle et al. (2007) state that the practice of scaffolding is associated with the Social Cultural theory which is part of the Social Constructivist theory and is based on the idea that a task otherwise outside of the student's ZPD can become accessible if it is carefully structured. This is based on the teacher's ability to structure topics or offer the correct assistance to learners on how to learn or solve problems.

Lastly, Van de Walle et al. (2007) emphasise the importance of honouring diversity. This notion applies to this study in a twofold manner. Firstly, with regards to the training of the student-teachers and secondly the acknowledgment of diversity in the Grade R classroom. This strategy is based on the fact that learners come from different backgrounds with different experiences. Student-teachers had to take this into consideration in planning for teaching in the Grade R classes.

The student-teachers enrolled in the Diploma in Grade R teaching, as well as the facilitators and lecturers, came from different backgrounds with diverse experiences and knowledge. As indicated by Brooks and Brooks (1992), it was important that they interacted with one another and learned from each another. Through interacting, they gained specific knowledge about different contexts and cultures. In addition, there was interaction between the presenters of the programme and the student-teachers. While the presenters contributed their expertise and knowledge, the student-teachers came to the programme with palpable knowledge about the circumstances in their contexts as well as the Grade R classrooms where

they were teaching. Therefore, the student-teachers' understanding of a Social Constructivist teaching environment was deemed applicable to their Grade R classrooms.

In light of this logic profits of social constructivism, it will also be beneficial to ground all teacher professional development in social constructivism.

2.3 CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The term Continuous Professional Development (CPD) is used to refer to ongoing processes, actions and activities which are designed for the purpose of enhancing the student-teachers' professional knowledge, teaching skills and attitudes towards teaching (Guskey, 2002). The purpose of CPD is not only to improve students' learning and methods of learning, but also to transform their knowledge into practice for the benefit of their own learners' growth (Darling-Hammond 2010). Kárpáti, Török and Szirmai (2008) recognises two different forms of CPD. Firstly, in-service teacher development is practised around the world as Continuing Professional Development (CPD), which is aimed at updating one's existing knowledge and skills. Secondly, there are additional programmes which offer new skills and qualifications. Kárpáti, et.al. (2008) indicated that in-service CPD was made compulsory or strongly recommended in eleven countries: Belgium (in the German speaking community), Germany, Estonia, Greece (only for newly qualified teachers), Latvia, Hungary, Malta, Poland, Portugal, Finland and Romania.

In South Africa, teachers are also expected to engage in CPD (DoE, 2000) so that they are continuously updated on trends in their field as much as they are also exposed to interactive educational experiences that they could reconfigure from a constructivist perspective.

2.3.1 The importance of Continuous Professional Development

Alfaki (2014) conducted a study to illustrate the necessity for teacher professional development in today's world as well as to identify the best activities for professional development. The data were collected through a questionnaire from 40 English language teachers. The results indicated that professional development is crucial for teachers to become highly confidential with positive beliefs in what they are doing. The best activities were identified as reflective teaching and sharing ideas between colleagues. The study recommended that teacher professional development should be seen as a necessity in a teacher's growth and that teachers should take part in the responsibility for their professional development (Alfaki, 2014).

Shulman (1987) defined categories to provide a framework for teacher knowledge which are: Content knowledge (CK); General pedagogical knowledge (GPK); Pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) as well as Curriculum knowledge (CK). Shulman (1987) further clarifies CK as the knowledge teachers have of the subject matter they are teaching and regards GPK as principles and strategies of classroom management and organisation. CK is the knowledge of what should be taught to a particular group of pupils and requires an understanding of children's learning potential, national syllabuses, contextual requirements, school planning documents and year group plans. PCK entails the knowledge of how to teach within a particular subject area, which enables teachers to ease the learning for students through the use of clear explanations, appropriate analogies and presenting learning in interesting, motivating and entertaining ways.

> Pedagogical content knowledge identifies the distinctive bodies of knowledge for teaching. It represents the blending of content and pedagogy into an understanding of how particular topics, problems or issues are organised, represented, and adapted to the diverse interests and abilities of learners, and presented for instruction (Shulman, 1987, p 4).

Guerriero and Révai (2017) uses Shulman's (1987) categorization of teacher knowledge as, general pedagogical knowledge i.e. principles and strategies of classroom

management and organization that are cross-curricular and, pedagogical content knowledge namely, the knowledge which integrates the content knowledge of a specific subject and the pedagogical knowledge for teaching that particular subject. Pedagogical content knowledge should also include knowledge of content and classroom management, and knowledge of learners and learning. In addition, Guerriero and Révai (2017) emphasises that teaching and learning of 21st century skills, such as problem-solving, collaboration, communication, and creativity, might entail a re-skilling of the current teacher workforce and upgrading of the knowledge base of the teaching profession. As professionals in their field, teachers should be expected to process and evaluate new knowledge relevant to their core professional practice and to regularly update their knowledge base to improve their practice and to meet new teaching demands, because teachers are the key factor in teacher professionalism (Guerriero & Révai, 2017).

Guerriero and Révai (2017) add that while teacher knowledge is certainly a component of teacher professionalism, professional competence involves more than just knowledge. Skills, attitudes, and motivational variables also contribute to the mastery of teaching and learning. Motivational variables in learning are explained by Spector (2001) as change in abilities, attitudes, beliefs, capabilities, knowledge, mental models, and patterns of interaction or skills. Thus, in-service teachers' courses must ensure that student-teachers reach such outcomes in the objectives of the courses. In spite of various impeding internal and external factors, the Diploma in Grade R Teaching programme endeavoured to ensure that student-teachers attained the set outcomes of the programme.

In the South African educational landscape, it is important for Grade R teachers to be trained, supported and empowered in the work that they do. To uplift current poor learning readiness of the learners. This training should include content, general pedagogical, pedagogical content as well as curriculum knowledge. Pedagogical content knowledge will

ensure that Grade R student-teachers can teach the three subjects: Home Language, Mathematics (focus on literacy and numeracy) and Life Skills (CAPS, 2011). However, pedagogical knowledge about teaching in an integrated, play-based, child-centred manner is of equal importance. Thus, ensuring the skills and knowledge necessary to teach the Grade R content in an integrated, play-based manner, quality professional development of Grade R teachers, is necessary.

Atmore (2012) confirms the importance of teachers' professional learning and states that regardless of the facility in which children are placed, a quality teacher should provide a distinctive learning environment in which children can develop in a holistic manner (Atmore, 2012). He continues to say that Grade R teachers must continuously improve their professional standing by attending education courses, attending refresher and in-service courses, conducting research on Grade R teacher education involving new concepts and strategies and keep abreast with what goes on in Grade R teaching and learning.
Pitton (2006) argues that school districts often require that novice teachers attend training sessions, expecting immediate implementation of a new idea or concept from participation in a workshop or a class. Pitton (2006) however warns that professional development does not happen that quickly. In a Social Constructivist teaching environment, teachers must practice, evaluate and adjust new skills before applying them in the classroom. As with any new learning, the opportunity to hear different perspectives, reflect, and rethink is the key to true understanding (McKimm, Jollie & Hatter, 2007).

An opportunity for professional development of the in-service student-teachers in Early Childhood Development was created though the Diploma in Grade R teaching (cf. 1.1.1), but in a sense it also involved teacher training, because this qualification is often these student-teachers' first encounter with a tertiary education programme that would provide them with a professional teacher qualification.

2.4 THE IMPORTANCE OF TEACHER TRAINING

Boudersa (2016) indicates that training is often seen as preparation for instruction into a first teaching position or as preparation to take on new teaching assignment or responsibility. Training involves understanding basic concepts and principles as prerequisite for applying them to teaching and the ability to demonstrate principles and practices in the classroom. In addition, the primary aim of teacher training is to develop educational skills that are compatible with education policies and to enable teachers to deliver these policies. She defines teaching practices, that impact on student-teachers' performance, as a complex task (Boudersa, 2016).

The importance of teacher training is highlighted by Bourdersa (2016) who notes that teachers are key role players in education and therefore, preparing teachers for the teaching profession should be given a high priority in any country since this profession is considered as challenging and critical. This notion applies to the Grade R teachers in South Africa as well. The Makwetu Report (2014) highlighted the lack of qualified Grade R teachers in South Africa. The report led to the DBE survey in 2014, which investigated the status of Grade R practitioners in the country. This survey (DBE, 2014) confirmed the need for qualified Grade R teachers. As indicated previously in this study (cf.1.2.2), the DoE assisted the entire nine provinces in the country to train Grade R practitioners to acquire Level 4 ECD qualifications. Though this Level 4 ECD certificate improved the skills of Grade R teachers, it was not a professional qualification. It became important to further train Grade R teachers to be properly qualified, hence teacher training is included in the literature review of this study.

Darling-Hammond (2010) identified that the most educationally successful countries are selective when admitting applicants to teacher training programmes. The two outstanding examples are Finland and Singapore. She says that selection procedures are designed to assess skills and aptitudes needed for a teaching career and these attributes are used to select

applicants for admission. The selection procedures of both countries focus on applicants' academic performance, communication skills and professional motivation.

According to Melekhina and Kazachikhina (2016), training is often seen as preparation for instruction into a first teaching position or as preparation to take on new teaching responsibility. Training involves understanding basic concepts and principles as prerequisites in teaching and the ability to demonstrate theoretical principles as much as practical problem-solving in the classroom. Blömeke, Gustafsson and Shavelson (2015) describes the primary aim of teacher training as the development of educational skills that are compatible with education policies and enabling teachers to deliver in respect of these policies. They state that defining teaching practices that have an impact on student-teachers' performance is a complex task since what counts as an effective teaching strategy varies by student age group, personality, learning ability and social background.

In this study Grade R student-teachers were trained to build on what they already knew about teaching in Grade R classes, since those enrolled were volunteering their services at schools (cf.1.2.3). This dovetails with the international perspectives where the policy imperative for the teaching and learning of 21st century skills, such as problem-solving, collaboration, communication and creativity might entail a re-skilling of the current teacher workforce and upgrading of the knowledge base of the teaching profession (Guerriero & Révai, 2017).

In order to produce quality Grade R teachers, various training and education opportunities are made available through short skills programmes, as well as through full ECD qualifications (Atmore, 2012). Depaepe et.al. (2015) highlight many features that characterise expert teachers, which include extensive pedagogical content knowledge, better problem-solving strategies, better adaptation for diverse learners, better decision making,

better perception of classroom events, greater sensitivity to context, and greater respect for students (Depaepe, et.al, 2015)

Guerriero and Révai (2017) indicated that several studies stress the importance of the knowledge teachers hold, highlighting that in addition to assimilating academic knowledge, student-teachers also need to incorporate knowledge derived from experiential and practical experiences in the classroom. These authors also refer to research that shows that variations in 'opportunities to learn' in teacher preparation are related to differences in student achievement.

2.4.1 Training of Grade R teachers in South Africa

South Africa, like all progressive countries of the world, is concerned about the education of young children (WP5, 2001). The formal education system of South Africa, starts from the Reception year (Grade R). Children in Grade R, are five years old, turning six by 30 June in the year of admission (Department of Basic Education, 2002). Grade R is the first year of the Foundation Phase in South Africa. In other countries Grade R is referred to as elementary or kindergarten. In this study, the unique situation of the Grade R sector, the need for trained Grade R teachers and the DBE's intention to move Grade R classes to schools mandated the training of under and unqualified Grade R teachers. According to Harris and Sass (2014), in the United States (US), it is generally acknowledged that the promotion of teacher quality is a key element in improving primary and secondary education. They say that one of the main goals of recent presidential administrations in the US has been to have "highly qualified teachers" in the classroom (i.e. a teacher who is educated in content, pedagogies and pedagogical content knowledge and who is able to apply these in teaching) (Harris & Sass, 2014).

Atmore (2012) confirms this notion of highly qualified teachers and the lack thereof in Grade R classrooms in South Africa. A study conducted by the Department of Education, the Department of Social Development and UNICEF in 2011 indicated that throughout South Africa, ECD practitioners based in Grade R classes in public schools were relatively experienced, but had a fair level of ECD qualification (UNICEF, 2014). This situation led to the additional training of in-service teachers.

In-service teachers are serving teachers participating in training programmes for the purpose of upgrading their professional skills, knowledge and interest subsequent to initial training (Wehmeier, 2000). The Diploma in Grade R teaching is one example where student-teachers are working and studying at the same time.

Biersteker (2012) states that the initial training of the Grade R practitioners funded by the then DoE during the ECD National Pilot Project from 1997 to 1999, was provided to Grade R practitioners working in Grade R classes at selected community-based and public primary schools. The essential facet is that conceptualising teacher knowledge is a complex issue that involves understanding key underlying phenomena such as the process of teaching and learning, the concept of knowledge, as well as the way teachers' knowledge is put into action in the classroom (Blömeke & Delaney, 2014).

From the perspective of the Department of Social Development (DoSD, 2015), the national integrated system is embedded within a coherent legal framework that identifies, enables and compels the fulfilment of early childhood development roles and responsibilities of relevant role players. ECD education gives foundation to and is connected to Grade R. The then DoE was committed to have Grade R as a first year of compulsory schooling. This meant that the DoE had to relook and reshape policies to accommodate Grade R. The minimum qualification for Grade R teachers in the formal schooling system in South Africa is either a Diploma in Grade R teaching or a Bachelor of Education in the Foundation

Phase (Department of Higher Education and Training, 2015) (cf. 1.1.1). The training of Grade R teachers focused on two issues: to ensure relevant qualifications for Grade R teachers and enhancement of their professional development to meet the unique needs of the young learners in Grade R.

2.4.2 Distinctive teaching, learning and assessment in Grade R

According to Hassinger-Das, Hirsh-Pasek and Golinkoff (2017), free play and guided play, together known as play-based learning, are pedagogical tools through which learners can learn in joyful and conceptually rich ways in that without any instruction, learners of all races and genders, in all cultures of the world, invent and reinvent play in every generation. Hassinger-Das et al., (2017: 375) continue to submit that "a growing body of behavioural research establishes relationships between children's play and development in several areas, including language, mathematics, spatial skills, scientific thinking, social and emotional development."

Motshekga (2017) adds that the play-based approach to learning is well-defined as a process for learning that is intrinsically motivated, enjoyable, freely chosen, non-literal and safe. She posits that in today's increasingly complex, changing, competitive, and interconnected world, parents want to ensure that their learners gain the life skills needed to be successful in life. These include the four critical areas, namely: Collaboration and teamwork; Creativity and imagination; Critical thinking and Communication.

These are necessary skills to meet the demands of the 21st century. South Africa needed to discard the pedagogy of the 20th century, which was largely influenced by methodologies of rote learning; "the mantra, as we know it, has been the Test, Teach, Test (Triple 'T') approach" (Motshekga, 2017: 7) and to look for more progressive teaching approaches and strategies. She continues that the shift in paradigm involves "Critical

Narrative Pedagogy" which is a possible antidote to both "teach - test - teach and rote learning". The option is to use play, which comes naturally to learners, to teach. In the new teaching paradigm, learners are taught to play but not for its own sake. Learners play to learn, in order to create something that is both fun and educational at the same time (Motshekga, 2017).

Hassinger-Das et al. (2017: 383) concur in saying that play is a wonderful metaphor for active, engaged, meaningful, and socially interactive learning. Play also prepares learners to become social, caring, thinking, and creative citizens. In fact, they indicated that many researchers and teachers now concur that the "child-driven educational methods sometimes referred to as 'play-based learning' are the most positive means yet known to help young learners' development".

The suggestions above are clearly a move away from the 20th century debate focusing on curriculum in early childhood programmes which created controversy, confusion, and contention; because some curriculum programmes stressed content skills such as mathematics, language, reading, and science. Ogunyemi and Ragpot (2015) suggest that these programmes advocated direct instruction, workbook exercises, drill and practice, and in general emphasized learners' achievement on standardised IQ and readiness tests. Other curriculum developers supported developmentally appropriate practice (DAP), which they believed was in harmony with Social constructivism and does not rush learners into academically rigorous learning before they are ready. This is the child development approach in which work with manipulatives, social interaction, and a more traditional method was advocated (Ogunyemi & Ragpot, 2015).

This unique approach to teaching, learning and assessment in Grade R, clearly demonstrates the importance of being able to master and apply the learned theory in the Grade R classrooms.

2.5 THE THEORY-PRACTICE DEVIDE

"Educational Theory" may be defined as a body of knowledge or the content of the programme studied at the university, and "practice" refers to the teaching and learning activities in the Grade R classrooms. Often newly appointed teachers find it difficult to practise or apply the content and strategies they have learned during their education (Kiggundu & Nayimuli, 2009). This results in the creation of a "gap" that must be filled to enable the teachers to teach effectively. In this gap, there is difficulty for a smooth transition from training to actual teaching in the classroom by the teachers (Kiggundu & Nayimuli, 2009; McGarr, O'Grady & Guilfoyle, 2017).

McGarr, et al. (2017: 52) say that "the 'theory-practice divide' in teacher education can be viewed not simply as an acceptance of a body of knowledge but instead an acceptance of the teacher-educator's authority to determine what is relevant educational theory". Often newly appointed teachers find it difficult to practise or apply the content and strategies they have learned during their training, in their classrooms. This results in the creation of a gap that must be filled to enable the teachers to teach effectively. In this gap, there is often difficulty for a smooth transition from training to actual teaching in the classroom and how teachers should contextualise their work.

In keeping with the thrust of transformation of Education, White Paper 5 on Early Childhood Development (DoE, 2001) aspired to provide quality programmes to a million Grade R learners by 2010. One of the strategies of transforming education was through providing training programmes where the notion of the learner at the centre of the learning and teaching process was emphasized. The other strategy was to align the teaching philosophy and principles in Grade R as expressed in White Paper 5 (2001). However, according to Department of Basic Education (2008), the evidence gathered by Department of

Education officials and scientific research reports reflect that teaching in Grade R remains a challenge.

One big challenge that Grade R teachers are faced with is linking theory to practice. The approach taken in the training of the in-service student-teachers for the *Diploma in Grade R teaching,* was to use both the theoretical and practical components of the programme. The participants attended contact sessions for two Saturdays every month and apply this theory in practice when they went back to their Grade R classes for teaching. In addition, student-teachers were also given an opportunity during school holidays to come for contact sessions where training in theory and strategies to apply theory in practice, was offered by the respective lecturers. The purpose of this approach was to enable the Grade R student-teachers to link theory to practice.

Linington, Excell and Murris (2011) express their concern that some of the learners in Grade R are currently taught as though they were Grade 1 learners. This shows that the correct developmental, sociological, philosophical and psychological theories of teaching Grade R learners are not practised. Porter, Youngs and Odden (2006) suggest that practising teaching in the abstract, without applying the teaching principles while working with learners, does not provide student-teachers with the context they need to develop and hone their pedagogic skills. That is why, before graduation, student-teachers must demonstrate their subject and pedagogic competencies. This is drawn from the logic that they are expected to be accountable for learners' learning in the same way that experienced teachers are. Many countries such as England, Australia and Ireland have enacted a probationary status for 1st year teachers, along with testing and provisions for support.

Student-teachers enrolled in the Diploma in Grade R teaching participate in Work Integrated Learning (WIL) where they are observed by mentors and their lecturers to assess their progress. Work-Integrated Learning: Good Practice Guide (CHE, 2011) indicates that

programmes that promote graduates' successful integration into the world of work and make meaningful contributions in contexts of development require innovative curricular, teaching, learning and assessment practices. The Higher Education Quality Framework (HEQF, 2007) requires that all initial teacher education programmes include work-integrated learning which is designed to assist student-teachers not only to learn in practice but also from practice. These programmes and licensing requirements ensure that beginning teachers continue to learn and grow as they interact with students and the school community (Portner, 2006). This is indicated in what is involved in Grade R teaching and learning context.

2.5.1. Grade R teaching and learning context

In South Africa, Grade R learners are being taught in different contexts. These include community-based centres as well as institutional-based centres. DoSD, 2015) categorises these contexts in three components: Non-Centre Based Grade R classes (Home-Based Care Centres – these are centres that are run from people's homes and can have), Centre-Based Grade R Classes (Community-Based ECD Centres – community halls and other buildings dedicated to ECD programme implementation), as well as School-Based Grade R classes (Grade R classes at schools). In all the above contexts, different settings, such as indoor and outdoor environments are used to teach learners.

The preferred term of teaching environment is the *classroom,* which according to Zidniyati (2013) has more limited and traditional connotations - a room with rows of desks and a chalkboard, for example. This kind of teaching environment as indicated by Zidniyati (2013) has shown not to be conducive to Grade R programme implementation. Zidniyati (2013) describes the teaching environment as the diverse physical location and context in which teaching and learning takes place. The teaching environment includes the ways in which teachers organise an educational setting to facilitate learning, but also acknowledges

the school culture, including how individuals interact with and treat one another. The school culture will, for example, influences how classes are conducted, how learner tables are organised, the decoration of the walls with learning materials, or the use of audio, visual and digital technologies. Grade R learners learn in a variety of context and settings (Zidniyati, 2013).

The teaching environment should support the implementation of the programme content in practice. This support should include the role of the mentor, school management, teaching and learning space as well as learning and teaching support material (LTSM). Zidniyati (2013) continues by stating that the qualities and characteristics of Grade R learning environment are determined by a variety of factors, school policies, classroom rules, daily programmes with teacher and learner initiated activities and routines forming part of the teaching and learning environment.

The Grade R classroom should meet the guidelines regarding minimum space, design and maintenance requirements available from the local authority (Meier & Marais, 2012). Carter (2017) describes three elements of the early teaching and learning space. These are the physical environment, the social environment (where activities and interactions between learners are happening) as well as the active environment (where the daily programme is being implemented). These components must be planned and implemented effectively to create a conducive teaching and learning space for young learners. The Grade R classroom should meet the guidelines regarding minimum space, design and maintenance requirements available from the local authority (Carter, 2017; Meier & Marais, 2012).

Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin (2011) note that teachers should understand that learning environments have both a direct and indirect influence to teaching and learning. Indirectly, learning environments influence learner engagement, motivation to learn, learners' sense of well-being and belonging as well as feelings of personal safety. For example,

learning environments filled with sunlight and stimulating LTSM would likely be considered more conducive to learning. How adults interact with learners and how learners interact with one another may also be considered aspects of a learning environment, and phrases such as "positive learning environment" or "negative learning environment" are commonly used in reference to the social and emotional dimensions of a school or class (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 2011).

2.5.1.1 Social constructivism in Grade R

According to Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin (2011), the social constructivist teaching environment where learners are taught should enhance active involvement in learning. This is the kind of learning environment envisioned by South African school curriculum and the Dip in Gr R Teaching. It should be organised and arranged in a manner that allows learners to move around, to explore, to investigate and to gain new knowledge.

One way to prepare teachers on leveraging social interaction in their classrooms is to incorporate it into their training activities. When social interaction becomes part of the training programme dynamics, lecture rooms become active places. Student-teachers need to experience these activities for themselves so that they know how to create this type of learning environment in their own classrooms (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 2011). According to the Socio Cultural Theory, people in the teaching and learning environment of children are important (Meier & Marais, 2012).

Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin (2011) further explains that social constructivism acknowledges that the culture of a school influences the way in which teachers organise an educational setting to facilitate learning.

2.5.1.2 Inside equipment and area

The teaching environment where Grade R learners are taught should enhance active involvement in learning and the organisation should allow learners to move around, to explore and investigate in order to gain new knowledge (DoE, 2008). This kind of expertise influences classroom arrangement.

Loewenberg-Ball, Thames and Phelps (2008) identified features that characterise expert teachers. These include extensive pedagogical content knowledge, better problem-solving strategies, better adaptation for diverse learners, better decision making, better perception of classroom events, greater sensitivity to context and greater respect for learners. Guerriero and Révai (2017) and Meier and Marais (2012) stress the importance of the knowledge teachers hold, highlighting that in addition to assimilating academic knowledge, student-teachers also need to incorporate knowledge derived from experiential and practical experiences in the classroom. Research also shows that variations in 'opportunities to learn' in teacher preparation are related to differences in student achievement (Guerriero & Révai, 2017; Meier & Marais, 2012).

Kaplan (2017) indicates that it is important for Grade R teachers to be taught how to manage their classrooms, to set-up learning centres or areas, to involve parents, to maintain a daily programme, to coordinate classroom activities and engage learners, to keep discipline and to put learners into groups and create a positive environment.

Student-teachers should know how to effectively utilise the classroom space. Seating plays a huge role in determining how focused learners will be during teaching. The DoE, (2008) indicates that planning the indoor learning environment entails organising the space, laying out interest areas to provide activities such as construction area, art area, reading and writing are as well as fantasy area. Space for transition activities such as first teacher directed activities e.g. story time and snack time should be included in the organising of the

classroom. Student-teachers must be taught how to choose, care for and store teaching and learning support materials. Such items must be clearly labelled and placed in boxes, preferably transparent containers.

According to Kaplan (2017), there will not be an effective learning environment if the classroom is cluttered. The Grade R teacher should make sure that storage spaces are utilised. Unused objects should be out of the way while all items are clearly labelled for daily use. Visuals go a long way in helping learners to find objects to use during activities, and to pack away at the right places (Kaplan, 2017).

2.5.1.3 Outdoor equipment and area

Student-teachers should be able to maintain the outdoor equipment and ensure safety of learners. Equipment should be kept clean and safety checks regularly done. The suitable equipment to have in the outdoor area could be swings, climbing equipment, slides, water troughs, and wheeled toys. More important, the area should be fenced off. Learners with special needs should be accommodated. Ramps and doorways ought to be provided for wheelchair usage (DoE, 2008).

2.5.2 Learning and Teaching Support Materials

Onuoha-Chidiebere (2011) refers to Learning and Teaching Support Materials (LTSM) as different kinds of materials or resources that teachers and learners use in the teaching and learning process, in order to make the process more effective and productive. These materials or resources have a common purpose, namely to help teachers and learners to achieve teaching and learning outcomes. LTSM is defined by the Gauteng Department of Education LTSM policy (2012) as all the materials that facilitate teaching and learning in

schools, including materials for learners with special educational needs (LSEN). The Gauteng

Department of Education LTSM Policy (2012) categorises the LTSM as follows:

- Consumable items: These are materials of an educational or a non-educational nature normally used over a certain period of time, to achieve the intended teaching and learning outcomes. These include learner and office stationery, excluding textbooks.

- Non-consumable items: These are durable materials whose lifespan is indefinite. These are normally purchased once for schools and require schools to have a budget for their maintenance.

- Non-LTSM: These are materials used for effective curriculum delivery in schools, e.g. computers, photocopiers, fax machines, telephones, cleaning and sporting equipment.

- Other materials: This category includes a wide spectrum of materials that are not included above and are used to assist learners to attain intended outcomes, e.g. duplicating paper, practical materials or science equipment, and educational toys for Grade class.

The importance of Learning and Teaching Support Materials is emphasised by the DoE (2008), which suggests that LTSM should help with the holistic development of learners and stimulation of different types of play. The choice of LTSM for outside classes should include climbing, balancing, sliding, swinging, sand and water play pretend play and pulling along, pushing and riding as well as climbing over and going under. In addition to this, Excell and Lenington's (2015) advice is that LTSM for use in the classroom should include posters, pictures, three-dimensional (3D) objects, theme tables, computers and apparatus for experiments including educational toys. The training of Grade R student-teachers should include choice of LTSM and opportunity to use LTSM.

The above discussion highlights the unique teaching and learning requirements of Grade R. Although teachers often enter the teaching practice with relevant knowledge of teaching, leaning and LTSM, the skill to apply this knowledge in practice to effectuate meaningful learning is often lacking. Mentoring is generally viewed as a means to help new teachers to link theory to practice and is regarded as an essential strategy to guide new teachers in delivering quality teaching and learning in their Grade R classrooms.

2.6 MENTORING

Meyer (2002) defines mentoring as a relationship between two or more people, whether formalised or not, where the relationship has a specific purpose. The relationship is reciprocal and both parties benefit, albeit in different ways. The mentor-mentee relationship is dynamic with different stages or phases. Each mentor-mentee relationship is unique although there may be certain general characteristics in all mentor-mentee relationships. Mentoring therefore takes place when someone helps another person through an important transition such as coping with a new situation like a new job or a major change in personal circumstances. In this instance, it involves teaching at the Grade R level as well as professional development and personal growth. This relationship transcends duty and obligation and often involves coaching, networking, sponsoring and career counselling (Meyer, 2002).

Since the 1980s, school-based mentoring has come to play an increasingly prominent role in supporting the initial preparation, induction and early professional development of teachers in many parts of the world. Dietz, Jansen and Wadee (2006) state that individuals who enjoy supporting others and sharing knowledge and time are far more suited to being mentors. They continue to say that the success of a mentor programme rests crucially on the supportive nature and academic capacity of the prospective mentors.

According to Cranfield (2016), mentoring is a cost-effective method of training and developing staff, since mentors are able to carry out their role in conjunction with their normal teaching jobs and there is no cost incurred for external training providers or premises. Student-teachers have a role to play in the mentor-mentee partnership which is described by Goodman, Ford, Simmons, Gatward and Meltzer (2000) as taking charge of one's own development and seeing real value in learning from others. The whole conceptualisation of mentoring is aptly captured in Aspfors and Fransson (2015) who identifies 3 stages in the mentoring process: firstly, the **ethos** or moral dimension of the relationship, which involves consistency, congruency, integrity, honesty, sincerity, credibility, genuineness and values. Secondly, **pathos** or having a genuine interest in the other person as a person in his/her own right and recognising that the other person brings human emotions, hopes, fears, ambitions into the relationship. Pathos entails empathy, warmth, positive regard, disclosure and rapport. Lastly, **logos** or substantive content of the essential conversations, which includes the goals, techniques and outcomes of the conversations.

2.6.1 The necessity of mentors

Entering practice in any profession offers a major challenge to newly qualified practitioners. According to Baporikar (2015), novice teachers juggle an overwhelming number of unfamiliar issues, such as classroom management, teaching, curriculum, school culture and operations, lesson planning and administration, parent relationships and interactions with other teachers. Left to themselves, the new teachers may develop counterproductive behaviours. With extra support, however, new teachers learn more effective practices to apply to daily challenges. Entering the teaching profession requires the application of the knowledge, skills and attitudes acquired during initial teacher training. It is a transition period which can be stressful as well as challenging as new demands are made

upon individuals who are seeking to consolidate their skills. Thus, novice teachers are in need

of guidance and support in order to develop confidence and competence (Baporikar, 2015).

Dietz, et al. (2006) state that to become a mentor, one should possess knowledge of

the needs of the mentee. They further state some of the requirements of a mentee as being

able to commit to the mentoring process, to accept constructive criticism as well as to seek

advice when required. The mentor's activities, as identified by McKimm, et.al. (2007),

include giving technical assistance, clarifying roles and responsibilities, identifying and

analysing learning experiences, opportunities and gaps, encouraging analysis and reflection,

structuring learning and work, confronting through questioning, listening and giving

feedback.

From the onset, the mentor needs to develop a safe and protected environment with

support and protection, but as the mentee develops confidence, independence and autonomy,

the mentor's role changes to challenge the mentee to be more analytical, reflective and

critical. Mentors bring experience, perspective, objectivity and distance into the mentoring

relationship. They are influential in terms of helping the mentee reach their goals and

aspirations, in a caring, open and honest relationship which focuses on the needs of the

mentee (McKimm, et.al. 2007).

2.6.2 Selection of mentors

Hobson, Ashby, Malderez and Tomlinson (2009) state that mentors are selected based

on the qualities worthy of emulation that they possess. Darwin (2016) says that

knowledgeable, compassionate, mentors should be chosen. The mentor should also possesses

the attributes of a good teacher, have excellent communication skills and be able to help their

mentees find success and gratification in their chosen profession. Overall good mentoring

requires empowering the mentee to develop their own strengths, beliefs, and personal

attributes. Dietz et al. (2006) further mention that a good mentor exhibits the personal attributes it takes to be successful in the field and that by showing the mentee what it takes to be productive and successful. They demonstrate the specific behaviours and actions required to succeed in the field.

In this study, some student-teachers worked in schools where their mentors were older colleagues on the staff or simply the principal or the deputy principal. Student-teachers may have to work under these people whether they possess mentorship qualities or not (Dietz et al., 2006). It is because of this condition that more experienced teachers, that worked with under-experienced teachers, were given orientation by University X, to facilitate the mentoring process in schools.

2.6.3 Mentor training

Trorey and Blamires (2006) suggest that experiential learning is one of the most effective processes for mentor training. They suggest that because mentoring is a social interaction, training of mentors is critical in the success of the mentoring programme. Mentor training needs to take place within a social learning context. Active learning, focused on dialogue as well as conversation, is a necessary and powerful tool that should be the basis for effective mentor training (Trorey & Blamires, 2006).

University X, after receiving a list of mentors from schools, arranged a one day workshop to ensure that mentors knew what was expected of them. In the *Diploma in Grade R teaching,* the mentors had to be knowledgeable about how Grade R learners learn, how they should be taught, how the classroom should be organised and above all, how to support the student-teachers. The purpose of the workshop was to empower mentors on mentoring of student-teachers. The content of the training included how the Grade R programme should be implemented. The daily programme in the Grade R class as well as the informal teaching and

learning strategies employed in the Grade R setting. By the end of the workshop it was

expected of prospective mentors, to understand that play-based and developmentally

appropriate activities are the main strategies for teaching and learning in the Grade R class.

The mentors were expected to help the mentees gain experience in Grade R teaching as well

as to develop into efficient Grade R teachers.

2.7 THE DIPLOMA IN GRADE R TEACHING

2.7.1 Programme content

Tormey, Hardebolle, Le Duc and Isaac (2018) from the Eberly Centre of Carnegie

University on Teaching Excellence and Educational Innovation say that the programme

content of a course is made up of topics selected to address the objectives of the programme

organised into a dynamic whole. According to Tormey *et al.* (2018), to accomplish a

particular set of objectives, a course could be arranged in any one of the following ways:

"chronologically, from concrete to abstract (or vice versa), from theory to application (or vice

versa), around a set of questions, around a set of practical problems or case studies, according

to disciplinary classifications and categories" (Tormey *et al.*, 2018: 5). In addition, the

structure of the course, should contribute to and support the learning objectives that have

been identified. As Fink (2003: 128) puts it: "The goal is to sequence the topics so that they

build on one another in a way that allows students to integrate each new idea, topic, or theme

with the preceding ones as the course proceeds."

The report from the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills

(Ofsted, 2017) say that the teacher training programmes must have well-established and clear

progression routes in place to enable teachers to continually improve their qualification levels

and experience. The Ofsted report (2017) states that having a staff team with the necessary

skills, knowledge and understanding of early childhood development is crucial to the

development of the children. Undoubtedly, a better and higher qualification will impact

positively on the development and education of children. The programme content should encourage the student-teachers to demonstrate the theoretic principles of teaching (Warner & Sower, 2005). These include cognitive developmental, the importance of the teaching environment and the impact thereof on learner development. In addition, student-teachers should understand the importance of children's growth in relation to their ages and developmental stages. Lastly, the programme content should teach the student-teachers how the home and community affect learner development as well as acknowledge learner diversity and different cultures (Olsen, 2015; Follari, 2015; Moore, 2014).

According to the National Association for the Education of young Children (NAEYC, 2005) as well as Gordon and Brown (as cited in Meier & Marais, 2012), quality programme content is related to the improvement of professional practice and working conditions in early education, building and maintaining networks of strong, diverse and inclusive classrooms, well trained staff who are able to interact with children and meet their developmental needs.

The purpose of the *Diploma in Grade R teaching* was to produce well qualified and reflective Grade R teachers. To accomplish this goal, 17 modules were introduced over a period of one year, the duration of the study. Annexure C provides a brief summary of the content of the modules, involved in this study.

2.7.2 Programme delivery

Van Lieshout, Egyedi, and Bijker (2018) say that programme delivery involves instructional strategies that would be used. These include lectures, discussions, laboratories, studios and case studies. Wilk (2018) specifies that programme delivery anticipates and responds to cultural differences in the classroom, creates a productive and inclusive learning environment, conducts assessment of teaching and learning, handles course management

issues, addresses problematic student behaviour, teach after tragedy, direct students to support services and that the delivery supplements one-on-one teaching (Wilk, 2018). Different institutions use different approaches to offer education programmes including Open Distance learning (ODL) or face-to-face training. Comparing ODL and face-to-face training, Keegan (2013) as well as Zeng, Huang, Zhao and Zhang (2012) have not found any significant differences in the overall effectiveness of the two models in knowledge acquisition and retention or great variation in outcomes, because some applications of distance education perform better than their classroom counterparts, while others perform more poorly.

In this specific case, the 97 in-service student-teachers at University X, received a bursary and the funder requested face-to-face contact sessions (cf. 2.5) to provide students with more support.

2.7.2.2 Face-to-face support classes

University X and the funder had an agreement that the 97 student-teachers, besides the ODL, should be given further support through face-to-face contact sessions (cf. 2.2.6 & 2.2.7). Every two weeks in a month student-teachers attended support sessions offered by lecturers. In addition, student-teachers attended 3-day block teaching sessions during school holidays.

2.8 SUMMARY

The chapter sought to describe the concepts that underpins this study and how it is embedded in the social constructivist theory. Firstly, the theoretical framework of the study, social constructivism was explained. Thereafter, a review was taken about the importance of

Continuous Professional Development as well as teacher training and how it impacts on quality teaching and learning in Grade R. Subsequently, covering of the theory and practice devide as well as the importance of mentoring were placed in the context of this study. The next chapter provides details about the research design and methodology employed by the study.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter reviewed the literature related to the professional development of Grade R teachers, covering the theory-practice devide as well as the social constructivist theory that underpins the study. In this chapter, the research design and methodology selected for this study are presented in detail, justifying the choices made in order to respond to the research questions outlined in Chapter 1. A descriptive qualitative case study, with a quantitative component, was adopted within the interpretative paradigm. Justification of the chosen sampling procedure as well as techniques and methods of data collection, namely questionnaires and focus group interviews are consequently discussed. Thereafter, the data analysis deployed is highlighted. Finally, the chapter concludes by motivating the methods used to strengthen the trustworthiness and quality criteria.

3.2 RESEARCH PARADIGM

This study is situated within an interpretivist paradigm which perspective places primary emphasis on the process of understanding the researched phenomenon. Zongozzi (2015) indicates that an interpretivist paradigm entails the construction of new insights, because researchers seek a more holistic understanding of the world they live and work in by developing subjective meanings of their experiences. Interpretivists believe that reality is not objectively determined, but is socially constructed (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). The interpretative paradigm is concerned with interpreting and understanding human action (Creswell & Creswell, 2007), thus the objective of the study is to rely as much as possible on the views of the participants about their perceptions of the Diploma in Grade R teaching. Interpretative research assumes that the best way to understand a phenomenon is by studying

it in its natural contexts such as classrooms. The underlying assumption is that by placing people in social contexts, there is greater opportunity to understand the perceptions they have of their own activities (Collis & Hussey, 2013). In this study the student portrayed their perceptions of how the programme met their professional development needs.

3.3 RESEARCH DESIGN

According to Creswell and Creswell (2017) as well as Okeke and Van Wyk (2015), research design is the plan set out to conduct a research project. The research design for this study is a qualitative case study, with a quantitative component (questionnaire) aimed at understanding the research question: What are the Grade R in-service student-teachers' perceptions regarding the Diploma in Grade R teaching? A case study design was chosen, because the study requires an extensive and in-depth description of a social phenomenon (Yin, 2017). In addition when research is bounded by time and activities, the study is classified as a case study (Cresswell, 2009).

A single, descriptive case study was adopted for this research. Yin (2017) states that *single* implies that the research focuses on the global nature of only one, holistic case. This suggests that a single-case (holistic) design focuses on one unit of analysis. In this case a group of student-teachers enrolled in the Diploma in Gr R Teaching, offered by a as part of a bursary project, with specific intervention requirements was selected as a unit of analysis. Thus the researcher only draws conclusions about this programme as experienced by this specific group of bursary students enrolled for a specific project offered by one campus of a university. Rule, Davey and Balfour (2011) confirm that case studies in education focus on a single instance which can include a classroom, an educational project, a curriculum, individual learner or a teacher.

According to Leedy and Ormrod (2014), *descriptive* research examines a situation as it is. Yin (2017) adds to this explanation and states that descriptive case studies provide a

description of a phenomenon within a given context. The case is chosen to be purposeful and convenient, and allowed the researcher to have a full understanding of the participants' perceptions.

A frequent criticism of case study methodology is that its dependence on a single case renders it incapable of providing a generalising conclusion. The purpose of this research is not to generalise, but rather to provide a rich, thick description and holistic account of a phenomenon, namely the perceptions of a group of Grade R in-service student-teachers' regarding the Diploma in Grade R teaching, so that readers can learn directly and more intimately from the experience of others and also, perhaps, come to their own conclusions. Anchored in a real-life situation, the case study offers insights and illuminates meanings that expand its readers' experiences.

3.4 METHODOLOGY

According to Rallis and Rossman (2012), a case study approach enables the researcher to gather detailed data from a range of sources in order to obtain multiple perspectives within the case. The case is bounded as suggested by Baxter and Jack (2008), it is second year, in-service student-teachers enrolled at a rural Higher Education Institution. In this case, the perceptions of these in-service student-teachers about the *Diploma in Grade R teaching* were explored to gain a more nuanced understanding of the course, the curriculum, the participants and the delivery modes offered for the professional development of the student teachers.

In this study, the quantitative data emerged from the questionnaires and was used to get meanings from the larger group (79 participants), while the qualitative data was collected from a smaller, group (20 participants) in four focus group interviews. The focus group interviews provided in-depth data about student-teachers' perceptions of how the programme contributed to their professional development and enabled them to fill the theory-practice gap

as they were enrolled in a specific programme, namely the Diploma in Grade R teaching. These data have been used to construct a descriptive analysis and derive possible interpretations and implications of the perceptions of the student-teachers in respect of the course of study.

3.4.1 Boundaries of the study

The specific context of the study is a HEI in rural South Africa, called University X. At this institution, a *Diploma in Grade R teaching* was offered to Grade R in-service student-teachers. The *Diploma in Grade R teaching* is a three year course with 380 credits. The case study under question entails a specific group of students (cf. 3.4.2). The programme was funded by ETDP SETA and the funders had prerequisites to ensure that the students would receive adequate support. These were face-to-face contact with lecturers every second Saturday, continuous face to face teaching during school vacations twice a year.

The lecturers consisted of full time lecturers, permanently employed by University X (60%) as well as part-time lecturers who were temporarily employed to teach in the programme (40%). The site was chosen for convenience because it was accessible to the researcher and provided access to the participants who were enrolled for this course of study.

3.4.2 Participant selection

The sample for the study was made up of 79 participants in the third year of the *Diploma in Grade R teaching*, who made up 81% of the 97 student-teachers who were invited initially to participate in the study. To ensure ethical procedures, certain steps (cf. 1.5.3.2) were followed when participants were recruited to take part in the study. In addition, the informed consent forms were gathered by an independent research assistant.

The participants, all in-service student-teachers, were doing voluntary service in the Grade R classes at the primary schools where they taught. They were recruited because they were directly involved in the programme and were deemed credible sources to give the most relevant information for an informed understanding of the research problem. There were two groups. Group 1, consisted of 79 student-teachers and they completed the questionnaires, while group 2, made up of 20 student-teachers, indicated on the questionnaires that they were willing to be interviewed. The latter group was randomly divided into four groups of five, and they were involved in the focus group interviews.

3.4.3 Data collection strategies

Data were collected using the following methods:

3.4.3.1 Questionnaires

The questionnaires were purposefully designed to answer the research questions (cf. Table 1.1). The questionnaires (cf. Appendix A) served a dual purpose. Firstly, questionnaires provided information about the participants' biographical background. Secondly, section B of the questionnaires, with both open and close ended questions, were used to elicit the Grade R student-teachers' perceptions about the Diploma in Grade R teaching programme.

Some of the questions required categorical yes/no answers; others were based on the Likert Scale which required respondents to choose appropriate responses from a number of options (Goodman, et.al. 2000; Creswell, Plano-Clark, Gutmann & Hanson, 2003). The use of open-ended questions was to allow the participants freedom of expression and to elaborate on reasons for their perceptions.

Pilot testing: To ensure that the questions gathered the information that they were supposed to, pilot testing was conducted. Ten student-teachers were selected for this purpose.

The piloting established the content validity of the instrument in that it helped to improve the correctness and format of the questions, and also established the ease with which the ultimate instrument would be completed by the participants.

Actual testing: Questionnaire was distributed to all student-teachers who completed the informed consent. The questionnaire was handed out to participants on a Saturday and collected the following week, again on a scheduled Saturday. The student-teachers therefore had enough time to complete the questionnaire. An introductory letter of instructions and reasons for conducting the research was attached to the questionnaire.

3.4.3.2 Focus Group Interviews

Focus group interviews were used as a qualitative strategy which provided a description of the trends, attitudes and opinions of the participants. This was to validate the responses of the respondents as derived from the questionnaires. The information from the interpretation was then integrated in the overall results pertaining to student-teachers' perceptions.

During the focus group interviews (cf. Appendix B), the respondents were asked about their perceptions, opinions and attitudes towards the Diploma in Grade R teaching programme. A semi-structured interview guide, with questions that were purposefully designed to answer the research questions (cf. Table 1.1) were used to guide the discussion process. The duration of each focus group interview was between 20 and 30 minutes. These interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim.

The focus group interviews allowed social interaction in that the student-teachers listened to others and at the same time took part in discussions. Various views and suggestions were also elicited. This approach was in line with the Social Constructivist approach which underpins the research.

3.4.4 Data analysis

Merriam and Tisdell (2016) indicates that qualitative data analysis is primarily inductive and comparative. Creswell (2017) describes inductive analysis as building of patterns, categories, and themes from the bottom up, by organising the data gradually into units of meaningful information. This inductive process includes working back and forth between the themes and the data to create a complete set of themes which answer the research questions.

The quantitative components were analysed using simple, descriptive analysis to summarise the data collected from the bigger group in a clear and understandable way (Jaggi, 2003). Counterpart analysis (Yin, 2017) was applied to analyse data from the questionnaires and focus group interviews since the questions from the questionnaires and focus group interviews complemented each other and both contributed to understanding the in-service student-teachers perceptions about the programme in which they were enrolled.

The data was interpreted at the end of concurrent triangulation (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Concurrent triangulation entails synchronised collection of both quantitative and qualitative data as well as the comparison of the databases to determine similarities or contradictions. Creswell and Creswell (2017) recommend that the concurrent triangulation method should be used to compensate for the weaknesses inherent within one method with the strengths of the other.

3.4.4.1 Qualitative data

The qualitative data comprised of the open ended questions of the questionnaires, as well as the four focus group interviews. These sources of data were analysed concurrently. The procedure of conducting inductive content analysis is described and recommended by Maree (2017) as well as Nieuwenhuis (2014). After the audio records of the focus group

interviews were transcribed verbatim, an interactive process to analyse the data commenced. Firstly, the researcher read through all the data, then colour coded the data, and lastly, grouped the data to form themes and sub-themes based on recurrent patterns. This process involved moving back and forth through the data to ensure that all categories and sub-categories were identified, including accommodating and streamlining data that did not fit existing categories. Finally, the themes were discussed with colleagues to establish if they agreed with the logic thereof. This information was shared with the participants for verification and validation.

3.4.4.2 Quantitative component

Section A of the questionnaires (cf. Appendix A) were analysed to provide detail about the participant's context and biographical information. Section B provided information about the student-teachers' perceptions of the Diploma in Grade R teaching with specific focus on the way the programme content and delivery supported their professional development as Grade R teachers (cf. Table 1.1) and enabled then to link theory to practice. After collection of questionnaires from students, responses were entered into an electronic file created for that purpose and labelled. A table format was used to record data.

A simple descriptive analysis was used to describe frequencies and averages. Graphs were drawn to show relationships and interpretations of the Likert scale questions of the questionnaire. The purpose was to describe and summarise the basic features of the data collected from the larger group of 79 in-service student-teachers who participated in the study.

All the data were compared and concurrent triangulation was applied to ensure rigour and depth. Thereafter, conclusions were made and the information was stored in folders and backup files on the password protected computer of the researcher.

3.4.5 The role of the researcher

Stewart (2010) as well as Patton (2005) emphasise the central role of the researcher in qualitative research. Specifically in a case study, the researcher fulfils a crucial role, which should be defined. In addition, concerns and prejudices should be stated at the outset of the study to enhance the trustworthiness and credibility of the analysis (Patton, 2005).

The researcher in this study has extensive experience in Grade R teacher training and also involved in the programme. Researcher bias is acknowledged, but the researcher continuously strived to improve the programme based on the student-teachers' input. Therefore, observations over many years spurred this study to explore student-teachers perceptions about the programme that they are enrolled in.

The researcher collected, analysed and interpreted the data. Maree (2017) suggests that during the data collection stage, the researcher should observe and pay very close attention to creating a connection and social relationship with the participants. The researcher followed all ethical guidelines and practices of the university where the research was conducted. In addition, the researcher focused on being objective at all times and used reflective notes to ensure such objectivity.

The researcher's responsibilities included the following: constructing the questionnaires; setting up of focus group interview schedule, conducting the focus group interviews; data analyses and maintaining a professional and trusting relationship with the participants.

3.5 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Before collecting data, ethical clearance (cf. Appendix D) was sought from the university and granted: Ethics number NWU-00642-17-A9. The researcher ensured that data collected during the research would be trustworthy i.e., credible, transferable and dependable.

This is because data collected was first-hand and obtained directly from the respondents. No alterations were made to the submissions of the research participants.

3.6 TRUSTWORTHINESS

In order to meet the foundational measures of trustworthiness, credibility, and authenticity, Creswell and Creswell (2017) provide eight primary strategies for qualitative scientific inquiry. These are:

1. Triangulate with different data sources.

2. Use member-checking for both raw data collection and interpretations.

3. Use rich, thick descriptions to convey the findings.

4. Clarify the bias of researchers through self-reflection.

5. Present negative or discrepant information that counters themes.

6. Spend a prolonged time in the field.

7. Use peer debriefing to enhance accuracy.

8. Use an auditor to review the research.

This particular study employed all of these strategies. With respect to triangulation, this single-unit case study collected and analysed data through both qualitative and quantitative instruments.

Utilising counterpart analyses (Yin, 2017) combined with inductive content analysis (Nieuwenhuis, 2014) allowed for tapping into the strengths of both quantitative (Likert-style questions of questionnaires) and qualitative (focus group interviews and open ended questions of questionnaires) research instruments. Triangulation was utilised in this study when data collected by using different methods with the same participants were compared. The data derived from the different sources were used together to provide credibility, objectivity and validity in the interpretation of the data.

In addition, a peer review process was followed when colleagues of the researcher asked questions about the methods, meanings and interpretations - to ensure the researcher's honesty. These colleagues as well as the participants were also consulted to determine whether they agreed or disagreed with the conclusions drawn from the data obtained.

3.7 CONCLUSION

Chapter 3 looked at the design and methods that were used in the research. The reasoning behind the adoption of a qualitative case study with a quantitative component was discussed and defended. This was followed by a detailed description of the research methods, including participant selection, types of instruments and the administration of these instruments. Ethical considerations and trustworthiness during the research were also discussed. The next chapter discusses data sorting and classification, data analysis and interpretation.

CHAPTER 4

PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter outlined the research design and methodology followed in this study. This chapter presents the data collected to determine Grade R in-service student-teachers' perceptions about the Diploma in Grade R teaching and embed the data within the literature from Chapter 2. The interpretation of the data is discussed in Chapter 5.

Since the study was underpinned by Social constructivism, the researcher encouraged participation during data collection and ensured that participants were at ease. Different backgrounds and diverse experiences were acknowledged and bold, spontaneous responses to ensure the participants' honest opinions were stimulated.

Data were collected in an interpretative, descriptive case study, with a quantitative component. The quantitative component entailed responses from questionnaires (cf. Appendix A), which provided biographical information about the participants (Section A). Section B of the questionnaires included both open ended and closed Likert scale questions. The rest of the data were collected in four focus group interviews (cf. 3.4.3.2).

The focus groups generated qualitative data that responded to the research questions set out in Chapter 1 (cf. Table 1.1) as well as to allow for triangulation. The data is presented according to themes that emerged during sorting and classifying the participants' responses that correspond with the research questions and verbatim quotes are used to consolidate the full report on participants' responses.

Mouton (1996: 61) states that it is in the interpretation of the data collected that the researcher tries "to bring it all together", either by relating the various individual findings to an existing theory or hypothesis, or by formulating a new hypothesis that would best account

for the data. This notion is supported by Hox, Moerbeek and Van de Schoot (2017) who add

that analysis in empirical research refers to the stage where the researcher, through the

application of various techniques, analyses the data in order to answer the research questions.

For the quantitative component, the questionnaires were analysed using simple

descriptive statistical methods (cf. 3.4.4.2). The focus group interviews and the open

questions that formed part of the questionnaire provided qualitative data (cf. 3.4.4). The

participants' responses were transcribed, coded and placed according to themes. These were

then analysed to triangulate with the quantitative data (De Vos, Strydom, Fouche & Delport,

2002).

4.2 DESCRIPTION OF THE RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS AND CONTEXT

4.2.1 Profile of participants

The 79 participants were volunteers at school-based Grade R classes, in both public

and private schools and at community-based ECD facilities. Eight of the participants passed

matric, 40 had a Level 4 certificate in ECD and 31 possessed a Level 5 certificate in ECD.

Participants' ages ranged from 25 to 56 and there was only one male participant. This

imbalance strikes an interesting observation, suggesting that the vast majority of Grade R

teachers and trainees are female. The single male participant is apparently one odd student,

motivated to engage with young children in Grade R. All students have relative experience in

teaching Grade R classes (cf. 1.2.3). Some of the participants worked at community-based

Grade R classes, some worked with children aged between 4 to 6 years in the Community

ECD centres while some owned the ECD centres and had to delegate responsibilities to

others when they enrolled for the Diploma in Grade R teaching.

4.2.2 Context

Participants in this study came from towns and villages in the surrounding areas of

University X. During informal discussions, student-teachers indicated that travelling from

villages to the university was a challenge since public transport was scheduled. Should transport leave before they were through with the two weekly contact sessions, they would struggle to go back home. The participants experienced challenges arriving on time for their contact sessions.

Another challenge was the use of technology. Some participants did not have access to computers or the Internet in their schools. Older participants did not show much interest in computers and the Internet which could be attributed to their inexperience regarding technology. Very few participants had prior experience with computers and thus they lacked skills when they were expected to do assignments on computers, download assignments and work on the electronic site, eFundi, which was the main repository for study and assignment materials.

Poverty did not make it easy for participants. As pointed out by Letseka (2013) (cf.1.2.3), poor rural areas have unique challenges. Though all participants received a full bursary with regards to their class fees and learning material, they had to gain experience in Grade R classes, where they were giving voluntary service to schools and were not paid (cf. 3.4.2). Participants came to classes on Fridays and Saturdays each fortnight. Due to lack of funds and the vast distances from the university, Friday classes were discontinued and these hours were then added to their Saturday classes to enable them to go back home after class and not sleep over. The participants suggested that they should be paid some allowance to help them pay for transport and food.

4.2.2.1 School context

Grade R learners are taught in different contexts which are explained by Atmore (2012) as community-based centres and institutional-based centres. The National Integrated Policy for Early Childhood Development (DBE, 2015) describes the centres in three

categories. Firstly, Non-Centre Based Grade R classes or Home-Based Care Centres are managed from private homes. Secondly, Centre-Based Grade R Classes or Community-Based ECD Centres which are run from community halls and other buildings dedicated to ECD programme implementation. Thirdly, there are School-Based Grade R classes (cf. 2.5.1) at public primary schools. In this study the participants were volunteering their services at school-based Grade R classes in North-West Province towns and villages.

Responding to the question on the contextual situation of the schools and the number of learners in Grade R classes. 69 of the participants reported that the school where they were working as volunteers was located in villages, while only 10 were town schools. The questionnaires gathered data with regards the teacher-learner ratio.

Participants experienced problems with high ratios between teachers and learners and they reported that they struggled to manage overcrowded classes. In addition, participants indicated that these large class sizes impacted negatively on the teaching and learning activities in Grade R.

"My biggest challenge is not implementing the activities in my class, my biggest challenge is to manage a class of 48 learners on my own, without any support." [P: 3.1]

During the focus group interviews, the participants suggested that an appropriate teacher to learner ratio should be one teacher for every 30 learners in a Grade R class. This would allow for a more intimate understanding of the learners and ensure that individual attention is provided to each learner.

4.2.3 Summary

From the above data, it is clear that the participants face significant challenges, typical to poverty. These included lack of transport to attend contact sessions at the university as well as overcrowded Grade R classrooms.

4.3 EMERGENT THEMES FROM THE DATA

In the thematic analysis, four main themes and their sub-themes emerged. Braun and

Clarke (2006: 79) define thematic data analysis as "identifying, analysing and reporting

patterns or themes within data." The qualitative data analysis was guided by the research

questions set out in Chapter 1 (cf. 1.4.1). The table below gives a summary of the themes and

sub-themes.

Table 4.2: Data analysis – themes and sub-themes

Themes	Sub-themes
Theme one: Programme content and professional development	1: Empowerment through knowledge 2: Inclusive education 3: Teaching, learning and assessment
Theme two: Programme delivery and professional development	1: Contact sessions with lecturers 2: Assessment and group work
Theme three: Programme content supporting covering of theory and practice gap	1: Ability to implement theory in classrooms 2: Work integrated learning (WIL)
Theme four: Teaching environment and implementation of the programme content in practice	1: Role of the mentor 2: The school management team 3: Learning and teaching support material 4: Classroom sizes 5: Separate Grade R class and outside play area

The following section deals with each theme and sub-theme separately and provides data

from the individual questionnaires (cf. Appendix A) as well as the focus group interviews (cf.

Appendix B). In order to triangulate, the data obtained from the quantitative component (cf.

1.5.3.4) is discussed together with the qualitative data under the same themes.

4.3.1 Theme 1: Programme content and professional development

Darling-Hammond (2010) emphasises that the purpose of professional development is

to transform teacher knowledge to the benefit of the learners. To reach this goal, Alfaki

(2014) specifies that professional development should improve teachers' confidence through

reflective teaching and collaboration between colleagues. Brooks and Brooks (1992) highlight the importance of programme content to support participants in their knowledge construction. In addition, the programme content should support professional development by the addition of new skills and knowledge (Kárpáti, et. al., 2008). The intention of the content of the *Diploma in Grade R teaching* was to produce qualified and reflective Grade R teachers (cf. 2.7.1). This was designed in the light of the suggestions examined above.

4.3.1.1 Sub-theme 1: Empowerment through knowledge

Shulman (1987) explains knowledge as being made up of content knowledge (CK) (knowledge about the subject matter); General pedagogical knowledge (GPK) (knowledge about classroom management and organisation); pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) (knowledge of how to teach) as well as curriculum knowledge (includes the national syllabus and ways to plan the delivery thereof). In Grade R, general pedagogical knowledge includes integrated, play-based, child-centred teaching and learning activities.

According to the data obtained from the individual questionnaires, 98% of the participants agreed that training in the *Diploma in Grade R teaching* was sufficient to enable them to teach Grade R learners. These activities included curriculum knowledge (the planning and preparation of lesson plans) as well as general pedagogical knowledge (teaching, learning and assessment of learners).

During the focus group interviews, the response was equally positive:

"I have learned so much...not only about teaching in Grade R, but also about the law, about learner support. I am able to assist my school, I am on the SBST (School Based Support Team), I assist with policies, to improve them. " [P: 4.1][1]

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[1] P. 4.1 Refers to the fourth focus group, the first participant.

Another participant echoed similar sentiments: *"At my school, they know nothing about learning barriers, and, because of me, they now know, that you should involve parents and guide them about how to support you in the intervention."* [P: 1.1]

There is some element of the over-confidence in the third respondent who submitted the following vignette: *"People know that I know…I had two WIL students this year, I support other first year students on Diploma for Grade R. I am not a Grade R teacher, I am a specialist in Grade R.* [P: 5.4]

There were however, complaints about the degree of difficulty of some of the constituent modules. Participants indicated that the modules on educational law as well as research posed extreme challenges, in spite of the fact that they appreciated the depth and scope of the other modules that inducted them in content and curriculum matters.

4.3.1.2 Sub-theme 2: Inclusive education

During the focus group interview (cf. Appendix B, question 1.2) participants who taught learners with special needs were dissatisfied with the programme content. They indicated their discontent in responses such as the following:

"The learning support content was too difficult. What is in the content is not what we have at the schools. Learners in special schools are not catered for mostly because they don't have the resources that the normal schools have". [P: 1.3]

This focus on the special needs of learners who are differently abled is underscored again in the following vignette: *"Sometimes the resources that I got from the university, I display them but after teaching learners I take them away because I don't want to lose them. Nakongwe o kreiye gore ngwana ga a na pencil* (Sometimes learners don't have pencils). *Nna ke ne ke re ha e le gore go a kgonagala dispecial school di supplyiwe ka dimaterial".* (I am suggesting, if possible, special schools be given suitable stationery as well). [P: 3.2]

This is not an isolated observation with regards to special needs schools. The third respondent offers a more penetrating observation with regards materials, textbooks and the slightly adjusted curriculum requirements for special schools: *"The special schools do not use the same books that are given to the students by the university and are approved by the Department of Basic Education. Special schools use a different curriculum. In my class I have a deaf learner. The programme does not have sign language and does not help enough in this regard. I think teachers need to be trained to do sign language. I still need more knowledge. Because teachers are not trained to look after special needs learners, these teachers give the learners too much work and this is difficult for the learners. The programme content mentions that we should do inclusive education but it does not show us how"*. [P: 3.4]

Participants added that lack of resources was not the only challenge that they were faced with when teaching at special schools; the teacher to learner ratio was also a challenge (cf. 4.2.2).

"Teacher-learner ratio at special schools is supposed to be 1 to 10, whereby you are going to take control. In certain classes, ba kgobokanya bana and ga ba shebe le IQ ya bana". (In other classes learners are grouped anyhow without checking the learner's IQ*). [P: 3.5]

"In my class I have a learner who is hard of hearing. O kgona go dula mo pele ga o mong a kgone go mo thusa." (The learner without hearing difficulty helps the other child who hears partially). *"Mo claseng go tlabe go sena interpreter."* (We use learners as interpreters because we don't have professionally trained interpreters). [P: 3.2]

"Buddy system helps because other learners can help the others. All this makes it difficult to implement everything that we learn at special schools". [P: 3.1]

Another unique challenge is presented in the following vignette where the learner in question has a medical challenge:

"The problem that I have in my class I have learners with Down Syndrome and others that are speechless. I also have one learner who has autism, she beats herself." [P: 3.3]

Such unique cases are unfortunately not catered for in the design of the content, knowledge and structure of the Diploma in Grade R offered at University X. This is captured in the vignette below:

"In special schools they teach skills. Their Daily Programme is not the same as that one of normal schools. Ko university ga ba re ruta go implementa Daily Pogramme mo special school. (which part is the translation?) *At the university we were not shown how to use the Daily Programme in the special school where we have to practically deal with learners with no speech or auditory challenges"* [P: 3.5]

4.3.1.3 Sub-theme 3: Teaching, learning and assessment in Grade R

This sub-theme involves Pedagogical content knowledge (Shulman, 2015) and involves the joining together of the content and pedagogy into an understanding of how particular topics are represented and adapted to accommodate the diverse interests and abilities of learners through? successful teaching, learning and assessment. (c.f. section in chapter 2)

Hassinger-Das et al. (2017) emphasise the importance of play-based learning, for Language, Mathematics, and Life Skills as well as social and emotional development. Motshekga (2017) supplements this notion and adds that a play-based approach to learning contributes to motivation and joy in the education of young learners. Thus, learners play to learn, in order to create something that is both fun and educational at the same time.

In Grade R this entails the integrated teaching of the three subjects, Language, Mathematics and Life Skills in an integrated, play-based, child-centred manner. Assessment should be continuous and developmentally appropriate. (cross reference chapter 2)

Data indicated that the participants were confident to teach and assess in a developmentally, play-based manner. During the focus group interviews, it was clear that the *Diploma in Grade R teaching* was useful, because their knowledge about Grade R was greatly improved by the programme. Though they were confident, they experienced challenges in the implementation of developmentally appropriate, play-based teaching and learning (cf. 4.3.3.1).

4.3.1.4 Summary

From the data above, the challenges and advantages of the programme content of the *Diploma in Grade R teaching* and how it contributed to the professional development of the participants are clarified. The main challenge was that participants who taught learners with special educational needs perceived the content of the programme as not giving sufficient support, depth and breadth to their professional development in dealing with the unique cases that they were likely to encounter or already had to deal with in special schools.

4.3.2 Theme 2: Programme delivery and professional development

The manner in which a teacher training programme is delivered should contribute to the professional development of the student-teachers. Wilk (2018) contends that the manner in which a programme is delivered should respond to cultural differences in the classroom to enhance a productive and inclusive learning environment. However, inclusivity also acknowledges students' different abilities. In this case, where the participants were the majority of student-teachers were from villages, the use of technology posed certain challenges and they reported that they were content about the fact that they could have face-to-face contact sessions (cf. 2.2.6 & 2.2.7) to support them.

4.3.2.1 Sub-theme 1: Face-to-face contact sessions with lecturers

The participants were in agreement that they benefitted from the face-to-face contact sessions with the lecturers. They highlighted the importance of demonstrations, not only with regards teaching and learning practices, but said that their contact sessions also taught them how to use the computer to prepare and plan for teaching in the Grade R class. A few of the responses during the focus group interviews are presented to consolidate these observations:

"To be honest...I struggled to get transport to the contacts, but I looked forward to it, knowing that I will be motivated and knowing that my uncertainties will be cleared." [P: 1.3]

This sentiment was echoed by another respondent in the following words:

"After the contact, when I go through my study material...it was as if I could hear you speaking. The book say[s] the same things that you explain. Your words and explanations really helped me to understand." [P: 2.2]

4.3.2.2 Sub-theme 2: Teaching, learning and assessment in the Diploma for Grade R Teaching

All the teaching, learning and assessment practices were aligned with the theoretical grounding established in Social constructivism which underpinned the study (cf. 2.2.3). Activities during f2f sessions? were informed by the "Five E's" (Bybee, 2013), which is an instructional model to ensure engagement (cf. 2.2.3). Thus, teaching and learning activities in the programme included demonstrations, but also a variety of small group activities. These included group discussions, group presentations as well as group assignments.

The participants reported that initially the group leaders contributed the majority of input, but as their confidence grew, the contributions were equally distributed. The group leaders had a huge impact, and one participant explained it as follows:

"Eish, mam... this group work... we did not know what it mean[s]... we would sit down

and complain that we do not know what is expected, but then T would say: Let us take it step-

by-step. Together we would figure it out." [P: 4.3].

4.3.2.3 Summary

The data collected suggests that the face-to-face contact sessions, coupled with

demonstrations and constructivism, contributed towards the professional development as well

as confidence of the participants.

4.3.3 Theme 3: Programme content supports bridging of theory and practice gap

The 'theory-practice divide' (McGarr, et al., 2017) involves the development of confidence to

determine what educational theory is relevant and how to implement this in practice. This is

an important notion in the provision of quality teaching and learning in schools. In South

Africa, evidence gathered by the Department of Education officials (2008) reflects that the

implementation of theory into Grade R practices remains a challenge. In the *Diploma in*

Grade R teaching, deliberate strategies were planned to integrate both the theoretical and

practical components of the programme (cf. 2.5).

4.3.3.1 Sub-theme 1: Ability to implement theory in classrooms

The participants were positive that the programme content of the *Diploma in Grade R*

teaching enabled them to close the theory and practice gap. They indicated that the content of

the *Diploma in Grade R teaching* provided them with sufficient skills and knowledge to

implement the theory in their Grade R classes. Data indicated that the majority of the

interviewees in the focus group felt empowered by the theoretical approaches discussed and

handled in the training programme delivery. However, during the focus group interview, a

few participants indicated that they faced problems in implementing what they learnt in their classrooms. These were some of the concerns:

"My learners are not allowed to sing aloud because our classroom is next to the staffroom. I would like my classroom to be moved far from the staffroom, because they complain that the learners make noise. If the university can ask the school to take the Grade R learners away from the office, they will be free to learn and play and have fun" [P: 2.3].

Another participant suggested that *"Grade R learners should learn through play and wear their private clothes and not uniform"* [P: 2.1].

The responses from 97% of the participants indicate that they implemented strategies learned in the programme to enhance literacy skills. They reported that they read aloud to learners and trained their learners in listening and speaking skills. The participants also taught learners about letter sounds and how to recognise the letters in their names. They teach them different shapes and colours. Learners were also taught to sing songs. These approaches consolidated the theoretical perspectives developed and taught in the diploma programme because they have been tried and tested over time and in different contexts, showing specifically how play-based strategies enhance learning and mastery of skills at Grade R levels.

On strategies that could be used to teach Grade R learners, participants were therefore confident that they could apply play-based teaching and learning as well as work in small groups in the Grade R classes.

4.3.3.2 Sub-theme 2: Work integrated learning

The majority of participants found their Work Integrated Learning (WIL) useful in equipping them with the skills essential to teach in Grade R classes. They reported that Work Integrated Learning during the course was sufficient to familiarise with the practical challenges and realities of teaching Grade R classes.

4.3.3.3 Summary

The responses given by participants indicate that they did not only learn about content, but were also educated on pedagogic aspects of teaching and learning. This combination of content and demonstrations of developmentally appropriate practices, coupled with the fact that they were teaching in Grade R classes, could have contributed to their confidence that they were able to apply the theory in practice. However, they indicated that they needed more support from their teaching environment, specifically the administration and other professionals teaching higher grades who perceived these student-teachers' involvement in Grade R practices as mere play and noise-making that was construed as intrusive on the 'serious' business of schooling.

4.3.4 Theme 4: Teaching environment and implementation of the programme content in practice

The Grade R learning space has unique needs with regards minimum space, design and maintenance requirements (Meier & Marais, 2012; Zidniyati, 2013). This space (cf. 2.5.1) entails three elements: the physical environment, the social environment as well as the active environment (Carter, 2017). These three components are a prerequisite for effective teaching and learning in Grade R (Carter, 2017; Meier & Marais, 2012). In addition, Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin (2011) suggest stimulating LTSM, adult interaction with learners and learners' social interaction as factors that add to a positive learning environment. The creation of such a positive learning environment would contribute towards the implementation of theory into practice. However, this process of creating such an environment is dependent on the leadership and support of the mentor and SMT.

4.3.4.1 Sub-theme 1: Role of the mentor

The role of the mentor and how it supported the participants to implement theory into practice were explored in the questionnaires (cf. Appendix A). Half of the participants agreed that mentoring contributed to the successful implementation of theory in practice. Details about why the role of the mentors was appreciated or not were obtained from the focus group interviews (cf. Appendix B).

During the focus group interviews, participants acknowledged that mentoring was considered an important component of the *Diploma in Grade R teaching*. However, the data indicated that the nature and quality of the support were not consistent. Some participants said that their mentors were good in that they exposed them to different approaches for teaching Grade R:

"*She showed us [how] to rotate learners. She taught us many things. I see light, I see a way.*" [P 4.5]

Another participant who appreciated the role played by mentors gave the following observation:

"*My mentor supports me in everything that I do.*" [P 4.5]

Yet another participant indicated that she appreciated advice from her mentor:

"*I was told by my mentors to improve on classroom management. I know it is true because I used to let my learners sit at the desks for the day in the classroom that did not have learning areas...corners. I have started to do as I was advised.*" [P: 2.4].

One participant, however, expressed the need to be given an opportunity to work more independently with Grade R learners, suggesting her negative perception of the mentor in her class:

"*I want to be given a chance to work with learners on my own*". [P: 1.5]

"She [my mentor] observes my lessons and gives feedback. She signs all my forms and supports me where possible." [P 1.4]

The mentor-mentee relations seem to work in some schools while the opposite is true in other schools as indicated by the following:

"Okare (seemingly) *mentors don't have much time to help us, even if they wanted to help us, they cannot".* [P 2.3]

The second divergent perspective on mentors is salient in the response provided below:

"Nna mentor wa me ke class teacher (My mentor is a class teacher) *and she works at the office. I am alone most of the time."* [P 4.2]

There were indications that some schools did not have mentors and participants were left on their own. Participants therefore become confused, as indicated by the following remarks:

"Kgang ya dimentor a e stressiwe because go tla be go twe ke na le mentor (The mentor issue should be clarified because some of us we have mentors that are not there). [P 3.4]. This confusion in the identities and allocation of mentors is reinforced in the following observation made by one of the participants:

"I don't know who my mentor is. My HOD? My principal? They do not give support. WIL becomes a challenge and the documents get lost because you do not know who is supposed to sign for you." [P 4.3]

Some participants complained that they struggled to ensure that mentors fulfilled their tasks. Others perceived mentors as staff in the schools who did not have time to support them. Participants indicated that mentors need to be trained to ensure success and the ensuing remark distils this concern: *"My mentor needs training...most of our mentors are still doing it the old way. I always ask to be given a chance to teach. My mentor agrees, but when I teach,*

she always interferes. I end up not doing what I have planned. Sometimes I get stuck and I am

afraid of her". [P 2.3]

4.3.4.2 Sub-theme 2: The School Management Team

Though the intention of this research was not to explore the role of management in the

implementation of the programme, this is an element that featured in all the focus group

interviews in this study. Therefore, it is considered important to highlight some of the

comments that emerged from the research process as incidental data.

All the participants agreed that they faced difficulties in trying to explain Grade R

issues to their school principals and colleagues. In addition, the participants perceived that

they were not valued by the school management. The importance of basic knowledge about

Grade R for the stakeholders who support the Grade R implementation should not be

underestimated.

The following responses reflect the data of this emergent theme:

"At my school, they don't want to take anything from me. Like nna ha ke tlhaloganye " (They

behave as if I do not understand). [P2.3]

Participants recommended that supervisors and officials from the department should

visit them often to ensure some semblance of appreciating the pedagogic role of the Grade R

teachers, and giving them due recognition. The reason for this is, *"when our colleagues see*

that the officials and the staff members from the university are visiting us, [only then do] they

take us seriously. " This statement also implies that the participants do not always get the

substantive and professional recognition from schools, authorities and their colleagues.

In the Grade R class ga gona di theme tables (There are no theme tables). *Ba re bolella gore*

re tlatsa diclass (They tell us that we are cluttering the class rooms). *Ke nagana gore Grade*

R class e tshwanetse go nna le dithusathuto tse dintsi (I think the Grade R class should have a lot of resources and LTSM)". [P: 4.5]

The participants suggested that the school management should be trained and be more informed about developmentally appropriate teaching and learning in Grade R. Training could also eliminate the ignorance manifest in the almost derogatory remarks about Grade R learners cluttering the 'real and normal' classes. As indicated by one interviewee:

"The worst part is when the teachers from other classes are not at school, we are taken to their classes to teach. If this habit could be stopped we would be able to implement as we understand [better] the programme's intention." [P: 4.3]

A need for additional support with regards to the lack of understanding by the school management teams was raised in the following manner:

"The support that we ask for is that the university should write letters to the schools and tell them to let us teach Grade R learners only. They use us and they do their daily plans in the classroom and we are supposed to teach the learners." [P: 2.3]

Another participant echoed these sentiments where Grade R teachers are seriously marginalised and pushed almost to the periphery of the teaching practice and profession:

"School Management Teams should be trained or attend workshops to be taught on how teaching and learning should be implemented in the Grade R class, they should know that learners are learning through play and not just playing". [P: 4.5]

Participants also indicated that when School Management Teams called staff meetings, as Grade R teachers they were not invited and had to look after the children in classes. This created feelings of not being part of the team. They felt isolated from the serious decisions and matters debated in the staff meetings.

4.3.4.3 Sub-theme 3: Learning and Teaching Support Material

Learning and Teaching Support Materials (LTSM) should support the holistic development of learners and stimulation of different types of play (DoE, 2008). Outside LTSM should include, amongst others, apparatus to enable climbing, balancing, sliding, swinging, sand and water play, pretend play and pulling along, pushing and riding as well as climbing over and going under. Inside LTSM, according to Excell and Lenington (2015), should include posters, pictures, three-dimensional (3D) objects, theme tables, computers and apparatus for experiments including educational toys (cf. 2.5.2).

Participants agreed that they had enough LTSM to ensure the implementation of theory into practice. However, they responded negatively about the suitability of the stationery supplied by the schools because those did not match the needs of the Grade R classes. Items that they would prefer to have included kid-safe scissors, waxcrayons as well as paint and brushes. Most of the participants had music creating or percussion . instruments. However, some of them said they had no music creating or percussion instruments. Considering the importance of percussion instruments in the Grade R teaching and learning environment, all learners should have the opportunity of creating music or knowing the difference between distinctive sounds and develop listening skills which is a prerequisite for learning to read in higher grades. For the identification of shape or numeracy training, participants said they had different shapes, figures and counters for the purpose. In addition to this, they have bean bags, hula-hoops and balls for developing numeracy skills. Only a few of the participants did not have LTSM suitable to teach numeracy skills to Grade R learners. The participants indicated that they lacked educational toys for play, specifically fantasy play.

To scaffold the reading and phonics of Grade R learners, the majority of participants said they had different types of books, big story books, small books, workbooks and

magazines. Almost all the participants recommended that schools should provide LTSMs to cover the Grade R curriculum in a stimulating and engaging fashion. Again the need for more LTSM was emphasised in the focus groups interviews. *"Schools should provide more user-friendly books than what is currently being provided"*. [P: 4.3]

"In most cases, we don't see how integration happens in the departmental workbooks. Oxford ke yona e go rayang gore o dire jang (Oxford series of books is the one that helps a lot in showing you how to go about teaching in Grade R). [P: 3.2]

4.3.4.4 Sub-theme 4: Classroom sizes

Participants gave various descriptions of their classrooms as:

"Mine is large enough for my learners" [P: 2.4], *"yes it is good"* [P: 2.3] and answers such as *"it is a classroom"* [3: 4] indicated that some participants did not understand the question. Some participants however, gave descriptions of the structure and shortcomings of the school structure. One interviewee said *"No suitable class for Grade R learners"* [P: 1.3]. *"My class, I think it was not meant for Grade R, but it is OK because it has all the space I need to teach my learners"*. [P: 4.3]

In one school the Grade R classes are presented in the hall where meetings and other gatherings are held. On such occasions, the Grade R learners stay outside. On top of this, the Grade R classroom was used as a storeroom at one school? where all types of things are kept. *"No suitable class for Grade R learners and people complain about the noise that the Grade R learners are doing as they are learning"*. [P: 3.1]

"The toilets are far from the classrooms and learners take time to go there. Sometimes there is no water and learners go and help themselves in the field and it is dangerous and unhealthy." [P: 4.4]

4.3.4.5 Sub-theme 5: Separate Grade R class and outside play area

Many of the schools do not have separate Grade R classrooms and play areas. Participants agreed that outdoor play equipment was not sufficient for learners and the surface of the play area often uneven.

"I wish we could get jungle gyms at my school. Those that were donated are not maintained. In fact, they are dangerous and I cannot allow my learners to play on them." [P: 2.4]

"There are rocks from the ground, they need to be shovelled out. Learners are injured daily, when they run and fall. [P: 1.3]

With regards to the availability of a separate classroom for Grade R, many of the participants indicated they had such a facility. Very few said they did not. The finding here is that 15 of the 27 participants were teaching at farm schools with multi-grade facilities. Grade R classrooms at these schools, were simply not available.

"At our farm school ... eish ... mam ... we have nothing. Not even a classroom where we can teach the children. We have to share a class with Grades 1, 2 and 3." [P: 2.4]

4.3.4.5 Summary

Ideally Grade R learners should be taught in classrooms that will allow the teachers to implement all the learning areas with relevant educational toys. This space should enable learners to learn through play and have fun. Grade R teachers should be able to implement activities the way they were trained without any interruptions. Schools should allocate suitable teaching and learning spaces.

4.4 CONCLUSION

This chapter provided an overview of both the qualitative and quantitative data and how it related to the literature. Participants were able to talk about their experiences and

perceptions regarding the programme. In the following chapter, the researcher discusses the

data and provides recommendations based on the findings of this study.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter provided details with regards to the data, how it was analysed as well as how it was underpinned by the literature reviewed. In this chapter the findings of the study and how it answered the research questions are discussed from the researcher's point of view. Conclusions are arrived at and recommendations for the improvement of the Diploma in Grade R teaching as well as future research are made.

5.2 THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

A single descriptive case study (cf. 3.3) was adopted for this study to determine how the Grade R in-service student-teachers perceived the Diploma in Grade R teaching, with regards to the programme content and delivery to support their professional development (cf. 1.4.2). In addition, the Grade R in-service student-teachers' perceptions about the way the programme supported the linking of theory and practice as well as how the teaching environment supported the implementation of the programme content into practice were interrogated. These objectives were reached by answering the following research question and sub-questions (cf. 1.4.1): What are the Grade R in-service student-teachers' perceptions regarding the Diploma in Grade R teaching?

The sub-questions were:

- What are the perceptions of the student-teachers of the way the programme content supported their professional development as the Grade R student-teachers?

- What are the perceptions of student-teachers of the way the delivery of the programme supported their professional development as the Grade R student-teachers?

- What are the perceptions of student-teachers of the way the programme supported the linking of theory and practice?

- What are the perceptions of student-teachers of the way the teaching environment supported the implementation of programme content in practice?

The research study strove to answer these questions through an elicitation of the perceptions of the participants. From the responses on the participants' perceptions of the Diploma in Grade R teaching, the student-teachers clearly indicated that the in-service components of the programme were positive and they benefitted from the programme. The professional development of the participants was enhanced by both the content and the method of delivery. These components gave them confidence to narrow the theory and practice gap in their teaching practice. The results also indicated some challenges with regards to the fourth sub-question that sought to unpack the teaching environment and how it supported or hampered the implementation of programme content in practice.

Concurrently, the themes are discussed, determined from the data analysis and recommendations provided with regards to the structuring and delivery of the Diploma in Grade R teaching. The discussions start with the profile of research participants and context.

5.3 PROFILE OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS AND CONTEXT

5.3.1. Profile of participants

All participants of the study were volunteers at school-based Grade R classes. The majority of the participants possessed a Level 4 ECD qualification. Only one participant was male, an indication that there was an overwhelming number of female Grade R student-teachers. This is evidence that the ECD teaching is still viewed as a career choice for females based on the caring role traditionally played by women. Participants' ages ranged from 25 to 56 years representing a fairly adult spread of participants. From the questionnaires completed

by participants, it can be concluded that all participants enrolled in the programme had some relative experience and prior knowledge about teaching in Grade R classes. Therefore they could contribute valuable information to the research. From the individual questionnaire, it is clear that the profile of the participants showed a varied but useful mixture of individuals with knowledge and interest in Grade R teaching and learning.

5.3.2 The context

Letseka (2013) noted that teachers from the poor, rural areas are sometimes faced with specific challenges, such as lack of resources and dysfunctional schools, without basic services. Data collected indicated that most of the participants were from villages surrounding the University X. Due to the rural nature of their environments, most participants did not have access to computers or internet, a necessary assets and support material for their studies, which confirms Letseka's (2013) opinion. To make matters worse, and due to the very nature of their background, the older participants did not show sustained interest in computers and the internet. They simply did not have knowledge about these gadgets and considered them difficult to use. Participants taught on a voluntary basis and received no emoluments for their work. This factor, coupled with the poverty of the context, added to the difficulties faced by student-teachers. Such a complicated background and limited exposure to quality Grade R teaching and learning necessitated many adaptations, amongst others, a change of contact time to only Saturdays to enable the participants to attend face-to-face sessions with lecturers. This meant a lot of the learning content had to be covered in the short time available in one day than would have been possible had the original plan been followed to the latter. The context necessitated this revisiting of the delivery of the content for the programme, a factor that reveals the way in which other dynamics shaped the entire course and the perceptions of the practitioners.

5.3.3 Conclusion

The profile of the participants and the research context, showed a rural background with its particular rural characteristics, such as low socio-economic status and lack of resources (Letseka, 2013) (cf. 1.2.3 & 4.2.2). Circumstances in the rural areas, coupled with the context of University X, had to be addressed in this specific milieu to actualise the best interest of the participants. The participants' responses indicated that the financial challenges could have hampered their progress. Though the research instruments did not address the question of poverty directly, participants indicated that they experienced problems with regards to access to the Internet, and because of lack of data they could not accomplish many of the requisite tasks such as printing assignments on time. In addition, transport and food during contact sessions was a challenge for the student-teachers.

In this rural context with an apparent lack of resources, lack of funds created challenges for student-teachers to attend the face-to-face contact sessions. However the face-to-face sessions created a platform for students to meet with their lectures and other student-teachers. They were able to share ideas, to solve problems together and appreciate one another. Thus, because cordial relationships were established, student-teachers could be supported and motivated to endure and brave the difficult circumstances.

5.4 EMERGING THEMES

The four main themes (cf. 4.3) that emerged during the data analysis are amplified and interrogated in this segment. These involve the participants' perceptions about the programme content and delivery and how it influenced their professional development. Also the participants' perceptions about filling of the theory-practice gap, including how it was influenced by both the programme content and teaching environment, are discussed.

5.4.1 Theme one: Programme content and professional development

Fink (2003), Ofsted (2017) and Tormey, et al. (2018) emphasised the importance of programme content in relation to the identified learning objectives, but also to contribute to success in teacher training programmes. The idea that the programme content and delivery supported the participants' professional development was evident in the research as the in-service student-teachers attested to the strong, positive influence these had on them.

Mention was made that student-teachers mostly indicated that the programme helped them with content and developed them professionally. One participant indicated "*I have learnt so much... not only about teaching Grade R but also about the law, about learner support. I am able to assist my school, I am on the SBST (School Based Support Team), I assist with policies, to improve them.*" [P:1.1] This made them confident to approach their daily tasks as teachers in Grade R classes. Even the older student-teachers who did not show much interest at the beginning also indicated that the knowledge they gained went a long way in improving their professional status. They became empowered, they claimed. Initially they considered the content as theoretical, but with more contextualization they were able to apply the knowledge. They were therefore satisfied with their new learning situation and the experiences.

In the South African educational landscape, it is important for Grade R student-teachers to be trained, supported and empowered in the work that they do (cf 2.4.1). This training, should include didactic as well as pedagogical content knowledge (cf. 2.3.1). The pedagogical content knowledge of the Diploma in Grade R teaching, ensured that the student-teachers could teach the three subjects: Home Language, Mathematics (focus on literacy and numeracy) and Life Skills (CAPS, 2011). However, the results indicated that there are still gaps with regards the pedagogical knowledge. During the focus group discussions, participants expressed the need for more pedagogical knowledge with regards to the

integration of the three subjects in Grade R (Language, mathematics and Life Skills), as well as developmentally appropriate, play-based, child-centred teaching and learning activities.

Participants indicated that the experience of the lecturers and the demonstrations provided by them, supported them with regards to the latter, but indicated that there is room for further improvement.

With regards to inclusive education, participants indicated that the lack of resources, lack of Grade R specific content knowledge as well as attention to the details and application of knowledge were some of the factors that did not reflect inclusivity.
These responses point to the fact that the course content was not Grade R specific, but generic and not properly aligned to address the specifics of inclusive education, diversity and learner support in Grade R.

Responses with regards to the assessment of teaching and learning in the Diploma in Grade R teaching, indicated that the participants were at ease with the social constructivist approach to assessment, which involved small group work. In line with my observations, participants agreed that the stronger lead the group leader would take, the better the outcomes of the group would be. Participants were unanimous that participation in small groups contributed significantly to them. They were free to discuss issues in their home language.

Conclusion and recommendations

One could conclude that participants had positive perceptions about the content knowledge of the Diploma in Grade R teaching at University X and the contribution thereof to their professional development.

However, the data indicated that the programme content, specifically with regards the three learner support modules, needed to balance the content and pedagogical knowledge to ensure that Grade R student-teachers are empowered to teach learners with disabilities. The

content knowledge should be designed to include special Grade R issues, such as developmental milestones and learner support for those that fall behind to cater for learners with various forms of disabilities and challenges.

5.4.2 Theme two: Programme delivery and professional development

According to the suggestions made by Van Lieshout et. al. (2018) as well as Wilk (2018) the programme delivery responded to the cultural differences in the classroom and created an inclusive learning environment. The delivery channels through which the programme was delivered to the in-service student-teachers included lectures, discussions, field work as well as Work integrated Learning (WIL).

Programme delivery was not without its challenges. In our informal discussions participants reported that they had to travel long distances to arrive on time for lectures. Sometimes some of them came to class without having breakfast. Some came to lectures tired and this affected their concentration and attention. Contact sessions included in-class activities, which caused problems for those who could not attend. To some of the student-teachers, the lecture room was an experience encountered for the first time.

The face-to-face contact sessions were found particularly useful because this is when the student-teachers were able to discuss challenges with the lecturers. Lecturers were able to give individual attention to the in-service student-teachers. This indicates a positive outcome of this method of delivery in that most of the participants said that their training was sufficient to allow them to teach Grade R learners. They were taught how to prepare Grade R lesson plans. Almost all participants said they were significantly exposed to examples of how to apply theory during work integrated learning (WIL) and considered this a useful attribute of the programme. This was considered exceptionally satisfactory. Overall,

participants concluded that the way in which the programme was delivered had markedly contributed to their professional development.

Although the in-service student-teachers said they knew about assessment, it was noticed that they did not fully appreciate the importance of assessment in teaching. However, as practicing student-teachers, the participants would need more practice in integrating assessment into teaching and learning such that there would be recognition of the importance of assessment for learning and its other component, assessment of learning.

Conclusion and recommendations

Delivery must be modified to include training the teachers on how to deal with learners with disabilities in physical and emotional challenges. The training gave the in-service student-teachers knowledge and experience in preparing activities for Grade R teaching and learning. My view is that the method through which the programme was delivered was beneficial to the professional development of the student-teachers.

5.4.3 Theme three: Programme content relative to the theory-practice gap

According to Guerriero and Révai (2017) as well as Shulman (1987) (cf. 2.3.1), a Grade R teacher should be a master of the subject (CK) and must be able to select appropriate pedagogic strategies (PK) and know and understand the learners well enough (PCK) to teach effectively. It is noticed that the Department of Education provides a fully illustrated Grade R curriculum which helps the student-teachers to make effective choices in their practice.

It was also noticed that through their WIL programmes, the in -service student-teachers were able to contextualise their teaching. However, the student-teachers' ability to use innovative and alternative, strategies grounded in theory of good practice would be an

indication of his / her ability to close the theory and practice gap. This was achieved to a great extent.

The data indicated that the participants were able to apply the various lesson presentation strategies of the Grade R curriculum including Language (concepts of print and small muscle development), Mathematics (numbers and shapes) as well as Life Skills (creative art activities and physical education).The participants indicated that they were confident to use all the methods that they were taught. This also added to the fact that the participants were positive that they benefitted from their training. This is an important factor, the fact that the WIL in the Diploma for Grade R Teaching, contributes in helping the student-teachers close the theory-practice gap.

The participants found their Work Integrated Learning (WIL) useful because most student-teachers agreed to the statement that practical examples of how to apply theory during work integrated learning (WIL) were always given during lectures. This confirmed their response for item 2.2 in the individual questionnaires (cf. Appendix A), which suggested that Work Integrated Learning in the Diploma course was sufficient to cover the theory and practice gap in Grade R classes.

With regards to assessment practices in the Grade R class, some of the participants indicated during the focus group interviews, that they needed further support with regards the integration of developmentally appropriate assessment into learning at the Grade R level.

Conclusion and recommendations

Participants indicated that the content of the programme, empowered them on how to fill the content and practice-theory gap. The Grade R student-teachers benefitted substantively from the content of the Diploma in Grade R teaching and the experience of their lecturers who demonstrated the theoretical aspects of the content as well as the WIL. All these components contributed to filling the theory-practice gap.

5.4.4 Theme four: Teaching environment and implementation of the programme content in practice

This theme involved the fact that teaching and learning in Grade R should entail active, hands-on involvement in learning activities (cf. 2.4.2) (Hassinger-Das et al., 2017). Teaching and learning should be organised and arranged in a manner that allows learners to move around, explore, investigate and gain new knowledge. The in-service training programme took into consideration the inside classroom as well as the outside classroom environment. Student-teachers were also provided with opportunities to practise how to use the educational toys.

However, data indicated that in some schools, Grade R classes were well stocked with materials for creative art activities, but lacked LTSM to promote fantasy play as well as free play outside. Since the physical education module specifically indicated how students can make their own resources or use what they have in an innovative way should they not have expensive equipment. Teachers in these schools had to make plans to ensure that learners get the experience outside play by bringing some of these to schools as well as requesting parents that can to provide. The care and use of, for instance, LTSM for outside free play could be done. The in-service student-teachers gained knowledge on how to apply safety rules concerned with the outside teaching environment.

Loewenberg-Ball et al. (2008) indicate that expert student-teachers are able to adapt for diverse learners and for better decision making, better perception of classroom events, greater sensitivity to context, and greater respect for learners (cf. 2.5.1.2). Practice in managing the classroom environment goes to emphasise the need for student-teachers to be taught how to manage their classrooms, to set-up learning centres or areas, to involve parents,

to maintain a daily programme, to coordinate classroom activities and engage learners, to keep discipline and to put learners into groups and create a positive environment.

In constituting an enabling and effective classroom environment for Grade R, these are the factors which arose from the focus group interviews. Participants reported that although they gained knowledge and understood how to apply the theory to teach Grade R, the lack of appropriate LTSM and related resources withheld them from doing so.

Mentoring (c.f. 2.6) forms a crucial part of the training and education of these in-service student-teachers because it helps the otherwise novice to mature in a correct way (Meyer, 2002). Issues such as classroom management, teaching, curriculum, school culture and operations, lesson planning and administration, parent relationships and interactions with other student-teachers are topics that a good mentoring programme should encourage. Left to themselves, the in -service student-teachers may develop counterproductive behaviours. With extra support from an experienced qualified teacher, however, new student-teachers learn more effective practices to apply to daily challenges. It was therefore necessary for a mentor to possess knowledge of the needs of the mentee.

The result of the mentorship programme is that it helped the student-teachers to grow in confidence and help to narrow or eliminate the widening theory and practice gap. The special conditions of the schools where these participants were teaching as volunteers, means that there were no mentors in some schools. Where such people were present, they were either the principal, the Head of Department or the elderly teacher not necessarily the person trained as such.

In the training programme, mentors were given a semblance of mentor training. This is because the training was for only one day and coverage of topics only minimal. It is important for mentors to know what is expected of them. They should know how the Grade R learners learn, how they should be taught, how the classroom should be organised, and above

all how to support student-teachers. Mentor training needs to take place within a social learning context. University X, after receiving a list of mentors from schools, arranged a one day workshop so that these challenges could be addressed. The purpose of the workshop was to empower mentors on mentoring of student-teachers. There were presentations on how the Grade R programme should be implemented. These extended to how the day in the Grade R class is spent and most important, on the informal teaching and learning strategies employed in the Grade R setting. Prospective student-teachers' mentors were expected by the end of the workshop, to understand that play is the main strategy for learning in the Grade R class. The mentors are expected to be trained to help the mentees gain experience in Grade R teaching. The mentoring of the student-teachers should add to their professional development. The mentor-mentee relationship is an important contributory factor in the training of In-service student-teachers.

Mention was made that some School Management Teams (SMTs) did not clearly understand the importance of Grade R and did not pay the deserved attention to them. These were indicated by student-teachers *"The worst part is, when the teachers from other classes are not at school, we are taken to their classes to teach. If this habit could be stopped, we would be able to implement as we understand the programme's intention."* [P: 4.3]. A recommendation from one student-teacher was *"School Management Teams should be trained or attend workshps to be taught on how teaching and learning should be implemented in the Grade R class ... "* [P:2.3]. This confirms the fact that some of the Management teams still needed to be better informed about Grade R teaching and learning. Lack of the necessary support for the SMTs might also have played a part in their misinformation and apparent lack of support.

Teaching Grade R learners involved teaching basic ideas and concepts especially through play (NAEYC, 2017). During the focus group discussions, Student-teachers were

asked if they have enough LTSM to ensure the implementation of the theory-practice (Appendix A). Their responses indicated that they do have some LTSM that assist them in teaching Grade R learners mind-to-hand coordination using pencils, chalk and crayons. To use kid-safe scissors and drawing paper. They teach them learners colour differentiation using water colours and paint. For mathematics foundation, they use different figures, shapes and counters, hula hoops and balls and bean bags. They also teach Grade R learners language, phonics, phonemic awareness and reading ability through the use of story books, work books and magazines. They teach music development and body building exercises. All these fundamental learning activities are taught through the use of appropriate learning and teaching materials.

The provision of these LTSMs call for massive financial support and proper management. Some of these were not available in some schools, which made teaching and learning difficult. This affected the closing of the theory-practice gap. This goes against the dictum "training the body, mind and soul" i.e. the incomplete holistic development of the Grade R learner.

Under teaching and learning support some of the student student-teachers indicated that although they used LTSMs for teaching and learning, these were not enough for the learners. Other LTSMs were inappropriate. Opportunities for movement activities and physical development were poorly supported in some schools due to lack of appropriate LTSM. The situation is-made worse when student-teachers are not supported or guided to use available LTSMs to enhance teaching and learning of specific topics. Responses of the student-student-teachers indicated that, although they do not always have access to the LTSMs referred to in the study material, they realise the importance of LTSMs. Needless to say, the professional use of LTSM holds potential for improved teaching that will consequently improve learners' development in all developmental areas (cf. 2.5). Thus, if

these student-teachers had access to the LTSM as suggested by the programme content, they would have been better able to apply the theory in practice which could have contributed even more to the closing of the theory-practice divide.

Grounded in the literature on ideal teacher-learner ratio (1:30), the size of the Grade R classes of some of the participants would have affected teaching and learning. There were obvious differences between the ratios of rural and town schools.

Although the village schools had poor infrastructure, there was space in the classrooms due to a low intake of learners. Some schools in towns schools where these participants are teaching as volunteers had big numbers of learners which might have resulted in limited space for meaningful play-based learning as required by the Grade R curriculum. Such high teacher-learner ratio would not have allowed one-on-one attention with the learners. These starkly different contexts and realities could have influenced student-teachers' attempt to practice what they have been taught in some instances. This impacted negatively on their attempts to fill the theory-practice gap.

Conclusion and recommendations

The discussion above amply demonstrates the importance of suitable and appropriate support for Grade R teaching and learning. There must be adequate and appropriate learning and alternate teaching support materials for learners to play and experiment with. It is necessary to discern between inside and outside learning and teaching materials for supporting learner development on all terrains. E.g. physical, cognitive and emotional. It is important for Grade R student-teachers, just like all other student-teachers, to educate the young child in a holistic manner.

5.5 RECOMMENDATIONS

5.5.1 Introduction

The research sought to establish the Grade R in-service student-teachers' perceptions regarding the Diploma in Grade R teaching. How the programme content, the delivery of the programme, the teaching and learning environment supported their professional development as well as how the programme supported them in closing the theory-practice gap. Problems and challenges experienced during implementation were also interrogated, examined and suggestions made by student-teachers on how the programme content and delivery can be improved to consequently improve support for the professional development of the typical student-teachers who enrol for the Diploma in Grade R teaching.

5.5.2 Implications of findings for policy, programme content and, delivery and school management

Various institutions such as HEIs and NGOs are offering programmes to qualify ECD practitioners that can work in a variety of ECD contexts. Government views these programmes as a way to address the dire shortage in well qualified and professional ECD student-teachers who are able to support the holistic and optimal development of South Africa's children (see MRTQ and SOUTH AFRICAN DEPARTMENT OF BASIC EDUCATION. 2011. Action plan to 2014 - towards the realisation of schooling 2025 [Online]. Pretoria: Government Press. Available: http://www.education.gov.za)

The Diploma in Grade R teaching is specifically geared at the education of under and unqualified practicing student-teachers who will have the responsibility to turn around the current poor learning readiness of 5/6 year olds and to consequently improve these learners' chances for success when they start with formal learning in grade one. Due to different types of teaching and learning spaces or teaching contexts that these student-teachers were working

in, it would be understandable that some of them might be faced with challenges such as lack of resources, unconducive teaching and learning spaces which would impact on their implementation of the programme.

Findings on their perceptions of the programme provided the researcher a better understanding of the way they experienced the programme to support their professional development and the way the programme guided them in linking theory with practice. Thus giving you the opportunity to identify strengths and weaknesses and to suggest possible improvements in content and delivery to meet the specific professional development needs of this specific group of students and others that match their specific profile.

With regards the Diploma in Grade R teaching. Some of the participants indicated that they need more PCK and that the content of the learner support modules should be contextualised and adjusted to fit the Grade R environment. Though the research did not focus on parental involvement, during the focus group discussions, it was a prominent issue.

Interpretation of the data collected suggested among others that overcrowded classes should be attended to; appropriate facilities for a number of Grade R classes at primary schools should be provided. In addition, participants experienced that the SMTs underestimate the importance of Grade R and are not aware of the unique needs of the Grade R student-teachers and learners. Principals together with other school authorities needed to be work-shopped on the importance and needs of Grade R student-teachers and learners to ensure quality in Grade R. The importance of mentoring is also highlighted by this study, thus, it is recommended that all schools designate qualified mentors with knowledge about the unique needs of Grade R student-teachers and learners and who are competent and willing to support the mentee in her/his learning in and from practice.

5.5.3 The *Diploma in Grade R teaching*

The following recommendations are made for the improvement of the education and training of the student-teachers to ensure quality teaching and learning in Grade R. There is a dire need to accomplish the following:

- To improve the PCK base of the in-service student-teachers, they should be more involved in the teaching and learning process.

- The in-service student-teachers should be guided on how to solve problems associated with their teaching learning for example, involvement in finding innovations for the development of Grade R LTSM.

- As much as possible, Head of Departments and mentors should be supported by the lecturers regarding the WIL needs of the student-teachers.

- In-service student-teachers' supervision and support should be increased and improved through monitoring and evaluation.

- Department of Education should endeavour to improve the provision and maintenance of Grade R LTSM, specifically with regards to the outside play area.

5.6 LIMITATIONS OF THIS STUDY

The research was limited to one campus of University X. Although the Diploma in Grade R teaching programme could be benchmarked with other diploma courses, the specific circumstances and teaching context of the student-teachers also affected the depth and breadth of this study. Their examples were also largely grounded in their context and experiences. These factors had an influence on the findings of the research. The findings provide significant depth and breadth as associated with case studies, but these cannot be applied universally although examples from it can be used in similar situations.

5.7 FUTURE RESEARCH

The following are recommendations for future research with the hope that it may add to the information on the research on Grade R education. Further quantitative studies can be performed to compare the programme at various institutions.

- The perceptions of parents on Grade R Education.

- The impact of Grade R teaching and learning on subsequent Grades.

- The perceptions of lecturers about the Diploma in Grade R teaching.

5.8 CONCLUSION

The study provided an understanding of student-teachers' perceptions of the Diploma in Grade R teaching. As researcher and lecturer I have realised that I was not fully aware of the challenging context in which these student-student-teachers are expected to implement theory. I now see how the student sacrificed all to be admitted in such a programme. However, the student-teachers' perceptions about the Diploma in Grade R, were positive and they felt empowered and able to implement, what they have learned, in their Grade R classrooms.

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APPENDIX A

INDIVIDUAL QUESTIONNAIRE

The purpose of the questionnaire is to establish the perceptions of the student-teachers about the *Diploma in Grade R teaching*.

SECTION A: PERSONAL DETAILS

Your name and surname/or pseudonym if you wish to stay anonymous.

Training and Qualification:

Level 4 ECD Certificate in ECD	
Level 5 ECD Higher Certificate in ECD	
Matric	
Other:	

Years experience in Grade R teaching:

0-5	5-10	10-15	15-20	20-25	25-30	30-35	35-40

Age:

20-25	25-30	30-35	35-40	45-50	50-55	55-60	60-65

Location of your school:

Town	Village

Number of learners in my class:

20-25	25-30	30-35	35-40	45-50	50-55	55-60	60+

What do you view as a manageable teacher-learner ratio? Motivate your

answer.

....

SECTION B: YOUR PERCEPTIONS ABOUT THE DIPLOMA IN GRADE R TEACHING

[1 = Strongly disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Not sure, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly agree]

1. PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT – PROGRAMME CONTENT AND DELIVERY

1.1 Training in the *Diploma in Grade R teaching* is sufficient to enable me to teach Grade R learners.

1	2	3	4	5

1.2 I am able to prepare, implement and manage Grade R lesson plans.

1	2	3	4	5

1.3 I know how to assess Grade R learners.

1	2	3	4	5

1.4 My knowledge about Grade R was improved by the *Diploma in Grade R teaching.*

1	2	3	4	5

1.5 I find preparing activities for Grade R teaching and learning is easy.

1	2	3	4	5

1.6 The two weekly face-to-face contact sessions with lecturers improved my professional development.

1	2	3	4	5

1.7 The group work improved my professional development.

1	2	3	4	5

How do you think the *Diploma in Grade R teaching* should be changed to improve your professional development?

_____

_____

_____

2. THEORY AND PRACTICE GAP: PROGRAMME CONTENT AND TEACHING ENVIRONMENT

2.1 It is easy to apply the theory learnt, in the Grade R classroom.

1	2	3	4	5

2.2 Work Integrated Learning was sufficient to cover the theory-practice gap.

1	2	3	4	5

2.3 Circumstances at my school enable me to implement at school, what I have learned in this Diploma.

1	2	3	4	5

2.4 The mentor supports me to implement theory into practice.

1	2	3	4	5

2.5 I have enough LTSM to ensure the implementation of theory into practice.

1	2	3	4	5
				.

What support do you think would improve your ability to implement theory into practice?

_____

_____

I am willing to participate in a focus group discussion of 30 minutes, please underline:

YES   NO

APPENDIX B

FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEWS

1. PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Programme Content

1.1 In your opinion, how does the content of the *Diploma in Grade R teaching* enhance your professional development? Motivate your answer / elaborate

1.2 Did the content enable you to include Learners with special educational needs (LSEN) in Grade R? Why do you say so?

1.3 Do you think that the content of the *Diploma in Grade R teaching* empowered you to assess Grade R learners?

Programme Delivery

1.4 Do you feel that the support which you received during your training for the *Diploma in Grade R teaching*, was sufficient to develop you professionally?

1.5 Do you think that the two weekly face-to-face contact sessions with lecturers improved your professional development?

1.6 Assessment often involved work in small groups. How did the group work support your professional development?

2. THEORY AND PRACTICE GAP

Programme Content

2.1 Do you think the content of the *Diploma in Grade R teaching* makes provision for the closing of the theory-practice gap?

Teaching Environment

Teaching and learning conditions

2.2 How many learners are in your class? Does the class size contribute towards your ability to implement what you have learned in the diploma?

2.3 Does your Grade R outside play area meet the needs of Grade R learners? What could be done to improve the Grade R teaching and learning conditions at your school?

Support SMT and mentor

2.4 What support do you think would improve your ability to implement theory into practice?

LTSM

2.5 Do you have enough LTSM to implement what you have learned in the *Diploma for Grade R Teaching*? If not, what do you need?

APPENDIX C

MODULES INVOLVED IN THIS STUDY

A brief Curriculum outline of the Diploma in Grade R teaching is explained below:

Grade R Teaching and Learning module (RTAL)

This module is intended to provide opportunities to study the acts of learning and teaching in a meaningful and interrelated way.

The Disabilities and Learning Barriers module (RLSD)

This module concerns learners with disabilities and chronic illnesses

The rights of learners with disabilities are protected by international and regional laws. The UNCRC, especially article 23, recognises learners with disabilities as a vulnerable group requiring special protection. And the United Nations Convention on Persons with Disabilities (UNCPD, 2008) calls for the full and effective inclusion of learners with disabilities in society, equal opportunities, respect, dignity, non-discrimination and the accessibility of services and programmes. This means learners with disabilities should have access to and be included in ECD services and programmes. The purpose of this module is to equip educators with the necessary knowledge, skills and values to enable them to accommodate learners experiencing barriers to learning and to provide the necessary support at different levels and in different settings.

Fundamentals of Mathematics Teaching and Learning in Grade R module (RMAT)

This module focuses on the critical context-specific knowledge of Grade R Mathematics teaching and equips teachers with skills on how young learners master mathematical concepts, the mathematical concepts which should be mastered by the Grade R learners and

the way a Grade R teacher should facilitate the concept formation of fundamental mathematical constructs in Grade R.

Life Skills: Personal, Social well-being and Beginning knowledge modules (RWEL)

The intention with this module is to equip students with a good understanding of personal wellness concepts, implementing healthy practices and teaching young learners ways to contribute to their own wellness. Student-teachers develop skills on how to gain insight into enhancing learners' well-being. They will recognise the important contributions of nutrition, health and safety to learners' learning and over-all well-being. Students must undertake an introductory investigation of Beginning Knowledge and how it can be applied in the planning of Life Skills lessons. They must be able to demonstrate an applied knowledge in all the facets of Beginning Knowledge. They must also be able to identify and assess individual differences and similarities in child art and to produce inclusive research results regarding the diversity of child art in the Foundation Phase.

Technology and Computer Literacy for Educators module (RTCL)

In this age of technology where the computer plays a prominent role, the purpose of this module becomes imperative in providing the Grade R student-teacher with the knowledge, skills and values that are related to the effective and efficient use of information and communication technology in the Grade R classroom.

The aim of this module is to help the student-teachers to acquire skills with regard to the basic functions of the computer to empower them as individuals and assist them in the completion of their studies.

Handwriting proficiency module (RHWP)

The purpose of this module is to equip the student-teacher with basic knowledge and skills to prepare Grade R learners for handwriting. The module further aims to inform student-teachers regarding the critical role of emergent writing activities in Grade R in laying the foundation for later handwriting proficiency.

Emergent Reading and Phonics in the Language of teaching and Learning (LoLT)

The purpose of this module is to equip student-teachers with the basic knowledge of the importance of language development in accordance with Listening and Speaking Skills and to use techniques and methods to teach Home Language in Grade R.

Work integrated Learning module (WIL)

Work integrated learning aims to integrate academic study and practical work experience responding to the need of the industry and providing the graduates that employers will value. *Work-Integrated Learning: Good Practice Guide* (2011), programmes that promote graduates' successful integration into the world of work and make meaningful contributions in contexts of development, require innovative curricular, teaching, learning and assessment practices. The Higher Education Quality Framework (HEQF, 2007) requires that all initial teacher education programmes include work-integrated learning which will assist student-teachers not only to learn in practice but also from practice.

Life Skills: Music

This module consists of basic music concepts and various music skills that young learners must be engaged in. Student-teachers learn skills that will enable them to present music in Grade R and to integrate it with Mathematics, Home Language and Life Skills. Music is essential for linguistic development, reading readiness, problem solving, and development of self-image, gross and fine muscle development, co-ordination, social interaction and

mathematical skills. Student-teachers will be able to expose young learners to various music activities such as singing, listening, movement, instrumental play and graphic notation. They will know how to assess young learners' music skills, attitudes and knowledge.

First Additional Language (RFAL)

The poor performance of learners in South African schools is blamed on poor foundations for reading comprehension and language skills in the early years. Since English as First Additional Language is the Language of Learning and Teaching (LOLT) in most schools in South Africa, the teacher in grade R should provide a role model for learners. They should be aware of how a second language is acquired, and be able to use the language proficiently and effectively to communicate, and to assist and guide the learners in the process of language acquisition. The language skills of listening and speaking are especially important since these are the basis of all language comprehension. The purpose of this module is to enable the student to use English as medium of instruction effectively and proficiently in the classroom. This module further aims to provide the student with detailed knowledge and understanding of language skills, vocabulary. This module further aims to provide the student with detailed knowledge on effective lesson planning and assessment.

Education management (REDM)

The purpose of this module is to equip the student with basic knowledge regarding the importance of classroom organisation and the ability to apply and evaluate key terms, concepts, facts, principles, rules and theories in respect of child development and the Grade R classroom organisation.

APPENDIX D

CERTIFICATE OF ETHICAL APPROVAL

NORTH-WEST UNIVERSITY
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Institutional Research Ethics Regulatory Committee
Tel: +27 18 299 4849
Email: Ethics@nwu.ac.za

ETHICS APPROVAL CERTIFICATE OF PROJECT

Based on approval by the Human Resource Research Ethics Committee (HRREC) on 02/08/2017, the North-West University Institutional Research Ethics Regulatory Committee (NWU-IRERC) hereby approves your project as indicated below. This implies that the NWU-IRERC grants its permission that, provided the special conditions specified below are met and pending any other authorisation that may be necessary, the project may be initiated, using the ethics number below.

Project title: In service students' perception of Grade R diploma

Project Leader/Supervisor: Dr E Wessels
Student: DM Lekgetho

Ethics number:	N	W	U	-	0	0	6	4	2	-	1	7	-	A	9

Status: S = Submission; R = Re-Submission; P = Provisional Authorisation; A = Authorisation

Application Type: Single Study
Commencement date: 2017-08-02   **Expiry date:** 2020-08-02   **Risk:**   NA

Special conditions of the approval (if applicable):

- Translation of the informed consent document to the languages applicable to the study participants should be submitted to the HRREC (if applicable).
- Any research at governmental or private institutions, permission must still be obtained from relevant authorities and provided to the HRREC. Ethics approval is required BEFORE approval can be obtained from these authorities.

General conditions:

While this ethics approval is subject to all declarations, undertakings and agreements incorporated and signed in the application form, please note the following:

- The project leader (principle investigator) must report in the prescribed format to the NWU-IRERC via HRREC:
  - annually (or as otherwise requested) on the progress of the project, and upon completion of the project
  - without any delay in case of any adverse event (or any matter that interrupts sound ethical principles) during the course of the project.
  - Annually a number of projects may be randomly selected for an external audit.
- The approval applies strictly to the protocol as stipulated in the application form. Would any changes to the protocol be deemed necessary during the course of the project, the project leader must apply for approval of these changes at the HRREC. Would there be deviated from the project protocol without the necessary approval of such changes, the ethics approval is immediately and automatically forfeited.
- The date of approval indicates the first date that the project may be started. Would the project have to continue after the expiry date, a new application must be made to the NWU-IRERC via HRREC and new approval received before or on the expiry date.
- In the interest of ethical responsibility the NWU-IRERC and HRREC retains the right to:
  - request access to any information or data at any time during or after completion of the project;
  - to ask further questions, seek additional information, require further modification or monitor the conduct of your research or the informed consent process.
  - withdraw or postpone approval if:
    - any unethical principles or practices of the project are revealed or suspected,
    - it becomes apparent that any relevant information was withheld from the HRREC or that information has been false or misrepresented,
    - the required annual report and reporting of adverse events was not done timely and accurately,
    - new institutional rules, national legislation or international conventions deem it necessary.
- HRREC can be contacted for further information via Estie.Entsch@nwu.ac.za or 018 299 2873.

The IRERC would like to remain at your service as scientist and researcher, and wishes you well with your project. Please do not hesitate to contact the IRERC or HRREC for any further enquiries or requests for assistance.

Yours sincerely

Prof LA Du Plessis
Digitally signed by Prof LA Du Plessis
Date: 2017.09.01 13:02:29 +02'00'

Prof Linda du Plessis
Chair NWU Institutional Research Ethics Regulatory Committee (IRERC)

APPENDIX E

LETTER REQUESTING STUDENT TEACHERS TO PARTICIPATE IN THE RESEARCH

Dear Student

PARTICIPATION IN A MEd RESEARCH STUDY

I am a MEd student and would be honoured if you could agree to participate in my research study. The title of my study is **"In-Service students' perceptions of the Diploma in Grade R teaching programme at a South African university."**

I shall give you a questionnaire to answer. Questions will be on content, strategies, teaching and learning support materials, assessment, work integrated learning and suggestions for improvement. In addition, you could volunteer to take part in focus group interviews.

I promise to protect your identity by not giving your names and those of the schools that you work at, to anyone. The information that you give to me will be kept in a safe place. You are free to decide not to take part and you are allowed to withdraw from the research if you should feel that you do not want to continue. Please inform me should this be the case.

To show that you agree to take part in this research study, please sign the form attached here.

Thank you

Yours sincerely

DM Lekgetho

APPENDIX F

STUDENT-TEACHERS' CONSENT FORM

I have read the information presented in the information letter about a study being conducted by Ms DM Lekgetho. I have had the opportunity to ask questions related to this study and received satisfactory answers to my questions.

I am aware that I have the option of allowing my interview to be tape recorded to ensure an accurate recording of my responses.

I am also aware that excerpts from the interview may be included in the research document, with the understanding that the quotations will be anonymous.

I was informed that I may withdraw my consent at any time should I feel I am not comfortable.

With full knowledge of all foregoing, I agree, of my own free will, to participate in this study.

☐ YES ☐ NO

I agree to have my interview tape recorded.

☐ YES ☐ NO

I agree to the use of anonymous quotations in the dissertation that comes out of this research.

☐ YES ☐ NO

Participant's Name (please print) _____

_____   _____

Participant's Signature   Date

APPENDIX G
FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEWS

1. PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Programme Content

1.1 In your opinion, does the content of the Diploma in Grade R Teaching enhanced your professional development?

1.2 Did the content enable you to include Learners with special educational (LSEN) in Grade R?

1.3 Do you think that the content of the Diploma in Grade R Teaching empowered you to assess Grade R learners?

Programme Delivery

1.4 Do you feel that the support from that you got during your training on the Diploma in Grade R Teaching, was sufficient to enhance your professional development?

1.5 Do you think that the two weekly face-to-face contact with lecturers improved your professional development?

1.6 Assessment often involved work in small groups? How did this hinder/helped your professional development?

2. THEORY AND PRACTICE GAP

Programme Content

2.1 Do you think the content of the Diploma in Grade R teaching allow for the closing of the theory-practice gap?

Teaching Environment

Teaching and learning conditions

2.2 Does the class size enhance your ability to implement what you have learned in the diploma? How many learners in your class?